



Parliamentary Debates

(HANSARD)

FORTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION
2023

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Wednesday, 10 May 2023

Legislative Assembly

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THE SPEAKER (Mrs M.H. Roberts) took the chair at 12 noon, acknowledged country and read prayers.

PAPER TABLED

A paper was tabled and ordered to lie upon the table of the house.

BILLS

Notice of Motion to Introduce

1. Appropriation (Recurrent 2023–24) Bill 2023.
2. Appropriation (Capital 2023–24) Bill 2023.

Notices of motion given by **Mr D.A. Templeman (Leader of the House)** on behalf of Mr M. McGowan (Treasurer).

LEGAL SERVICES AND COMPLAINTS COMMITTEE

Statement by Attorney General

MR J.R. QUIGLEY (Butler — Attorney General) [12.02 pm]: I would like to take the opportunity to formally thank Mr John Ley, SC, who retired as chairperson of the Legal Services and Complaints Committee effective 3 March 2023. The LSCC, formerly the Legal Profession Complaints Committee, is a committee of the Legal Practice Board of Western Australia. The LSCC and the board are established under the Legal Profession Uniform Law Application Act 2022 of Western Australia. Mr Ley served the LSCC for 17 years, and was chairperson for eight years. Mr Ley made significant contributions and demonstrated great leadership in presiding over a number of changes to the regulation of the legal profession in Western Australia, including recent changes introduced by the legal profession uniform law scheme. I went through law school at university with Mr Ley. I know him well. He is an excellent legal practitioner, a very steady hand and he has done a wonderful job. It is with great sincerity that I wish Mr Ley all the best for his future endeavours.

I am pleased to announce that the board has appointed Mr Gary Cobby, SC, as the new chairperson of the LSCC. I congratulate Mr Cobby on his appointment. Mr Cobby joined the LSCC in October 2022 but has acted in a legal capacity for the LSCC and the board for many years. Mr Cobby has a deep understanding of the committee's functions and the types of matters it considers. Mr Cobby's extensive legal experience and dedication make him eminently equipped to preside over the LSCC. I had the pleasure of receiving Mr Cobby, SC, together with Mr Howard, SC, the chair of the Legal Practice Board, earlier this week. It was absolutely evident that Mr Cobby is eminently suitable to take over as the chairman of the LSCC. I wish him well in that role, may it please you.

CENTRAL REGIONAL TAFE

Statement by Minister for Training

MS S.F. McGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Training) [12.05 pm]: On Friday, 28 April this year, I travelled to Geraldton in my capacity as Minister for Training to see some of the world-class training opportunities on offer at Central Regional TAFE. As part of that campus's partnership with the Shore Leave Festival this year, the TAFE had the exciting opportunity to host high-profile chef Matt Moran. Tourism, hospitality and commercial cookery students and local residents had the opportunity to hear directly from Matt about his career and the exciting opportunities available in the industry. Matt himself undertook his training at TAFE at the age of 16 years, which set him on a path to become one of the world's most successful chefs, opening his first restaurant at 22 years of age and expanding to over 10 celebrated restaurants across Australia. The Shore Leave Festival is in its third year and is the ultimate seafood festival that celebrates all things seafood, culture, food and adventure that make the midwest region unique. I am so impressed to see our regional TAFEs providing such unique opportunities for local students through partnerships with local events like Shore Leave.

I also toured the Batavia Coast Maritime Institute specialist training facility. The maritime institute is an award-winning, state-of-the-art training, research and development facility, specialising in aquaculture, marine and environmental science research training. Daniel, the campus's aquaculture and maritime technician, explained the science behind how fish breed, feed and grow at the institute with Batavia's team leading the charge globally in aquaculture.

We topped off the trip by visiting the Technology Park campus where new equipment—three new earthmoving vehicles—had just been delivered thanks to our government's \$25 million modern equipment program for TAFEs. As Minister for Training, I am working hard to ensure that young people in the regions have access to the training they need to get the jobs of the future. We have invested over \$240 million in the largest TAFE capital works program

in Western Australia's history and, in addition to that, are providing new money for modern TAFE equipment. There are major upgrades to 14 TAFE colleges across the state and half of them are located in regional areas. There has never been a better time to get into training at your local TAFE.

PERTH CBD REVITALISATION

Statement by Minister for Local Government

MR J.N. CAREY (Perth — Minister for Local Government) [12.08 pm]: I rise to update the house on the state government's commitment to revitalising Perth's CBD and Northbridge. We are boosting vibrancy and activity throughout the city by funding a \$4 million CBD revitalisation program as part of the government's broader \$12 million package to increase foot traffic and reconnect Perth city. With two rounds of grants already provided, the Perth CBD and Northbridge have experienced a resurgence of energy and activity. Events included markets, festivals, artistic performances and light shows, making the city more vibrant and attractive than ever before. The response to the third round of grants has been overwhelming. In this round, a total of \$958 540 in funding has been awarded to 15 successful applicants. The funding provided through this program will continue to support local businesses, promote tourism and create more job opportunities for Western Australians. It is an investment in our city's future and we are committed to ensuring its success.

Recent data highlights that the Perth CBD office occupancy rates have hit 80 per cent of pre-COVID levels, with workers returning to the city faster than in any other capital city. The success of this program is about the power of investing in the heart of Perth and our city.

Although attendance figures from the first two funding rounds of the CBD revitalisation grant program are still coming in, current data shows that an estimated 200 000 people attended the first 21 activations. Evaluation data also indicates that the funding has leveraged \$2.11 in event investment for every dollar in grant funding awarded in round 1. The data for round 1 also indicates that around \$60 was spent in our city for every event visitor or participant. This indicates that the \$1.3 million in grant funding in round 1 delivered an estimated economic stimulus of \$12 million, supporting local jobs and small businesses.

The results are clear. The McGowan government's investment in our city has delivered significant economic benefit to local businesses, while also encouraging people to get back out there and enjoy social, community and arts events. This is a fantastic result for our city. The round 3 events will bring in even more people. As Minister for Local Government, I am excited about making our city more attractive, accessible and dynamic, and I look forward to the several more events to come over the next few months.

