

TAXIS — SURVEILLANCE CAMERAS — REGIONAL AREAS

Grievance

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah) [9.36 am]: My grievance this morning is to the Minister for Transport and relates to the issue of regional taxis. As the minister is aware, monitored cameras—important safety devices for taxidriviers and taxi patrons—are mandatory in all taxis operating within the metropolitan area. The same, however, does not exist for taxis operating in regional centres outside the metropolitan area, such as in the regional cities of Mandurah, Albany, Bunbury or Kalgoorlie. This issue I am raising today is an important one for all regional members.

On 1 March 2011, I wrote to the minister requesting that Mandurah, my city, be considered as another trial region for the installation of surveillance cameras in our taxis. At that time two serious assaults on local taxidriviers had occurred, and Mandurah taxi owners, local police and local taxidriviers called for and supported the introduction of cameras in our taxis in Mandurah. The minister responded to my request in a letter to me dated 13 April 2011 in which he stated that a successful trial of surveillance cameras was carried out in Geraldton in 2008. The letter states —

While this trial may be considered successful, it highlighted several practical issues that need to be resolved before TCSUs —

That is, taxi camera surveillance cameras —

can be rolled out across the regions. These include the availability of personnel to install, service, inspect and test TCSUs and the availability of premises and personnel with the proper authority and capacity to perform regular downloads in regional towns. Until these issues are resolved, there are no plans for further regional TCSU trials ...

Just over two weeks ago, Mr Lindsay Ferguson, a local taxidriver of some 20 years' experience in Mandurah, died in his taxi after a frightening, violent passenger traumatised him and other passengers who were in his taxi at the time. Lindsay died and it will be alleged—as charges have been laid—that his death was as a result of this violent passenger. I acknowledge in the public gallery Lindsay's daughter Karen; and also Julie Murray, the proprietor of Mandurah Taxis. This death obviously devastated the family, Lindsay's workmates at Mandurah Taxis and the proprietors. Although cameras may not have saved his life, there is no doubt that having surveillance cameras in taxis is an important additional safety appliance for both taxidriviers and taxi patrons; also, in already proven cases, it can provide important information to police on incidents that have occurred outside a taxi but that have been captured by a taxi's external camera.

I want to refer to another tragedy; the death of Mr Tauri Litchfield, a man who was killed in Pinjarra Road, Mandurah in March this year. Mandurah police were seeking camera surveillance and contacted Mandurah Taxis asking for any surveillance it may have had, and the police were astounded that our local taxis were not fitted with taxi camera surveillance units.

Regional centres—particularly large centres like Mandurah, Bunbury, Albany, Kalgoorlie, and even the minister's own, Busselton—need monitored surveillance cameras now. Surely since March 2011 the issues that prevented the rollout of these cameras to regional centres, as outlined in the minister's letter, have or should have been resolved; after all, it is two years since that matter was raised, and five years since the original TCSU trial took place in Geraldton.

Julie Murray is here as a proprietor, along with her husband, Greg, of Mandurah Taxis. She is representing her employees—the taxidriviers of Mandurah—and she is also the secretary-treasurer of the WA Country Taxi Operators Association, and a regional representative and member of the Taxi Council of Western Australia. Julie, her company and I really want to work with the minister and the department to ensure that the funding needed to roll out TCSUs in regional areas is secured as soon as possible, so that taxidriviers and taxi patrons in regional WA are treated the same as their counterparts in the metropolitan area.

As the minister highlighted in his letter—maybe he will elaborate today—there have been some impediments, and I mentioned some in that quote, but I can assure the minister that Mandurah Taxis already has the expertise to address a number those, so really it is now a case of having the will to ensure that this is funded; I think Mandurah is the perfect regional centre to start.

The minister would have had correspondence from Julie and her company, Mandurah Taxis, and over a period she has also corresponded with her local member, the Deputy Premier, and also the minister responsible for royalties for regions, the member for Pilbara, on a number of occasions on this and other matters relating to regional taxis. It is time for action, and I respectfully ask that the minister find funding, from royalties for

regions if necessary, for the rolling out of TCSUs into major regional centres; I suggested Mandurah, Albany, Bunbury and Kalgoorlie as examples. I think the minister has had enough time to address the issues highlighted in the 2008 trial and iron out those impediments that have stopped the rollout into regional centres, and I think we owe it to Lindsay, Karen, her mum, and his family, and other regional taxidriviers and their patrons, to ensure that the taxis in regional communities are as safe as possible for not only taxidriviers, but also of course patrons; they would provide the extra eyes on the street, if you like—surveillance information, if and when needed, to relevant police. It will need strong support from police, the minister's department and obviously the taxi operators, but I think the minister will get that, and I really look forward to his response.

