

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 21 August 2013]

p360a-364a

Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Troy Buswell; Mr Matt Taylor; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr John McGrath; Mr Chris Tallentire

Division 33: Commissioner of Main Roads, \$1 343 347 000 —

Mr P. Abetz, Chairman.

Mr T.R. Buswell, Minister for Transport.

Mr R.A. Waldock, Commissioner.

Mr D. Snook, Executive Director, Road Network Services.

Mr P. Woronzow, Executive Director, Finance and Commercial Services.

Mr S. Troughton, Managing Director.

The CHAIRMAN: I call the meeting to order. We are dealing with division 33. I draw attention to the fact that questions cannot be asked about service 7, “Office of Road Safety”, under the heading “Service Summary” on page 382.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: The member for West Swan.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: My question relates to the Malaga Drive intersection grade separation on page 390. It is a \$75 million project that was intended to start this year and finish next year but it has been delayed by three years. Can the minister explain why this has occurred?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Malaga Drive, yes, I am familiar with that particular intersection. I think it is under new works —

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: It is under “Works in Progress” and it is at the top of page 390.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: The member is right, that project was deferred for a couple of years. I am just trying to get some information I provided earlier because it relates to this particular answer.

One of the reasons for the delay is that we are currently looking at some very major roadworks in that area; there are the grade separation interchanges on Tonkin Highway and the Perth–Darwin highway. My view is that this particular project needs to be considered in combination with those projects as a job lot of road projects. We have not worked out how to divvy up those for the purposes of procurement and contracting but there is a very strong probability that given its proximity to those other roadworks they will be done as a one job lot, although we are still working through that. Our experience with the Gateway project has given us a very clear indication of the benefits of bundling these sorts of projects into a larger project in managing not only the delivery but also the impact on road users. That is the reason for that delay of one or two years.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: At least two or three years.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Well.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I have a further question about the implications of the Perth–Darwin highway. A lot of different views have been put forward about the construction path of the Perth–Darwin highway, or the Tonkin Highway extension. The Premier outlined that he wanted to start in the north from Muchea and go down to Gnangara as a stage 1 project because the overpasses were difficult and costly. Can the minister advise exactly how the Swan Valley bypass, the Perth–Darwin highway, will be constructed? Will it be constructed from the south northwards or from the north southwards?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: There is logic to start earlier in the north if there were a finite amount of money because a lot of the processes around planning have already been done for the northern leg, as I understand it. I think that things may well have moved on a degree from that conversation given what we now know of the nation building commitments to the Perth–Darwin highway. Certainly, from our point of view, we are looking at it as one job lot; looking at the capacity to deliver the Perth–Darwin highway, Malaga Drive, Reid Highway and the three upgrades on Tonkin Highway at Benara Road, Morley Drive and Collier Road. I do not think I am in the position to give any more advice to the member at this stage, but I will certainly pull together a team in Main Roads to progress this project. In aggregate this is a very large road project and when it is added on to the work that is currently happening with the Gateway project and the work that will happen in and around the rail extension to the airport, it is something that we are going to have to manage very carefully in terms of construction and implementation, and to manage the impact on people who use that road. We also need to manage it carefully from a construction and procurement point of view to make sure we get the very best value for money for the taxpayer.

Mr M.H. TAYLOR: I refer to page 380 under the heading “Appropriations, Expenses and Cash Assets” where it indicates that adjusted total cost of services for Main Roads is over \$2.1 billion. This is a substantial amount for state infrastructure in anyone’s terms. Can the minister advise the committee on this impressive investment for the state’s roads?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I thank the member very much for the question. There are a couple of elements here because the total appropriation to Main Roads does not cover just capital, it also covers the money invested in road maintenance. There is a very solid contribution out of the total appropriations across the forward estimates, around \$3.1 billion, going to road maintenance, which, in my view, is as important as new road construction. Some of that money is flowing through to local governments for their road programs and then there is a big chunk of it on capital works. The Main Roads capital works program is massive at the moment in the metropolitan area, in terms of what is planned and under construction—members would struggle to find a time when it has been larger. Interestingly some of the projects that may be a little smaller in scale are very complex; for example, separating Lloyd Street in Midland from the railway line, although not large in the context of the budget, it will be a very complicated project.