ABORIGINAL RANGER PROGRAM

Statement by Minister for Environment

MR R.R. WHITBY (Baldvis — Minister for Environment) [12.11 pm]: Today I would like to update the house on the McGowan government's Aboriginal ranger program. The Aboriginal ranger program initiative is one of the cornerstones of this government's commitment to working with traditional owners.

The program was designed to create jobs and training and community development opportunities to empower Aboriginal people across Western Australia. The people funded through the program are building knowledge and skills in conservation and land management, Aboriginal site management and tourism on country. Since the McGowan government's initial commitment in 2017, the program has supported more than 800 employment opportunities across 32 projects in all regions of the state, with 650 ranger jobs on country, of which 95 per cent have gone to Aboriginal people, almost half of whom are women. The program is administered by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions and is largely funded through royalties for regions. In 2021, the McGowan government acknowledged the importance and success of the program by investing another \$50 million. Later that year, it added another \$16.5 million, bringing the total phase 2 commitment to \$66.5 million over five years. A further annual allocation of \$16.5 million will begin after phase 2 is complete, bringing the current total allocated to the program up to \$83 million. This is exciting growth. It is a symbol of our state's ongoing commitment towards closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Feedback from our partners has told us that long-term funding certainty was important to keep ranger programs strong and sustainable. Therefore, in mid-2022, the state government allocated \$22.8 million to 14 established ranger programs under the Aboriginal ranger program's new expansion fund. This money will support 57 full-time equivalent positions for up to four years, meaning that organisations will be able to do more long-term planning and build stronger career pathways for rangers. In late 2022, we allocated another \$10 million to 17 ranger groups as part of the development fund. This investment will help Aboriginal organisations develop new ranger programs or build emerging ones. Last month, my colleague the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Hon Dr Tony Buti, MLA, joined me in inviting expressions of interest from eligible organisations for a new round of funding under the program. Up to \$11 million under the Aboriginal ranger program innovation fund is available for one-off innovative projects, and later in 2023 we will be making another \$13 million available through the development fund. I look forward to announcing the successful applicants of the \$11 million innovation fund and to sharing more of the benefits of the broader program.

**WESTERN AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SERVICE
COMMUNITY SERVICES EXCELLENCE AWARDS**

Statement by Minister for Community Services

MS S.E. WINTON (Wanneroo — Minister for Community Services) [12.14 pm]: I rise to inform the house of some outstanding community service achievers who were recently recognised at the annual Western Australian Council of Social Service Community Services Excellence Awards, which I had the privilege of attending. Through those awards, we celebrated and recognised our state's often unsung heroes in the community services sector, and what a deserving celebration it was. The WACOSS Community Excellence Awards recognise community sector workers for their commitment to helping make a difference in the lives of vulnerable Western Australians every day. The awards are a partnership between the state government through the Department of Communities and WACOSS.

The many finalists and eight award winners were recognised at a ceremony at Optus Stadium on 1 May. The 2023 award winners for the category of organisation providing collaborative, innovative or creative programs or services was Man Up WA for small organisation, Starick for medium organisation, Gumala Aboriginal Corporation for large organisation and Busselton Hospice Care for regional organisation. The winner of the award for outstanding community-led collaboration leading to better community outcomes was Social Reinvestment WA. The winner of the award for outstanding achievement by an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation, leading to better outcomes, was Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service. The winner of the Above and Beyond Award was Winnie Hayward, and the winner of the Excellence in Leadership Award was Elena Petrici. These eight winners have made an incredible contribution to our community. Like them, every day thousands of dedicated staff and volunteers in our community services sector work to support Western Australians who experience disadvantage and adversity.

In my capacity as Minister for Community Services, it has been a great privilege to travel around WA and meet with so many of these hardworking people across the sector, and I look forward to meeting many more of them. Awards nights like these are a great opportunity to recognise their incredible efforts. I want to congratulate all the deserving finalists and winners, and extend a huge thank you to all community service organisations for the wonderful and most important work they do each day to make a difference in people's lives. I thank WACOSS for its ongoing support and partnership with the state government for this event, and for hosting a wonderful celebration.

MAIN ROADS AMENDMENT BILL 2023

Second Reading

Resumed from 23 February.

MR S.A. MILLMAN (Mount Lawley — Parliamentary Secretary) [12.17 pm]: I rise to speak with unwavering support for the Main Roads Amendment Bill introduced to this chamber by the Minister for Transport, Hon Rita Saffioti. I do so by reflecting upon the incredible record of achievement that we have already seen from this minister under the McGowan Labor government in both this term and its previous term from 2017.

One of the things that I say often in this place is that good government is evidenced by striking the right balance, updating our statute book, and making sure that we put in place modern legislation that will provide benefits for the Western Australian community. The Main Roads Amendment Bill meets those criteria. Bear in mind that the Main Roads Act is almost 100 years old. Community expectations 100 years ago about the provision of road services were significantly different from the community expectations today. Back then, Main Roads was required to build and maintain roads. Main Roads must now manage modern highways and freeways, implement and integrate complex technological infrastructure, and operate a vastly improved and expanded regional road network with much higher traffic and freight volumes.

When members take long drives in the country and are behind a truck, they will often see stickers saying "Fix Australia—Fix the Roads", or "TWU—Carrying Australia". I love seeing both those stickers. This bill speaks to both of those. It represents some of the great work that the Transport Workers' Union of Australia is doing. I will be talking also about roadhouses and roadside facilities for long-distance freight drivers. The bill also builds on this government's legacy of fixing the road network in Western Australia by taking the money that is available to us through our sound financial investment and putting that into our road network to ensure that we will have a world-class twenty-first century road network that is ready for use by the people of Western Australia.