As I earlier said to the minister in the chamber, I would really appreciate him having a quick chat to Julie and Karen after this grievance if he is able to.

MR T.R. BUSWELL (Vasse — Minister for Transport) [9.43 am]: Can I just start by extending my condolences to the family and work colleagues of Mr Ferguson. Nobody expects to say goodbye to their husband, father or colleague as he goes off to work and have him not come home, especially in such tragic circumstances. As the member pointed out, there is no guarantee that a camera would have stopped this from happening; indeed, unfortunately, even in the metropolitan area where there are cameras there are still violent attacks against taxidriviers and occasionally issues involving taxidriviers and passengers. However, there is no doubt in my mind that the cameras are a good deterrent, and there is no doubt in my mind that the cameras help the police—particularly the new cameras, which are much better quality—in gathering evidence when crimes are committed.

In relation to our potential rollout of taxi camera surveillance units—I will call them cameras—into regional WA, at the moment, technically, there is nothing except cost to stop people in regional WA purchasing cameras and having them fitted to taxis; it is my recollection that it costs around \$4 000 a unit—it might be more in regional areas. Indeed, the advice I have had from the department is that a taxi in Geraldton was recently fitted with the new generation of taxi camera surveillance unit. They are not monitored as such, but they do keep the data in the black box in the cab for up to six days, which is a lot better than previously. Within that six-day period I would imagine that wherever somebody is in WA, if there is a serious need to get the data out, the people who need to access that can get to the destination.

In relation to the metropolitan area regarding the rollout of the new cameras, if somebody buys a new cab and puts it on the road, they basically have to foot the bill for the camera; that is just part of the mandatory requirement. However, for existing cabs, the government has provided a subsidy to assist the transition across to the new cameras. The funding for that subsidy has come out of the taxi industry development account, which is where lease payments received from metropolitan taxi plate holders go. They go into the TIDA and the money is then allocated out. Just to put it into perspective, a peak-period plate in the metropolitan area pays about \$6 500 a year; a conventional plate pays about \$13 000. So they pay that money, it goes into the account, and then it gets spent in the industry.

In regional WA the arrangements in and around leases are a lot lower than that, simply because there is a lot less regulation, control and, I suppose, oversight by government. However, I do not think that is a reason not to look at proceeding in the country. As I said, there is currently no reason for people not being able to do it, it is just not mandated as a requirement. I will shortly have a chat to Mrs Murray; we will just need to have a bit of a conversation about how we can assist in the funding of that. In the metropolitan area I think we covered half the cost—maybe up to 75 per cent of the cost, depending on the type of camera unit that was being replaced. I am happy to sit with Mrs Murray and, by extension, perhaps other operators in regional areas; the member is right, my hometown Busselton, and certainly Broome, Geraldton and Kalgoorlie, are areas where issues have been raised in the past. If there is a mechanism we can use to move forward, I am happy to have a look at that. There will be, though, a cost for that installation, but I expect that when that is considered in light of what happened to Mr Ferguson, cost really is not the issue; the issue is trying to make the cab safe. If that can stop one other person going through what Mr Ferguson would have been through and what his family is now going through, then that is probably a very, very good investment of public funds.

Historically, as the member read from the letter, the reasons that have been given for it not proceeding in regional areas are the three he highlighted: firstly, the difficulty with installation; secondly, issues around cost and who pays; and, thirdly, issues around monitoring. But, as I said, I think a lot of those issues can be easily resolved; for example, in Mandurah I cannot imagine the cost of arranging for those installations to be done would be too high, given the proximity to the metropolitan area.

In relation to monitoring, in practice what happens in the city is, if there is an issue either the taxi dispatch service or the police will contact the Department of Transport, and one of our operators—we now have operators in vehicles in the field, especially on the weekends—will attend wherever required, and they have the capacity to

download the equipment. One of the reasons it has to be very secure is that, unfortunately, sometimes there are allegations against taxidivers, and we have to make sure that nobody can access the data that is carried. Given that it can now basically be stored for six days before it is rolled over, that allows a fair bit of time to get in and access it.

So, I am happy to have a look at what we can do. We will need to have a conversation around costs associated with that, as I am sure the member appreciates, but in light of the sorts of outcomes that have happened in Mandurah, I think it is important we look for some changes. The member is right, I did write to him in 2011; since that time we have been heavily focused on trying to roll the cameras out in the city. As I am sure the member appreciates, we have had some significant issues in terms of safety in cabs, particularly safety for drivers but also safety for passengers. That program is now well underway. Around half the cabs now have it fully installed. We had some teething difficulties that we had to bed down, but from a personnel and resourcing point of view there is now capacity for us to look at what we can do in regional areas. We will go outside in a second and have a chat, but I thank the member for raising the issue. I close by extending my condolences to the family of Mr Ferguson, and his workmates in particular.