

per annum and Westrail has indicated that this is the most expensive way to cart this tonnage.

The people living in the area adopt a somewhat emotional attitude. As I have already explained, the region is suffering from economic depression and the people in the area find it very difficult to accept that they may lose their railway line. Therein lies the problem. As a member of Parliament I have consistently told people in the electorate that my duty is to ensure that if the railway line is discontinued some alternative transport system, as good as, if not better than, the present system will be provided.

I conclude by thanking members for their indulgence and consideration during this my maiden speech to the House.

THE HON. F. E. MCKENZIE (East Metropolitan) [4.09 p.m.]: Firstly I would like to congratulate you, Mr President, on your election to the high office you hold. I accept what previous speakers have said, not having known you before. However, in the short time I have been here I have observed your impartiality and I am quite sure you will be a worthy holder of the office.

I think it appropriate that I should speak on matters affecting our railway system as I came into the House from a position as a railway union official and I have two sections of railway line running through my electorate; that is, the Perth-Midland and Perth-Armadale lines.

The railway system has been sadly neglected by Governments over quite a period, and I bear in mind the fact that with the exception of three years a Liberal-National Country Party Government has been in power since 1959.

If we consider the situation in Australia we find that the urban railway systems are being developed in every mainland capital city in Australia with the exception of Perth. Sydney has its eastern suburbs railway under construction, and plans are afoot for the purchase of 50 double-decker passenger trains. Melbourne has the underground loop project and is planning a comprehensive extension of electrification to stations on the outer edge of the suburban area. It has on order 50 silver train sets. In addition the signalling and track are being upgraded.

Tenders have been called in Queensland for the purchase of 39 electric railway cars and extensive electrification is taking place in that State. In South Australia orders have been placed for the purchase of replacement diesel rail cars and rail signalling is being upgraded. In addition the main southern line from Adelaide to Christie Downs is being electrified.

The populations in the various cities are very

much the same. In Brisbane there are 950 000 people; in Adelaide, 900 000; and in Perth, 805 000. They were the figures as at the 30th June, 1976, and it can be seen that there is not a great deal of difference in the population of the various capital cities.

However, Western Australian has the highest car ownership ratio *per capita* in Australia. We have one car to every 2.1 people. Perth is the most motorised capital city in Australia and its people use public transport the least. They use it the least because it is not convenient. People are forced to use motorcars because the public transport timetables are not convenient and do not meet their requirements. There is usually too big a gap between the services—both rail and bus—hence people are forced to travel by motorcar.

I can understand Governments not pursuing an active public transport policy because it costs money. The greater the number of trains and buses utilised the greater the cost to the Government. However, the other side of the story is that the use of motorcars is a great cost to the public, so one wonders who really benefits in the long term. Surely it is the people who miss out in the long term because they are forced into motorcars; and in one way or another, whether by taxation or by other means, they are forced to pay more money. As I said earlier, Western Australia has the highest ratio of cars per capita than has any other State in Australia.

Turning to the railway situation, no new railcars have been purchased since 1966; that is 11 years ago. Some of the sets are reaching the end of their effective life as they have been in use for almost 20 years. It is true that this State Government approached the Federal Government—under the urban passenger transport improvement programme—for the provision of six new rail carriages over the years 1977 to 1981 at an estimated cost of \$2.24 million. That barely scratches the surface when one considers that next year, despite the cutback by the Federal Government in transport funds to the States for urban public transport development, there is \$51 million to be allocated. However, given the current policy of the Federal Government, it may well be that we have missed the boat. I believe action should have been taken to upgrade railway services in the metropolitan area quite some time ago.

A number of studies have been undertaken and recommendations have been made. Following the Wilbur Smith report in 1975, to its credit the Government decided to retain its rail services. Having made this decision, it ought to be making some plans about upgrading the service and, in

fact, electrifying it. No doubt one of the problems in regard to development of railway services is cost, but sooner or later that cost must be met. The decision has been made, and if the Government intends to proceed then it ought to be planning.

I was disturbed to note that nothing in relation to a programme for public transport appeared in the Governor's Speech. Over the last few years 100 buses have been purchased under the urban passenger transport improvement programme, but unless additional buses are purchased, that fleet will be run down also. It is recognised that the economic life of a bus is about 15 years, whereas a train will probably be able to continue for 20 years or more.

The former Labor Government commissioned the Wilbur Smith consulting team to examine the possible electrification of the suburban rail network. Strangely enough, the final recommendation of the group was for a busway. Another alternative was included, but the report actually recommended a busway. Subsequently the Government decided to retain the railways.