The range of powers that this bill will introduce include a more efficacious management of the \$55 billion state asset, which is under-utilised at the moment, providing an opportunity to generate a return for the government and the community. If passed by Parliament, the bill will provide Main Roads a power to enter into a wide range of commercial arrangements, including profit sharing and innovative business arrangements, with those business arrangements subject to ministerial and Treasurer approval; expand the functions and powers of Main Roads to reflect a modern road authority with regard to managing land and roadside facilities; and provide Main Roads with the ability to facilitate the operation of road service centres or roadhouses and to acquire and lease land for any purposes under the act. I think about the work of people like Tim Dawson of the Transport Workers' Union and

the campaign it ran to improve roadside facilities its members need to use. When TWU members travel long distances on their freight journeys, they have no option but to stop and use these roadside facilities. Some of these facilities are neglected, run down and in poor condition, so the campaign run by the TWU was to see the McGowan government invest in revitalising and improving those facilities, making them accessible to those truck drivers. The success of that campaign is a testament to not only the McGowan Labor government and Minister Saffioti, but also the collective work and effort of the Transport Workers' Union under the stewardship of secretary "Smoky" Dawson.

That pertains to this legislation. I want to talk more broadly about some of the road infrastructure projects that the McGowan government has undertaken and delivered since it was elected in 2017, because focusing on maintaining and improving our Main Roads network has been a signature feature of this government and one that it has carried out in an exemplary fashion. I wind back a bit to the 2021 state election. In the midst of the of the 2021 state election, there was a lot of commentary and discussion about the outstanding job the McGowan government had done, in concert with the community, shepherding Western Australia through the COVID pandemic. At that time, it seemed as though the issues that people were concerned about were health and our hospital services, the response to the COVID pandemic and the leadership and stewardship that the McGowan government had shown. Whenever I went doorknocking, was out at community events or talking to people, people said to me that they were very happy with the way that the McGowan government had handled the COVID-19 pandemic.

The concession that the Liberal and National Parties had no prospect of succeeding in the 2021 election was made early by the former member for Dawesville, of the Liberal Party, when he said that it had no chance of winning the 2021 state election. It was a fairly made concession that was prophetic in its accuracy, because it turned out that it had no chance of winning the state election and the McGowan government was returned with an increased majority. The reason I say that is that COVID took a lot of things away from us, including the opportunity to campaign on our incredible record of achievement when it came to road and transport infrastructure over the first term of the McGowan government between 2017 and 2021. The list of achievements by this minister in this portfolio is incredible. She has demonstrated an assiduous ability to deliver results for the people of Western Australia in both her planning and transport portfolios. A lot of the light, heat, attention, and glitz and glamour is focused on Metronet. Metronet is a signature project that will redefine the way transport operates in metropolitan Perth. It will be a legacy project that will predominantly benefit the people of Perth for decades to come. When it comes to transport investment, this minister believes that no-one should be left behind. That is why when we look at the record of achievements, it is throughout the entire state of Western Australia.

Some of the key metropolitan projects that have been delivered over the life of the McGowan government in both the fortieth Parliament and the forty-first Parliament include one that is dear to my heart and has a big impact on people in not only the Mount Lawley electorate but also the inner north-eastern suburbs around it, such as Maylands, Bayswater, Morley, Noranda, Nollamara and Mirrabooka. It is the Tonkin Gap. For many years, the narrowing of Tonkin Highway—from a south-easterly direction from Morley towards Perth Airport and in the opposite direction from Perth Airport back to Morley—over the Swan River, Guildford Road and the railway line has resulted in one of Perth's worst spots of congestion. It is fair to say that the Tonkin Gap in Bayswater is probably Perth's number one congestion hotspot. Yesterday, we heard a question from the member for Maylands on the iconic Bayswater Bridge that was the bane of existence for truck drivers going through Bayswater.

The bane of existence for communities travelling through the eastern corridor of Perth along Tonkin Highway is undoubtedly and unquestionably the Tonkin Gap. To remedy the problem of the Tonkin Gap required courage, determination, investment and commitment. We have seen these attributes from this minister in order to fix that longstanding problem. We inherited that problem from a previous government that did not have the courage, determination, commitment or investment to fix the Tonkin Gap. Not only is this minister remedying this number one congestion hotspot by widening the Tonkin Highway through that corridor, she is also doing it at the same time as we are building the Metronet project that will connect the Morley–Ellenbrook line into the train line at Bayswater back in through to metropolitan Perth. This civil engineering project of an unprecedented size is being delivered by this minister and Main Roads. For that I commend them.

Secondly, I want to talk about the Mitchell Freeway, another piece of major transport infrastructure that significantly impacts the people in my electorate of Mount Lawley. The investment that the McGowan government made from 2017 right the way through until 2023 has seen a significant improvement with the widening of the Mitchell Freeway. I remember that the former member for Hillarys used to bleat about the fact that the initial stages of the widening of the Mitchell Freeway were not going far enough, but we have now seen widening of the Mitchell Freeway extend well north into the northern suburbs from Hepburn Avenue —

Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski: Hodges Drive.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: To Hodges Drive. Thank you, parliamentary secretary.

That is together with, as I understand it, the duplication of Marmion Avenue for the northern suburbs and remediation on Wanneroo Road, including the new intersection at Wanneroo Road and Joondalup Drive. This is a significant investment in road transport infrastructure for people living in the northern suburbs in order to bust congestion, improve efficiency and productivity, and drive economic growth. When we look at the road widening of

Mitchell Freeway, the introduction of smart freeways and the Mitchell Freeway extension, we see that this is a government and a minister who is committed to the wellbeing and welfare of people in the northern suburbs such as Joondalup, Kingsley, Wanneroo, Girrawheen and Landsdale, all the way up to Butler and Burns Beach. This is a government that sees the needs of those communities and serves their needs by making these important investments.

Then we go south and see the improvements to Kwinana Freeway, such as the widening of Kwinana Freeway and the intersection at Roe Highway and Kwinana Freeway, for improved traffic flow and the easing of congestion. This is an easing of congestion, mind you, that is taking place when the population of Perth is growing materially. We are encouraging more migrants to come from the eastern states and overseas to help with our labour shortages. On the one hand, we are increasing the population of Perth and the number of drivers and cars on the road, but on the other hand, we are doing it in a way that means that our daily commute is not as bad as it might have been if these investments had not been made. We see the widening of Kwinana Freeway south and northbound, and also the introduction of smart freeways on Kwinana Freeway. These have made a material difference to people's daily commute. Whilst I am in the southern suburbs, I will talk about Armadale Road. My good friend the member for Jandakot keeps talking to me in our office upstairs in Parliament House about how important the widening of Armadale Road is for his community. It has opened up all of that area in the south-eastern suburbs for business and housing development opportunities. We can see that building the infrastructure first and providing the infrastructure that the community needs is an incredible opportunity to make sure that the Western Australian economy remains vibrant and robust and the services that Western Australian people demand—fairly—from their government are delivered.