The short answer to the member’s question is that this means a lot for Western Australia in terms of road safety outcomes. It also means a lot for WA in terms of transport productivity gains—look at what will happen in the Welshpool–Kewdale area when all of these road programs come to fruition. In theory, by 2019 a truck bound for the north of the state will depart, let us say, the Welshpool–Kewdale area, get onto Tonkin Highway and travel north over the river through those three intersections at Collier Road, Benara Road and Morley Drive without stopping, and then proceed on to the start of the Perth–Darwin highway, which will be approximately where Reid Highway currently branches off from Tonkin Highway—I say approximately because there is a bit more work to be done around that—and then proceed right through to Muchea before joining the Great Northern Highway. They will also benefit from a massive investment in the upgrade to the Great Northern Highway, so there are productivity outcomes and road safety outcomes.

I have been focused on making sure we work at more of a local community level to address local road issues. We saw an example that in the member for Wanneroo’s electorate—he is sitting next to the member—with a circumstance a year or two ago with people in a retirement village near Lakeside Joondalup who could not get on and off Wanneroo Road. The upgrade to that intersection has now been funded and I assume that it is in place. That has had a massive impact on the quality of life for those residents because a lot of them were very nervous about using that bit of road. My theory is that a road user does not necessarily notice a change from a state road to a local road and we have certainly tried to break down some of those barriers. Although these big projects are really important, a lot of the work we have been able to do on local roads, some of which has been funded through the money we collect from speeding and red-light camera infringements, will have a positive impact on the quality of life and road safety for people for people in those areas.

[2.10 pm]

Ms S.F. McGURK: I have two questions. One is about the Fremantle Traffic Bridge. What is the timetable for that bridge? I know that on page 390 of the *Budget Statements* \$1.6 million has been allocated this financial year to a bridge that it was advised some time ago was in need of replacement.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: The minister was committed to that bridge for a while.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: There is no funding in the forward estimates at the moment for the upgrade of Fremantle Traffic Bridge. The funding being made available is for maintenance of that bridge, which links the member for Fremantle’s electorate to that of the Premier. That is the circumstance at the moment. We are looking at some options for pylon protection for the bridge. We are looking at pylon protection with fender pylons—almost sacrificial pylons, really!—to protect our infrastructure from the impact of vessels. We had a circumstance maybe a year ago when something went wrong with the fuel barge—it has a name that starts with “S”; I cannot recall—and it impacted with the rail bridge. We are looking at that issue as well. Ultimately, there will have to be a solution put in place either from a safety point of view or a transport efficiency point of view. I would like to think that when we look at delivering that solution, it will include the upgrade of the railway bridge. The member raised before, quite appropriately, the issue of rail container movements and at some stage as part of the project around the Fremantle Traffic Bridge we will have to look at increasing the rail capacity on the railway line to and from the port and maybe separating, or creating the capacity to separate, passenger rail from the freight into and from the port. At this stage there is funding in the budget for maintenance, but there is no money allocated for the upgrade of that facility.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Was the minister concerned when he saw that a bridge had collapsed in the south west? That happened a couple of weeks ago; fortunately, no-one was on the bridge. How can the minister be assured

that the bandaid work he proposes to do on the Fremantle Traffic Bridge will not result in some sort of danger to the community?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I am no engineer and I have never pretended to be, so I will be guided by the advice provided to me by Main Roads about our capacity to maintain that bridge in a safe manner. As I said, at the moment we are looking at what we can do to protect the traffic bridge from vessel impact, which of course is mainly at the wider bit that vessels go underneath, and that work is currently underway.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I ask about the timetable of the Leach Highway–High Street work referred to on page 391 of the *Budget Statements*. I welcome the allocation of funding for the project, but I ask about the timing of it. I also ask about the detail of the Leach Highway–High Street improvements listed on page 389.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I will get someone to give us information about Leach Highway–High Street improvements while I provide a broader answer to this question. I think it is a \$118 million investment.