It is my belief that the Director-General of Transport is anti-rail, and ever since the proposition for a busway was put forward, where possible he has used his influence to ensure that busways become the order of the day. It is very strange that the Labor Government commissioned the consulting team to consider the electrification of the railways and that its final recommendation was for busways.

The other point about the Wilbur Smith report is that its recommendations in regard to the railway system were based on the third rail system of electrification. This is a most expensive system, and certainly it is more expensive than the catenary overhead system. In fact, the overhead system is being used currently in Queensland in its extensive electrification proposals. Sooner or later this Government must come to grips with the problem. In my opinion not only should it electrify the system, but also it should be extended so that it can be used by the many people who are now living further away from Perth. As a matter of priority, the Government ought to consider an extension of the system to the north of Perth—out to Wanneroo.

Almost 20 years ago Professor Stephenson drew up a plan for a rail system from Daglish to Whitfords. Unfortunately the idea was not proceeded with because of the cost involved. If that service were in operation today, I am quite sure our problems in regard to transport and traffic snags in the northern suburbs would not be as great as they are. So the Government ought to

look not only at the electrification of the suburban system but also at extension.

There would still be ample opportunity for an extension of our bus services. For a long while we heard talk of the co-ordination of the buses and the railways. The buses will bring in the commuters at strategic railway points and they will then travel by rail—express rail in many cases—to the city centre. I do not know what has happened to all this talk of co-ordination. The idea was mooted, but nothing has been done about it. I believe the reason no action has been taken is that there is insufficient railway rolling stock to make the proposition viable. It is for this reason that I say it is urgent for the Government to purchase, or to make some firm plans to purchase, additional railway stock rather than let the service just fold up.

I hope that the Government was genuine when it said in 1975 that it intended to retain the railway system. I hope we do not finish up with the same situation as exists with the Meekatharra-Mullewa line where the service has run down to the stage where it must be replaced completely or closed down. I am fearful that that stage is being reached and that fewer and fewer people will be using the railway system. From the latest figures it is evident that because of the reduction in the railway service, fewer people are using the system. Once we start to cut services, we drive the people away. A public transport system should be convenient. Some 18 months ago rail services were cut after 8.00 p.m. and on Saturday afternoons and Sundays. As a result, patronage of the railways has fallen off. Something must be done to attract people back to public transport and the railways can play a very important part in recapturing the public if we have an efficient and convenient service.

When the line to the hills was closed, a rapid transit depot was opened at Midland and I hoped that this would be the start of big things so far as the railways were concerned; but nothing ever eventuated. The Fremantle line is one of the least patronised lines and yet here there is ample opportunity to bring passengers to Fremantle by bus from the Kwinana and outlying areas. These passengers could then be transported to Perth by rail. The benefits of such a move would be two-fold: by transporting the people by bus to Fremantle and then by rail to Perth, many cars would be taken off the road. We would therefore have less traffic jams such as we see now, particularly at peak hours.

The Labor Party is very concerned about the closure of the Meekatharra-Mullewa line. I was quite disappointed to hear Mr Moore say that the closure was necessary for economic reasons. The

problem goes a little deeper than economics, and I believe the Murchison people also hold this belief. In last Saturday's *The West Australian* appeared a letter signed by a number of people who live in Meekatharra. It commenced—

The Minister for Transport, Mr Wordsworth, has indicated that the people of the Murchison are resigned to the closure of the Mullewa to Meekatharra railway line (reported July 22). Nothing could be further from the truth.

The closure of the line will have a dramatic effect on the lives of many people in this area. The 97 railway employees who work on the line will probably move to other areas and this will have a further effect on the local residents. As well as this, their townships will become more remote and in many cases their problems will become greater. I was very disappointed to hear that the honourable member is prepared to accept it.

I realise that over a period of time some questions have been asked about maintenance and future planning in respect of this line, pointing out the Government's neglect in this regard. Last night I heard some Government members congratulate the Government on presenting a balanced Budget, or rather, a Budget with a surplus. In 1974-75, \$1 million was spent on railway maintenance of the line, but what has happened in the two following years? In 1975-76, \$523 000 was spent, and in 1976-77, spending was down to \$237 208. So taking into account inflation and the associated costs that have escalated in those two years, it is pretty obvious that insufficient money has been channelled into the maintenance of the line. I know the line is in fairly bad repair, but the Government must be prepared to spend money on it if it is desired to bring it up to a reasonable standard. We have seen a gradual tapering off of the amount of money spent to maintain the line over the last two years. The Government should have made plans to bring the line up to standard.

What will happen when the additional strain is placed on the roads? Naturally additional costs will be involved for road maintenance.