I said earlier that as well as the significant work undertaken to deliver the Metronet project, which will predominantly benefit people in Perth, this Minister for Transport has also concentrated the government's attention on delivering for regional Western Australians. This minister is a champion of a regional road safety program that has seen more than \$800 million spent to seal shoulders and install audible lines on 8 500 kilometres of roads in Western Australia—8 500 kilometres of roads in Western Australia have been made safer because of the investment of this government and the diligence of this minister. In addition, there have been very important road projects for our big regional centres such as Albany and Bunbury, which are blessed to have champions as local members who continue to advocate on behalf of their communities. The Bunbury Outer Ring Road and the Albany ring road have received the significant improvements that the communities of Albany and Bunbury have cried out for over successive years. They were neglected by the so-called party of rural and regional WA and these works were delivered by the real party of regional WA, the Australian Labor Party, and Minister Saffioti. In addition, in the electorates of the members for Central Wheatbelt and Moore, we have seen significant upgrades to the Great Eastern Highway and the Great Northern Highway.

Whilst I am talking about regional WA, this minister not only has a plan that is being implemented in concert with Main Roads for the benefit of Western Australia, but also can respond to unforeseen circumstances. I am talking now about the unprecedented floods in the Kimberley and the Fitzroy River basin and the significant effect that that has had. I will spend a bit of time on this issue.

I want to give a shout-out to the communities in Fitzroy River that are doing it tough and struggling in the circumstances that they have been presented with by virtue of these floods. In particular, I want to give a quick shout-out to the Muludja remote community, which is about 40 kilometres east of Fitzroy Crossing, and to the local community school there, which is struggling in difficult circumstances. I also want to give a shout-out to Tash, who is the school principal and a friend of mine, and to her partner, Dave, and say that I hope you guys are going okay. Keep your chin up. You have done a great job serving the local community. The government is focused on doing what it can to improve the situation in Fitzroy Crossing.

I want to talk about some of the things that have happened in the Kimberley, including the ferry to get things moving. The government started the ferry service for goods and four-wheel drives on 14 March. It has carried more than 15 000 passengers, with 500 people a day using the ferry at its peak. It is also popular amongst our furry friends, with Trixie, a local Fitzroy dog, riding the service daily and getting pats from the barge operators. After the low-level crossing was opened, the ferry ceased its operations on 30 April but with the impending wet season, the ferry will be ready to go once again when that confronts the community. After a short hiatus, a single-lane, low-level crossing to the north of Fitzroy Crossing is now open to all vehicles. This causeway has reconnected communities in Fitzroy Crossing and enabled buses to access East Kimberley and West Kimberley ahead of the tourist season. It has also meant that heavy vehicles can now travel to East Kimberley again. Although semitrailers are the largest heavy vehicles allowed to travel on the crossing, the department has also set up small road train breakdown and assembly areas on each approach to the river to facilitate road train crossings.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: This has made it much easier to cross the river in a similar fashion to before. Construction on a dual-lane crossing near the old bridge is now underway and it will be able to carry all vehicles and pedestrians. Construction is progressing well, with the crossing on track for completion later this year. It is important to bear in mind that design of the bridge is near completion, the geotechnical work and service relocations are underway

and the piles are arriving onsite. A nine-month procurement process was expedited and completed in eight weeks. In addition to all the projects that I mentioned before—it would have been great had we had the opportunity to campaign on those projects in the 2021 state election—flooding of the Fitzroy River highlights how nimble, reactive and responsive this McGowan Labor government is. Confronted with that situation, that community faced a perilous future. But the work of this minister in doing exactly what I have just described with the ferry, the low-level causeway crossing and the expedited process for construction of the bridge has put the community in a much more hopeful position. Those opposite might decry the length of time taken and might try to strike fear into the hearts of people in that community. That is irresponsible. We should be focusing on hope; we should not be focusing on fear. That is one of the key differences between us and them. We are saying to those communities, “You’ve been through a terrible set of circumstances, but we see you; we understand what you’ve gone through and we are working as hard as we can in order to remedy that situation.”

Next I want to talk about a really important philosophical basis for Labor governments. Labor governments believe that governments can do good work; people can trust governments to get on with the job of doing important things. Liberal and conservative governments and the neo-Liberal philosophy have a tendency to want to privatise, sell-off, outsource and subcontract; they do not have the same faith and belief that governments can do good work. They are always so sceptical about the role of government in the community. It makes one wonder why they want to run for Parliament if they are so sceptical about governments doing good things. One of the things that this government has done that really speaks to the values of the WA Labor Party and the Labor movement more broadly is that we think that government can play a good role. One of this government’s greatest attributes is that it has delivered on bringing road maintenance back in-house. We now have public service employees, public workers employed by the government, doing road maintenance. Instead of lining the pockets of subcontractors who donate to the Liberal Party and all the rest of it, Main Roads is directly employing workers to do the work and maintain our roads. In a shocking and lamentable move, this work was contracted out by the Court government in the 1990s. It was ideological zealotry to attack the union movement, attack workers and undermine the role of government in society. There was no contract certainty. It is a shame that no-one from the Liberal Party is in the chamber because I would love to see them take account of this. I know that members of the Nationals WA realise that as a result of this decision, workers left the regions because they did not have jobs. The jobs they had working for the government were sold off by Richard Court. I bet you—I do not know, but I imagine—that in those cabinet meetings, the National Party representatives, if they were standing up for their regional communities, would have known just how important those jobs were. To see them go would have been a kick in the guts. Happily, the party of the regions is back in government and we have decided to support the regions by bringing those jobs back in-house. There was no contract certainty and lots of people moved out of regional WA. We now have 660 permanent FTE in-house at Main Roads—660! Of those 660 permanent FTE, 500 are in the regions; we are putting jobs back into the regions in WA. That is what people get with a Labor government and this minister for Main Roads. Workers get better pay and conditions with a unionised workforce; they are getting between \$12 000 and \$22 000 more per annum under the Main Roads enterprise bargaining agreement. They get long service leave, sick leave, other leave entitlements and access to workers compensation.

