

SOUTH WESTERN HIGHWAY, UPGRADING

2041. Hon Barry House to the Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure

I refer the Minister to the recent tragic accident on the South West Highway involving trucks transporting woodchips, and I ask -

- (1) Is the Minister aware of the strong community concerns regarding the condition of sections of the South West Highway?
- (2) What action is the Government taking to ensure the safety of road users by improving these dangerous sections of the highway?
- (3) What action has been taken to investigate the stability and safety of fully laden woodchip trucks travelling along the highway, given the poor condition of the road in some sections?
- (4) What action has been taken to improve the section of the South West Highway, where this accident occurred?

Hon ADELE FARINA replied:

(1) Yes.

(2) A number of actions are in progress as follows:

A speed reduction to 90 km/h has been implemented for permit vehicles between the northern boundary of Kirup Townsite and Torridon Road, approximately seven kilometres north of Kirup. This section of the Highway includes the location of the recent crash.

WA Police and Main Road's Transport Inspectors have increased patrols and inspections on South West Highway, including targeted operations such as "Operation Shake-up";

A review of multi-unit truck operations is in progress;

The Hesters Hill section north of Bridgetown has been allocated funds in 2005/06 and will be reconstructed, widened with a climbing lane and extension of the descending lane. This work will cost \$2.5 million and construction will commence in October 2005.

Improvements will be made to the main street in Bridgetown in 2005/06. This work is valued at \$240 000 and will commence in October 2005 with management by the Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes.

\$10 million has been provided for construction of the Bridgetown Bypass in 2006/07. Construction is planned to commence in September 2006;

Surface correction works to reduce the roughness of certain sections of the road surface are planned for the 2005/06 summer;

Main Roads has arranged for an independent Safety Audit to be undertaken for South Western Highway between Donnybrook and Bridgetown, including the Bendall to Donnybrook section.

In addition, at a public meeting held in Donnybrook on 23 June 2005, the Government announced a new package of urgent works to be delivered by Main Roads in 2005/06 to address community concerns about the narrow width of bitumen seal along sections of the Highway. The package of works involves:

Reconstruct and Seal the Shoulders on various sections of the Highway between Donnybrook and Balingup. This would involve work on a total of 7.5 km of Highway, and would widen the bitumen seal on the various sections from the current minimum of 6.8 metres to 8.0 metres.

Improve Curves and Geometry at various locations South of Donnybrook. This would improve the safety of various curves and merging areas at the end of existing passing lanes.

Overlay and Widen 0.5km north of Hesters Hill. This would widen the bitumen seal from the existing width of 6.8 metres to 9.0 metres, and would join two sections of existing widened seal. This work would be constructed in conjunction with the new climbing/descending lanes at Hesters Hill, north of Bridgetown that are already funded in 2005/06.

Main Roads has also reviewed the speed limits on South Western Highway and will introduce the following speed limit reductions by the end of June as follows:

Reduce the posted speed limit from 110 km/h to 100 km/h on the section of the Highway from Donnybrook to Balingup.

Reduce the speed limit for permit vehicles from 100 km/h to 90 km/h on this same section of Highway.

Reduce in the speed limit for all vehicles from 90 km/h to 80 km/h in the buffer zones to these towns.

- (3) Main Roads has audited several local transport operators in the region, including those involved in the recent crash, investigating both their fatigue and maintenance management systems, with the assistance in some instances of WorkSafe. Transport Inspectors have also checked operators' equipment as part of these audits. Operators involved in the crash were all found to have good fatigue and maintenance management systems in place and well maintained vehicles. However, another operator, who has also been involved in a recent incident has both system and maintenance issues and has been advised that systems need improvement and follow-up audits are being scheduled;

Transport Inspectors have increased patrols on the Highway. The patrol from 30 May to 16 June resulted in the interception of some 88 vehicles, of which 20 were woodchip trucks. Of the 20 woodchip trucks, 12 infringeable offences were detected and 11 cautions issued. Of the 66 other vehicles intercepted, 53 infringeable offences were detected and 26 cautions issued. The area is being continually patrolled by two teams of Transport Inspectors, with random road block exercises being utilised. Discussions have commenced with the woodchip industry regarding loading practices.

- (4) In addition to the projects outlined in the response to question (2) \$10.93 million of strategic Government funding has been committed to upgrade the railway line which will see the amount of plantation timber transported by rail in the South-West almost treble.

This investment will remove 144 road train journeys per day on South-West roads and more heavy vehicle movements through Bunbury.

We are negotiating with other operators to increase the volume carried by rail even further.