

BUNBURY–GREENBUSHES RAIL LINE — LITHIUM MINING

Statement

HON DIANE EVERS (South West) [9.52 pm]: Today, I asked a question without notice related to the Bunbury–Greenbushes rail line and, unfortunately, the answer was less than what I had hoped for. It basically just said that it is an agreement with Arc Infrastructure and that it is complicated. We understand that it is complicated, but that does not mean we should shy away from it.

I want to say a few words about this rail line. People down there are really hoping that, rather than lithium being transported on trucks to the port or to Kemerton, it is transported by rail. A couple of feasibility studies have been done recently on this rail line showing that it is financially a good idea, especially knowing that the mine will be there for 20 years, and possibly longer. Significant capital will have to be put into it. I imagine this is where that complication comes in. Arc Infrastructure of course does not want to have to pay for any of that capital and I am sure that the state does not want to have to pay for it either. The mine is saying it is not its issue; it will just put it on trucks. Somebody will have to pay for it. The agreement with Arc Infrastructure states it can determine that a line is uneconomical to run and then basically close it. It does not really say what happens after that. I am hoping that, through those conversations that Main Roads WA or the Department of Transport is having, they look into the idea and the legal ramifications of possibly taking back that line within the realms of the state running it. We need the rail line. Parts of the train line down there are quite crowded. It may be that more infrastructure is needed to free up some of that space, such as sidings so that trains can pass each other. A considerable amount of infrastructure is needed, but the benefits would be ongoing. The timber industry is listening closely to these negotiations because it is looking at possibly using the line. The line was closed when the timber industry slowed down. There was not enough volume to keep it open, but it is listening again to hear whether that line will open up. I hate to use the phrase “build it and they will come”, but as we progress through the next couple of decades and fossil fuels become more expensive, putting things on rail will become more economical. The lines can be run with electricity. There will be many benefits if we can just step outside of thinking about who will pay for it now and what it will cost and look to the future and the benefits of having that rail line open. I hope that the answer I got is trying to hide some of the negotiations that are going on. I will be patient for a while and see whether those rail lines might be opened somehow. That is the best answer. It is economically feasible and it is what the people down there want.