Members would think that if we are paying all these extra wages to these workers, perhaps there is an additional cost to the government. Perhaps this was what underpinned the ideological zealotry of the Court government, but no. As a result of not having to rely on subcontractors, bringing in-house the 660 permanent FTE has resulted in savings of \$25 million per annum. Looking after the workers, looking after the regions, looking after the community and looking after the state’s finances; that is a quadruple that only a Labor government can deliver. We have increased in-house skills, knowledge and expertise, and we have put ourselves into a position in which we are at a much higher level of responsiveness to things like the Kimberley floods. We are building our capacity to respond to those natural disasters, which we are unfortunately likely to see more of as the impacts of climate change really bite. We are futureproofing Western Australia’s road infrastructure by bringing that capacity in-house.

I want to finish in the time that I have. I have mentioned a number of the road projects throughout the northern suburbs. I want to make this point. People may look askance and say that the Mitchell Freeway does not go through Mt Lawley. The Great Eastern and Great Northern Highways do not go through Mt Lawley. Let me tell members this: if people who live in an arc from Yancheep all the way round to Gidgegannup come down Wanneroo Road, Alexander Drive, Beaufort Street or Guildford Road via the Great Eastern Highway—any of those roads—before they reach the Perth CBD, they will have travelled through my local community, the neighbourhood that I have the great privilege of representing, the suburb of Mt Lawley. People on Wanneroo Road will have travelled through Yokine, people on Alexander Drive will have travelled through Dianella, and people who travel down Walter Road will have travelled through Morley and Inglewood and down into Mt Lawley. These road infrastructure projects benefit the whole community of Western Australia, but they also have a material benefit for the people in Mt Lawley, because by busting traffic and reducing congestion, we are making that run into the CBD much easier for those commuters, and that means that rat-running, cutting through side streets and cutting through our local roads is materially reduced. As a dad with two school-age kids, who, as often as they can—not as often as I would like—walk, ride or scoot to school, I want to make sure that our local roads are as safe as possible. Although local roads will not be captured by this bill—this is a Main Roads Amendment Bill that deals with the significant road

infrastructure in the state, and local roads remain the province of local councils—if our big arterial roads are safer, the obvious consequence is that our local roads will be safer, and that means our neighbourhoods will be safer and our kids will be safer when they walk, ride or scoot to school. That is another corollary benefit of these significant infrastructure investments.

Finally, I want to talk about a couple of particular road projects that pertain precisely to the Mount Lawley electorate, without the geographic argument. One significant investment that was made by Minister Saffioti and the McGowan government concerned the upgrade of the Wanneroo Road–Morley Drive intersection, which is probably one of the most congested parts of those inner north-eastern suburbs. The member for Mirrabooka is here. It significantly affects her electorate, as well as the electorates of the member for Morley, the Minister for Health, the cabinet secretary and the member for Balcatta. All those electorates were significantly impacted by knock-on congestion created by the Morley Drive–Wanneroo Road intersection. In all our electorates, we saw local roads being used in a way they were not designed for, and rat-running and speeding on side streets. In order to encourage people to use the main corridors, investment needed to be made to ameliorate the congestion.

Ms M.M. Quirk: Can I interject for a second?

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: Yes, member for Landsdale.

Ms M.M. Quirk: One of the pleasant experiences of my drive, as you described, on Wanneroo Road is seeing your smiling face on bus stops.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: Thank you, member for Landsdale. People comment on the bus stops. I love the bus stops.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr D.A.E. Scaife): I should just remind the member for Landsdale not to mislead the chamber!

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: They are a good way of letting my community know how they can get in touch with me if they ever need any assistance from the local member for Mount Lawley.

I want to talk about the Wanneroo Road–Morley Drive intersection and the upgrades to that intersection. The way in which Main Roads has worked on that intersection has not only dealt with the immediate concern and congestion, but also put in place the capacity to have preference given to public transport. Instead of being stuck behind buses that pull over at the stop in order to take on passengers, there are now dedicated bus lanes as people come in and out of the intersection, so there is room to move. That means as we increase the number of buses that we put on and the patronage on our public transport system, which is always a feature of a Labor government, we will be able to make sure that the traffic flows well, not only now, which it does, but also into the future.

This government has not left the heavy lifting of looking after safety on our local roads to our local councils. I know that this government has invested significantly in the City of Stirling. We can look at the Stephenson Avenue extension, for example, and stage 2, which is leading into the Stirling city centre and across to the Mitchell Freeway. The City of Stirling has been campaigning for that project for a long time. We see that this government is working constructively and collaboratively with local councils to deliver the road projects that will make a material difference to people in those communities. I would say that that ability to proactively and collaboratively come together and solve transport problems is a real feature of this minister's stewardship and the new approach that has been adopted by Main Roads under the McGowan government.

I finish by commending the minister for the work that she has done in the time that she has been the minister, and commending the McGowan government for the investment it has made into our road transport infrastructure, because it makes a significant difference to the benefit of the people of Western Australia, it helps drive productivity in our economy and eases congestion, but, most importantly, it reduces unsafe practices on our roads and delivers for the entire community. I commend the minister and I commend the bill to the house.

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Leader of the Opposition) [12.46 pm]: I rise to contribute to this debate on the Main Roads Amendment Bill 2023, and, in doing so, say that I am the lead speaker for the opposition on this matter, and that the opposition will be taking the position not to oppose this legislation.

This bill is actually quite similar to and draws quite a bit of the wording from the Main Roads Amendment Bill 2015, which was introduced and read into the Parliament but did not progress through the Parliament, but there are some key differences between this bill and the bill that was presented in 2015. One obvious difference is that there is no freight charge in this bill, which was a provision of the 2015 bill, and because of that, there are a few consequent changes in some of the definitions. This current bill also goes further in what it will allow the commissioner to do; in other words, the roles of the commissioner and of Main Roads Western Australia will expand quite considerably from what they are now and what they were intended to be back in 2015. I will talk a little bit about those differences as we go through the bill.