Not very long ago a question was asked in this House of the Minister for Railways. Unfortunately I do not know the exact date of the question. The question concerned the tonnages hauled on this line, and the reply was 200 000 tonnes for that year, and today Mr Moore tells us it is 90 000 tonnes. This shows a big drop-off in the tonnages carried, and perhaps the Minister may explain that to us one day.

Further in the letter to the Press quoted earlier,

the people of Meekatharra say that at present the mining of talc accounts for the haulage of about 40 000 tonnes a year, and that is in one direction only. So it seems very strange to me that the railway is now hauling only 90 000 tonnes.

It is not that long ago that 200 000 tonnes was being handled on that line, going by the answer that the former Minister for Railways provided at that time.

I understand a Press release has been issued today to say that the line will be kept open for a further 12 months. If that is true, I am very grateful, because in November of last year the member for Murchison-Eyre asked the following question of the Minister for Railways—

In the light of persisting rumours in the Murchison region that the Mullewa-Meekatharra railway system is being phased out, would the Minister reaffirm his previous statement made earlier this year and confirm the announcement by the Premier who stated in Meekatharra on the 29th February, this year, that the line would not close for at least three years?

The Minister replied—

I saw only the Press comments on what the Premier said, but speaking on behalf of the Government I wish to advise that it is not the intention to close the railway down in the next two or three years. I know there have been persistent rumours and there are some problems in connection with the line. The Commissioner of Railways is having certain investigations made and I expect these to be completed before the end of the year. However, we have no intention of deviating from the commitments we gave.

That question was asked and answered in the Legislative Assembly on the 2nd November, 1976. However, I am very pleased to hear that the line will be kept open for a further 12 months. I have noted other questions which were asked in the other House, one of which is as follows—

Will railway road services be utilised in the Murchison regions when the line closes?

The Minister representing the Minister for Transport replied—

(a) It is not envisaged that railway road services will be used if the line is closed.

- (b) In making provision for alternative services, should the line be closed, it is proposed to utilise the services of local carriers where possible to ensure a continued operation of district carriers to meet local needs. If there is a need to use other than district carriers, public tenders will be invited.

Of course what is likely to happen is that when the Westrail road service is not in use, the situation will be open for anyone to charge any rate he so desires. There has been plenty of evidence of this happening when railway lines have been closed, and many protests have been made by country people as a result of the high freight rates that have eventuated, possibly not at the time of the line closure, but at some time after that. Some transport firms in order to get in on the ground floor, so to speak, are prepared initially to cut their rates, but after a short space of time they seem to increase the rate well beyond that which was charged by Westrail.

I envisage that is likely to happen if Westrail does not retain its interest in the area by providing road services if the line is not kept open. I think it is important that Westrail should continue to be engaged in that activity.

I pass on now to the final part of my speech. I wish to refer to the management of the railway system, which I feel cannot escape criticism from me. I feel it deserves some criticism from me on this occasion because this is the first opportunity I have had to speak on railway matters in this forum. Whilst I am critical of the Government, I trust the Minister will listen to what I have to say, because there are two sides to every question relating to the operation of the railway.

I recall it was proposed last year that the receiving and delivery centre for parcels in the city should be closed, and that people would have to take their parcels either to Subiaco, Maylands, or Kewdale. I think the ultimate motive behind the closure of the city centre was that the Subiaco and Maylands centres would be restricted in the size of parcels they could handle so that eventually everyone would be forced to the central receiving and despatch depot at Kewdale.

Currently a large volume of parcel traffic is handled in the city; and, of course, when the business people heard of the proposition they were unhappy about it. Sometimes one finds oneself in a situation in which unions have something in common with employers, and on that occasion I was a member of a deputation in which unions and business people joined together in lodging a protest with the Commissioner of Railways

regarding the closure of the city centre. Quite apart from that, other representations were being made to the Minister by business people protesting about the closure. As a result, the centre remained open.

What concerns me is that eventually that parcel receiving depot in the centre of the city will have to go because as members will know it is located in Roe Street, and the development of the cultural centre is at present under way. Therefore the parcel receiving centre will have to be relocated somewhere. I wrote a letter to the Minister, because I noticed there is a large parcel of land bordered by Nash Street, Short Street, Lord Street, and Moore Street. The area of that land is 1.3 hectares, or three acres, and at the moment there is a large "For Sale" sign on it. I suspect this is railway land. The Minister replied to my letter and said that the Commissioner of Railways did not consider the site to be suitable for a parcels depot. I believe it is suitable, and I hope the Minister will consider the matter, because in my view the Commissioner of Railways is pulling the wool over his eyes. The amount of land available would enable a complex far bigger than the present one to be constructed, and it would have a full block of land on which to operate.