Ms S.F. McGURK: For instance, no money is allocated from the \$118 million in the current financial year.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I will see whether I can get some more advice about that Leach Highway–High Street improvement. In relation to the \$118 million Leach Highway project for Carrington Street to Stirling Highway referred to on page 391, 50 per cent will be funded by the commonwealth and 50 per cent will be funded by the state. We can see the general expectation for cash flow in the *Budget Statements*; that is, it will be completed in the 2016–17 financial year. It will sort of commence in 2014–15 and will be substantively underway in 2015–16. We are probably looking about a year or a bit more before works get underway. I understand there is a bit more work to do to get access to the land. As the member would be aware, there are land access issues on the south of Carrington Street, which is up against where the golf course is. I think we have purchased the properties we need in what could be called the south west corner of that Holland Street precinct so we can get the curve right.

Ms S.F. McGURK: That is pretty astounding considering how long this project has been on the books—over 10 years.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: One reason this project has taken so long is that we made a conscious decision a couple of years ago to push it back. That is a given and probably explains some of the delay. Another part of the delay is due to the wonderful support this project has not received from the City of Fremantle. Probably the most polite word I could use to describe the city’s approach is “obstructionist in the extreme”—that is four words—and I do not back away from that.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I think the city wanted a minimal impact on the community.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Perhaps, but some very interesting commentary comes from some of the participants in the local government. They basically do not want any trucks at all going to the port and see this as a nasty outcome. My instruction to Main Roads has been to get on with it, get the approvals in place, get the bulldozers down there and get the road built. We now have the money and that is no longer an issue. There were some financial issues that contributed to some of the delay. The project has been handballed from the Transport planners across to the Main Roads planners and I anticipate that we will get on with that project as quickly as the approvals processes allow us to. It is important as it will change the orientation of the road into Fremantle harbour. For those people familiar with that intersection, it is currently a T-intersection of Carrington Street, which becomes High Street, and Stirling Highway. It will be completely realigned and Carrington Street will sweep into Stirling Highway and High Street will be a subsidiary component of the intersection. Because we are putting in a bend, we have to take some land to the south of the current golf course site and we have already acquired the houses.

There are a couple of other points. My understanding is that it will be quite a deep cut to get the road through there on a suitable grade. There is a chance that that may mean that people at the netball centre may not even see the trucks on the road; I do not know. It will be quite a significant cut.

The other aspect that I am keen to pursue is the issue of noise walls, and I have had some correspondence from people in Holland Street, Forrest Street and Marmion Street, but mainly those in Holland Street and Forrest Street. We are very keen to put in proper noise-management processes as part of this project. I do not think it will be as noisy, because there will not be acceleration and deceleration, which are two noisy parts of truck operations; there will be a more continual flow. I think the requests are very fair and valid.

[2.20 pm]

Ms S.F. McGURK: Will that noise attenuation be included as part of the funding for this project, including for residents along Duke Street and closer towards Marmion Street, Stirling Highway and Canning Highway?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I am not sure how far north we currently anticipate those noise walls will extend. By way of supplementary information, I will provide to the member an estimate based on our current planning of the

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 21 August 2013]

p360a-364a

Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Troy Buswell; Mr Matt Taylor; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr John McGrath; Mr Chris Tallentire

northern extent of those walls. I have that information. The noise monitoring and modelling is in progress. Monitoring was conducted throughout the project area and slightly beyond to include Duke Street, although it is outside the scope of the project. Local residents have certainly made their feelings known to me. We have given an undertaking to commit to having that investigated as part of this process.

Ms S.F. McGURK: A more committed word than “investigated” would be good.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I can say to the member that my anticipation is that it will go to Duke Street.