Clause 17 of the current bill is considerably different from clause 18 of the 2015 bill. Those clauses seek to amend section 15B of the act, "General functions of Commissioner". This section goes to the major changes in the bill that we see before us. The current bill will give much wider powers to the commissioner than those envisaged in the 2015 bill or in the current act, as I have said. I will talk a bit later about some of those issues.

It is also interesting to look at the proposed changes to section 15B that were proposed back in 2015 but are not contained in this bill. In 2015, it was proposed that in section 15B(2), there would be a final statement, if you like, of the functions of the commissioner. It stated —

In carrying out the functions referred to in subsection (1), the Commissioner must —

- (a) identify, implement and promote measures to —
 - (i) improve the safety of roads in the State; and
 - (ii) reduce the deaths of people, the injuries to people, and the damage to property, resulting from incidents occurring on roads in the State; and
- (b) act in a way that supports the sustainable economic, social and environmental management and development of the State.

Those very laudable matters are not mentioned in the bill before us. The parliamentary secretary is in the chamber. Perhaps it could be explained why that was not seen to be necessary to be included in this bill. It seems to me that reducing those injuries and coming to the outcomes that I just outlined is certainly something that we should all be aiming for.

The opposition was given a briefing on the bill. Perhaps government members had a similar briefing; I do not know. The briefing was quite instructive. I thank the minister for organising that for us. Among the matters discussed in the briefing was the rationale, if you like, or the case for why the act needed to be changed. We were told that it was nearly 100 years old and it had only general powers, which had been interpreted widely over the years and often used inferred powers. Section 15 included a general power to manage land; section 16, a general power to construct highways and main roads; and section 18, a general power to enter into contracts and agreements. We were also told that the last substantive amendment made to the act was back in 1996, with a couple of tweaks done since then.

It was pointed out that changes will be made to include a broader definition of “works” and “main roads works” to support a range of functions. There will be expanded functions, including commercial operations and other public purposes, under proposed sections 15B(1)(f), 15B(1)(g)(i) and 18E, “Other powers”. An expanded delegation power will allow sub-delegations of powers under other acts. The amended act will include substantially increased penalties. They will increase very substantially. There will be a provision for an infringement regime, and increased and variable contract approval thresholds.

The bill will also include enhanced powers to enter into commercial agreements and business arrangements with the Treasurer’s approval; provisions for business arrangements requiring the approval of the minister and the Treasurer, including company, partnership, trust, joint venture, and arrangements for sharing profits or sponsorships; the ability to generate revenue or profit; new and restated powers regarding adjoining works, road service centres and leasing of land; new powers to allow fees and charges to be applied in property developments, mining operations and for infrastructure placed in the road reserve; and expanded regulation-making powers, such as unauthorised use of the road reserve—that is, third-party works, unauthorised use of road train assembly areas and unauthorised parking of vehicles et cetera.

The opposition had some concern about the application of some of these powers and how they would be reviewed. The briefing identified commercial opportunities for using a road reserve for tourism, rest stops, public charity events, roadside vending, service centres, roadhouses and advertising. Some of the examples given include the heavy vehicle industry installing unmanned fuel outlets; the commercial leasing of land and premises for service stations; ancillary activities, such as a cafe, to support Matagarup Bridge activities; and the leasing of land and premises in support of commuters and the community, such as childcare facilities, gyms, bike repair shops near public transport hubs or community centres. They all had some sort of connection to transport. We asked what would stop the construction of apartments et cetera on land that was under the control of Main Roads. We also had some concerns around the ability of Main Roads to compulsorily acquire land and then use it for purposes other than potentially the development of road networks. Those matters were raised with the minister’s office.

We received some follow-up after the briefing. I will run through it for the benefit of the house. One of the matters that I raised related to the interaction between what Main Roads would be allowed to do and local planning arrangements that might already exist. I asked: what would be the interaction between the Main Roads Act and planning powers? The response was —

All relevant planning policies and guidelines will continue to apply under an amended Main Roads Act, including Development control policy 1.10—Freeway services centres, roadhouses incl signage ...

Any service station or road service centre or roadhouse would still need planning and development approvals from the relevant local government and/or the WA Planning Commission.

That is an interesting arrangement. On Indian Ocean Drive in the Shire of Dandaragan is a site that was envisaged by Main Roads to be a service centre when the road was constructed. The rationale was that Main Roads had fairly recently at that stage opened the Forrest Highway to Bunbury and there were very few places to stop,

apart from a couple of older establishments, and big distances between stops. Main Roads received criticism that Forrest Highway was not adequately served with service centres and rest stops. In a bid to overcome that, there was some discussion with a local landowner. In exchange for allowing Main Roads to use the land as a site from which to work when it was building the section of Indian Ocean Drive from Lancelin to Cervantes, Main Roads bitumenised quite a considerable area of land. There were two entrances into and off the main road. It certainly envisaged that a service station would be located there, and that was always the understanding it had with the owner of the land.

After this arrangement was put in place, the then Department of Planning developed a different idea. The proposal never received planning approval; it was refused. The department came up with the *Indian Ocean Drive: Planning guideline*. Somehow the department did not think that Main Roads' ideas for planning along the road were acceptable. It had a completely different approach to what should be available on the road. I know that this document was developed before the minister's time, but it would be interesting to hear how it could be used as a guide to what will happen in the future if there is an interplay between the views of the department and the Commissioner of Main Roads.

Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski: Can I just ask what that document is called?

Mr R.S. LOVE: It is called *Indian Ocean Drive: Planning guideline*, dated March 2014. It was released by the Western Australian Planning Commission and the then Department of Planning. This is a much smaller document than the one I saw. I think it included lots of maps, and it was quite thick.

