

MAIN ROADS WESTERN AUSTRALIA — MAINTENANCE CONTRACTS

732. Ms M.M. QUIRK to the Minister for Transport:

I refer to the Cook Labor government's longstanding commitment to bringing outsourced services and jobs back into the public sector.

Can the minister update the house on the work underway to end the outsourcing of road maintenance, instead bringing jobs back in-house with Main Roads Western Australia, and can the minister advise the house what this decision will mean for local jobs and communities across Western Australia?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI replied:

I thank the member for the question. Of course, in April last year, we made the key announcement that contracted routine road maintenance and other minor improvement works would return back in-house to government. I will give those who were not around at the time a quick history lesson. Back in the Court Liberal–National government in the late 1990s, there was a decision to outsource road maintenance to long-term contracts. That saw the number of people employed by Main Roads drop overnight from over 2 000 to 819. We saw jobs lost throughout regional WA. In fact, a lot of the jobs lost were those of Aboriginal people, because a lot of Aboriginal people were employed in road maintenance throughout regional WA. There was a loss of jobs and security and an impact on regional towns.

Last year, we made the decision to bring road maintenance back into government ownership. As a result, we are transferring people from their work in the private sector to government, creating security and stability. The progress so far has been significant. In October last year, 48 workers were transitioned to Main Roads in the wheatbelt region. Last November, a further 50 people transitioned in the midwest–Gascoyne region. Last week, we saw a third region come on board, with 26 people welcomed in the goldfields–Esperance region, and tomorrow a further 111 people will transition to Main Roads employment in the metropolitan area throughout the northern suburbs. This will mean that an additional 230 Main Roads employees will be on board. The critical point is that there will be better pay, better conditions, security of employment and more stability for regional towns. It will also save taxpayers' money, so it is a win-win! When we went out to the market to ascertain whether this was a value-for-money proposition, the answer was yes. There will be better conditions for workers and a better outcome for the community.

We just heard from the Premier about the Fitzroy River Bridge. We want to be able to retain some of the technical knowledge that we have built during the construction of that bridge. We want to create more jobs in local road maintenance, and we want to make sure that many of those people who have been trained on road construction up there can be retained and work throughout the entire region. Of course, the government controlling that will mean that we have a much better chance of retaining local workers, getting the training, and making sure we have good full-time, solid jobs in regional WA. We are also re-establishing and creating new depots and offices in Broome, Karratha, Manjimup and Esperance and expanding other facilities.

As we said, we are 100 per cent committed to jobs and full-time employment in this state, and we are 100 per cent committed to reversing many of those bad privatisation and contracting-out decisions, which did not actually deliver competitive tension, value for money or any better outcomes for workers. We are committed to reversing those decisions and creating full-time jobs, which will mean that when there is a natural disaster or issues that we need to deal with, we will have a workforce that is ready to go and knowledgeable, and has an understanding of the region. Particularly when it comes to road maintenance, local people know their region. They are proud of their roads and they are going to put extra effort into maintaining them, not only in response to natural disasters and other issues, but also in a proactive way. We are making sure that we are always on the front foot, making sure that our roads are the best in the nation and improving road safety and the quality of experience for all.