Ms S.F. McGURK: There was a second part to the question about the Leach Highway–High Street improvements of nearly \$8 million under the works in progress outlined on page 389.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: My advice is that the \$8 million referred to on page 389 is for the same project. The money for that project was funded out of the road funding from the Nation Building Program. The money that appears on the subsequent page will be funded out of the NB2 program. I apologise if it looks a little confusing, but it is actually for the same project.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: I refer to the works in progress listed on page 389. I can see line items for the Mandurah entrance road, Marble Bar Road and Mitchell Freeway, but I cannot find Manning Road and the on-ramp to the freeway for people south of the river. The member for Victoria Park is very interested in this, as a lot of his residents use it. Can the minister give us an update on Manning Road?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: It is in the completed works part of the budget papers in very fine print! It is not in new works either. I knew the member for South Perth was coming today. When we sat down, I said to Main Roads, “The member for South Perth is bound to ask about Manning Road.” Our current estimate of the cost is around \$30 million. It is not currently funded. However, we have done a fair bit of work on the design of the project and on understanding the property acquisition requirements, which are quite important. As we have discussed previously, the design is not tricky, but it is not straightforward. It is quite a sharp turn back to the south, but technically it can be done. The issue now is providing funding. Notwithstanding the member’s vigorous and ongoing lobbying efforts, it has progressed to the point at which we have done the detailed planning work and we are ready to go. It is now a matter of coming up with the money in a tight funding environment. We are not there at this stage, but I have a sneaking suspicion that the member for South Perth will not let this go. We will continue to monitor it. The argument that the member has put to me many times is that that intersection, which is loosely defined as Canning Highway, Manning Road, Canning Bridge and the freeway, is a shemozzle. If people travelling on Canning Highway want to go south on the freeway, they have to effectively come down, go around and up, providing that they do not miss the off-ramp onto Canning Highway and end up in the city —

Mr J.E. McGRATH: If they are travelling along Manning Road, yes.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: They then have to turn right, go down to the next set of traffic lights and turn right again to get onto the road that will effectively take them back up Manning Road if they miss the turn, but, generally, if they are lucky, it will take them back down to the freeway. I agree that it would be frustrating. I am not disputing that at all; it is just complex.

We are looking at identifying certain sections of the metropolitan road network where some real expertise can be focused on existing infrastructure and existing signalling to make improvements to productivity and throughput. I suspect that the first area we will look at from that point of view is that stretch of road from Canning Bridge, which affects this intersection, back up Canning Highway to Riseley Street. We have a very firm view that if we are smart about using our signalling and the road network there and give more priority to the major through road, which is Canning Highway, we can come up with some much better outcomes for people who use the existing infrastructure. When we have done that one, we will look at some other areas. Another one that springs to mind is the area around Stirling Highway, Claremont. I do not travel through there, but my understanding is that it is very congested at different times of the day. It is to do with the usage of the road and the current infrastructure. The director general regularly advises me that he uses non-direct road linkages to travel through that area around Canning Bridge and that a lot of other people do as well. This may help get the bulk of the traffic back on the main road, which is where it should be.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I refer to the line item for the safer roads and bridges program outlined on page 390 of the budget papers. Does that figure include the much talked about works for the Berkshire Road–Roe Highway intersection and also the Lord Street–Reid Highway intersection upgrade?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I will get some more detail, but I am sure that it includes in part some of those works. They are very important intersections, and I thank the member for raising them. For the benefit of members, the intersection at Berkshire Road and Roe Highway is a very unusual intersection. It is effectively two offset intersections with a walkway on what is, from a freight point of view, a very busy road. The intersection at

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p360a-364a

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Reid Highway and Lord Street is much in need of upgrading. My suspicion is that it may well be funded from the metropolitan intersections upgrade component of the money we receive from the road trauma trust fund.

I have just received advice that they are actually coming out of the metropolitan intersections component of the funding made available through the road trauma trust fund.

[2.30 pm]

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: How much has been allocated to each, please, for this year and ongoing years?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I do not have that information immediately in front of me. I will provide that information by way of supplementary.

The CHAIRMAN: Is the minister clear on what he needs to provide?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I will clarify that for the purposes of the meeting. The supplementary information will be the funding allocated to the Berkshire–Roe intersections and the Lord–Reid intersections, contained in these forward estimates.

[*Supplementary Information No B16.*]

The appropriation was recommended.