The conclusion was that there could not be a toilet on Indian Ocean Drive. There is now a Main Roads-sponsored facility, not a service station, just a toilet by the road, because there was a considerable distance between stops. I am not saying who is right and who is wrong, but there was obviously a difference of view between the two departments. It would be interesting to hear how these matters will be adjudicated in the future. I note that the Minister for Transport, the minister responsible for Main Roads, and the Minister for Planning happen to be the same person, but that will not always be the case. Main Roads is in many ways an autonomous body so it has a considerable ability to prosecute its own views in any case.

Another matter spoken about was the ability for some return of charges to Main Roads. There was a discussion, and questions, about the bulk concessional loading scheme. The minister's office responded that the bulk concessional loading schemes were established over 10 years ago to address an increase in bulk commodities, especially iron ore, being moved by road. Anybody who has been on the Geraldton–Mt Magnet road, for instance, would have seen very large vehicles moving up and down the road called quads—very, very heavy four-trailer trucks that travel much quicker on the way out they do on the way back, fully laden to port in Geraldton. I assume they are probably subject to the bulk concessional loading scheme because that consideration is not seen anywhere else in local road networks. The scheme is used for other mining operations carting bulk commodities, such as lithium producers, but to date not for any haulage in the agricultural sector. The agricultural sector is quite interesting because sometimes there will be wheat bins, or grain bins, CBH bins, and it is determined that there will be an out load from the bin to another bin or to port. Sometimes rail is used but quite often road transport is used. Shires in my electorate have said that they have just finished repairing roads and spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on them only to have a campaign to move wheat from a particular bin parcel on their roads and leave them in a very poor state indeed, costing the local ratepayer. Sometimes the bin may not be in the thick of the shire, it may be in another shire, and it is going to Kwinana, the metro grain centre or Northam, so there is no return for the ratepayers in that—they are not growing the wheat but the roads are being destroyed because of the passage of that grain. It is a difficult matter in country areas because everybody wants to see the grain industry well off, but some of the communities affected negatively find it difficult to accept. The briefing went on to say that the bulk concessional loading scheme was voluntary and applied to large-scale haulage projects that operate at concessional rates. Funds generated under the scheme are then applied to the relevant haulage route.

It is interesting to see how that is managed. It may be done at the local level, now that Main Roads has given greater autonomy to some of the regional areas. I assume it manages the expenditures on those roads. The minister is here now. We were just talking about the Mt Magnet road in the midwest being one of the roads where this is probably operating, and just how much of return that is making. No charges apply to the initial 300 000 tonnes per annum. The concession provides significant cost benefit to a producer. If a proposal were to be received in the agricultural sector, it would be considered along with normal guidelines. Interestingly, charges apply to the owner, producer or the receiver of a commodity, not the heavy haulage operator. At the moment, the current rate is 0.4¢ per tonne, and it would be interesting to hear from the minister whether any changes are envisaged, whether there will be a widening of that, whether the powers inferred under proposed section 18A(1) of the legislation mean that there will be more autonomy for Main Roads to set that fee or how that will occur. Perhaps we can work through those issues in consideration in detail.

I sought further clarity about freeway service centres. The key change under this legislation is the ability to acquire the land under the Land Administration Act for the purposes of a road service facility, to lease to any person and for that person to operate the facility. Under the current act the commissioner has the power to lease land only to the person from whom the land was acquired. I am mulling through that and thinking of the proposed route from

Dongara to Northampton around the Moonyoonooka store. Various maps lead to the current store having to be moved. If this is the system under which that takes place, what guarantees do landowners and current operators in the area have that they would be able to participate in the future of those facilities? Would Main Roads simply make the decision itself and potentially freeze out the landowners? The land could be compulsorily acquired and someone else would develop a service centre, or Main Roads could even develop it, and then it could be leased to someone else, so the landowner would miss out and would not only have their land compulsorily acquired but, in effect, their business. That is a conundrum I am sure the minister will be able to consider and take on board. I am not saying that that will happen, but it seems it is a possibility. I am just applying a local lens to how it would operate in that circumstance.

A couple of specific service centres were discussed, such as a West Pinjarra service centre. On 16 December 2016, Main Roads entered into an access deed for the freeway service centre at West Pinjarra. The relevant land is private freehold. The licensee pays Main Roads an annual fee for costs incurred, such as ramp maintenance, guide posts, pavement marking, lighting et cetera. The fee is payable in accordance with a relevant invoice generated by Main Roads. No other fees such as a ground lease or other is paid to Main Roads. There is also the Baldvis centre. Main Roads entered into that on April 2011. Again, Main Roads entered into an access deed for that freeway service with BP. The relevant land is private freehold. The licensee annually reimburses Main Roads a flat annual fee commencing from the date of commissioning. The flat fee is in relation to Main Roads' recurrent costs such as outgoings and expenses, power consumption, maintaining the entry and exit et cetera.

Then there was some discussion about commercial activities by Main Roads. Proposed section 15B(1)(g) qualifies that activities must not adversely affect Main Roads' other functions. The other functions are set out in 15B(1), and the purpose of the legislation is set out in the long title. Essentially, the commercial activities would need to link back in some way or be a benefit to the road network. The question is how that would be assessed. Who would do that assessment? Would it ultimately be the minister? I assume the minister would have to give some level of approval to such a commercial activity. We may be able to discuss that when we get to that proposed section 15B(1)(g). In any event, the briefing went on to tell us that any such commercial activities would need the minister's approval, but, again, I am not sure about the criteria or the lens through which the minister would address some of those matters.

The minister was not here when I talked before about Indian Ocean Drive and the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage having a different view from Main Roads on some of the facilities and planning on that stretch of road. If Main Roads were to develop facilities along its roads, what level of consultation would there be with the local community? I know that the briefing paper states that the existing planning legislation would apply, but how would that actually play out? Would the applicant have to go through a joint development assessment arrangement or would it be assessed by Main Roads Western Australia? I am seeking clarity from the minister about how these matters would be discussed. I am assuming that, ultimately, Main Roads would have considerable influence in determining where and what types of facilities should be placed along a road. The minister is aware that I have previously raised concerns about the consultation processes undertaken by Main Roads presently, whether that be on the Bunbury Outer Ring Road or the Dongara–Geraldton–Northampton bypass, especially around the walkway area in the most recent change, or, indeed, the Charles Street situation when Main Roads put forward an idea but nobody else thought it was a very good idea and, ultimately, Main Roads had to withdraw it. Part of the problem that it encountered was not doing the consultation up-front, and that led to the proposal being withdrawn.