I think really the Commissioner of Railways does not want to handle parcels any more; probably there is not enough money in it. Probably parcels are a losing proposition, and so the commissioner is trying to make it inconvenient for people to utilise the railway services for that purpose.

I believe that parcel of land ought to be retained—or purchased if it is not already owned by the railways—so that a proper parcels centre can be retained in the city for the convenience of customers and business people in the city. The site has plenty of room, and it is fairly close to the city without being close enough to create traffic congestion.

When we come to ticket sales, what do we find? We find that people who want to travel interstate currently cannot purchase tickets at the city railway station. Many people go there to purchase tickets and are shunted off to City Arcade. The logical place to buy railway tickets is at the railway station. There is ample room at the city station for tickets to be sold, particularly now that many staff have been moved to the new Westrail centre.

It is rumoured that the sale of country tickets also will be transferred to City Arcade. It is also rumoured that Railways of Australia, which shares the City Arcade accommodation with

Westrail is about to move out, and that is all the more reason that the ticket sales office should be located at the city railway station.

Again, there was once a very good dining room service provided at the city station, which was well patronised. Now it is gone. One used to be able to buy morning or afternoon tea and sit and drink it in comfort. The dining room used to be open from 6.30 a.m. to 6.30 p.m., but now it is gone. Now if a person wants a cup of tea he can still obtain one, but he must get it in a take-away cup from the kiosk.

It seems the whole service is being permitted to run down with the approval of the Commissioner of Railways. How on earth can a business be run like that? We must attract people to use the railway system, but if we are removing services then we are not attracting people to use the railways.

The final point on which I wish to comment is the Southern Western Australian Transport Study. Do not be fooled by the words "Southern Western"; the study includes the area south of the 26th parallel, which is a fairly large area. It takes in the whole of the railway system. I believe the study was set up to look into the matter of transport and to assist Westrail to shelve its responsibility to provide a service to the community—a service of social benefit. All the study seems to be interested in is anything that is economically viable, and service has now disappeared.

Of course, the idea of the railway services originally was that they should provide a service to open up the country. I feel there is still a need to enable country centres to be serviced at reasonable rates. I do not think it is reasonable that the Commissioner of Railways should complain that all he is able to cart nowadays is the freight that nobody else wants. A relaxation of transport permits has occurred, and it seems the commissioner is concerned only with running an economic business, in line with the wishes of the Government. Why should he be carting all the freight that no-one else wants?

The restrictions on carting goods have been removed. Maybe there was a need to remove some of them, but not all of them; and now it is open slather. No doubt the Commissioner of Railways is concerned because all he is left with is the freight that nobody else wants.

But what will happen in the long term if the rail service is phased out completely? People in country areas will be forced to pay very dearly for transport.

We hear talk of railway lines being closed down

at a time when more emphasis should be placed on the public transport system. We should be looking more and more to the railways, particularly at a time when we are being told continually that an energy crisis is just around the corner and that petrol and oil will escalate in price before long. In those circumstances I feel the Government should be looking at the long-term effects of allowing the railways to run down, rather than considering the short-term effects as everyone seems to be doing.

It is very easy to have a surplus if the Government does not spend the money but expects people to shell it out of their pockets in some form or other; and in this case it appears that form is by forcing them to use road transport and to pay a high freight rate rather than subsidise the rate where necessary; or, alternatively, by forcing them into motor vehicles because we have not a public transport system which is efficient enough to attract people to utilise it.

Mr President, I thank you and members for your indulgence. I realise this is the only occasion on which I will be able to get by without interjections. However, next time I hope I will be prepared to take them, and probably I will not be as nervous as I am on this occasion. I will be just as prepared to dish it out as I am prepared to receive it. I thank you for your indulgence in listening to me giving voice to my feelings, and for listening to me in a quiet and respectful manner.

THE HON. TOM McNEIL (Upper West) [4.45 p.m.]: Mr President, may I commence by offering my congratulations to you on your election to such high office. No doubt the 24th May, 1977, will remain in your memory for quite a number of years for not only was it the day on which you were elected President of the Council, but you also are the first President in the history of the House to be elected from the floor. On behalf of the Leader of the House, the Leader of the Opposition, Ministers, and members who have been returned, and new members coming in such as myself, I congratulate you and hope that you have a long and fulfilling time in this House.

At this juncture, I would like to pay my respects to the late Hon. Jack Heitman. Whilst I was not a personal friend of Jack I realise, from my tour of the electorate, the high esteem in which he was held and the fine work he carried out on behalf of the people in the Upper West Province. The manner in which he carried out his duties to his constituents was always uppermost in his thoughts.

I have not previously been involved in politics