It is not just me who has highlighted that sometimes Main Roads tends to act in a fairly insular manner. I know that the minister would be very familiar with the special inquiry into government programs and projects that the government conducted under John Langoulant. He had some interesting things to say in that inquiry. Page 58 of the inquiry's report deals with a couple of projects such as Perth Stadium, the Swan River pedestrian bridge and other matters. The report talks about the transport sector and Main Roads' interaction with the planning process throughout the whole of that development and of the need to improve its operations. That is not me saying that; it was the special inquirer who said those things. If the minister turns to pages 58 and 59, she will see all that written out for her. To give the chamber a flavour of what this is about, the special inquirer observed the operations of the Public Transport Authority and Main Roads through the prism of its inquiry into the Perth Stadium and Swan River pedestrian bridge projects. It did not look at the operations of the port authorities. The report says —

It is apparent that staff within the Public Transport Authority and Main Roads —

They are two of the arms that were examined —

have considerable expertise and their respective achievements over many years have benefitted the State's development.

Nobody would quibble with that. It continues —

The Special Inquirer observed that the Public Transport Authority and Main Roads work more competitively than collegiately. Three issues were apparent:

... The Main Roads WA legislation is dated and the Special Inquirer was made aware of a number of aspects of the legislation which cause cost inefficiencies.

Is the minister aware whether all those issues that the special inquirer identified for the government have actually been dealt with in the legislation that is now before the house, and does the bill make sure that those inefficiencies will be dealt with? The report goes on to refer to the funding differences between different branches of the departments. It says —

Main Road's access to hypothecated revenues through vehicle licence fees takes them outside the budget process and enables them to operate more independently than other agencies. Main Road's preference for alliance contracting arrangements on major road programs is arguably not always cost effective.

I have raised some concerns around those arrangements myself. It is interesting to see the special inquirer almost presciently outlining those issues when he undertook that inquiry.

The report goes on to talk about the cultural differences. It states —

The cultural differences between the two entities, and the Department of Transport, are long standing and pronounced. The culture of Main Roads particularly is one of a closed shop which is not amenable to external review.

I wonder whether the minister is satisfied that she has addressed those cultural issues that the special inquirer identified. Has she initiated changing the culture that the special inquirer and I have brought to the minister's attention?

In another section of the report, the Department of Transport talks about its involvement with steering groups to oversee the development of the precinct on the Swan River around Perth Stadium. It goes on to say —

Whereas the main parties involved in the Stadium project formed a "one team" project group and were located together at the Stadium site the transport bodies chose not to be part of the team.

It goes on to say —

The lack of communication with other agencies on these design issues was a major factor which gave rise to the need for these changes.

He is talking about the contract variations. The report continues —

Main Roads' approach in managing the contract and communicating developments have been the source of much dissatisfaction and were assessed by the Special Inquirer to be unsatisfactory.

The minister may care to look at some of that information to see whether she is satisfied that, along with the changes that have been made and the ability of Main Roads to launch into a whole range of different activities and work on things that are not necessarily related to roads, the culture is good, the oversight is sufficient and the benefits to the state can be identified and reported on.

With that, I will conclude my contribution. I will just say once again that the opposition will not be opposing the bill. I want to tease out the issues that I have raised as we go through the discussion. We will be going into consideration in detail and talking about those matters as this bill progresses through the house.

MR C.J. TALLENTIRE (Thornlie) [1.16 pm]: As the member for Thornlie, I am very proud to rise to address the Main Roads Amendment Bill 2023. The bill is about a very important part of our mobility. There is so much interest in the technology of mobility, including the various vehicles and devices that we use to get around, that I think the surface upon which we travel often gets forgotten about. In many ways, this legislation is about updating the very important Main Roads legislation that will enable the futurisation and the future development of our road network in a way that will be in keeping with what the latest technology can provide. It is up there with the various global initiatives on the future of roads. The bill will ensure that we will have in place the capability, the approvals processes, the funding mechanisms and the land acquisition arrangements to ensure that our road network—certainly that part that is looked after by Main Roads Western Australia—will be as contemporary as possible. I contrast that future vision of the roads with the reality that I am sure many people in Western Australia will face for probably at least 100 years to come, given the size of our state and the sparseness of the population. Good old gravel roads will be a major form of our road network. Gravel roads become corrugated, get chewed up and demand a lot of resources to maintain, mostly from local governments. They are essential for the travel of people and goods. The Leader of the Opposition touched on the transport of grain around the state. Much of that is done on the gravel road network.

This is really exciting legislation because Main Roads as a department and as an organisation can do some very expensive and large-scale projects that require incredibly complex engineering. I just want to say how brilliant a lot of that engineering is. I am constantly struck by the manner in which projects are developed and then executed. Major construction works are being undertaken and, yet, the engineering work allows for us to continue to transit through the area, albeit at a reduced speed and with congestion and other such problems. I am amazed when I see areas of development like the Leach Highway–Welshpool Road intersection that I frequently travel through and is now at completion point. It is amazing that despite all that engineering work going on, it was always possible to drive through that area—absolutely incredible. I marvel at the quality of the engineering in that staged development phase and how clever that work is. The member for Mount Lawley talked about the Tonkin Highway gap project

and acknowledged that prior to that we had the eastern gateway project. It is incredible that despite the engineering works going on there, as complex as they are, we can still travel through there at all development stages of the project. That applies to not only vehicles, but also the principal shared path for those who walk, wheel, ride, scoot or use whatever other means they choose. The temporary structure that was put in place to enable people to walk, wheel, ride or scoot along was incredible in itself. I do not think it is officially open yet but people can access the new PSP that goes through the Tonkin Highway gap and across the river. It is stunning and magnificent. The width is incredible; the quality of the pavement and the grade on the inclines has been so cleverly done, and the way that links into our network is absolutely brilliant.

I know that in some ways my comments are a little unfashionable. I hear from some people who say that these deviations are a bit excessive and they complain about the amount of time a deviation might be in place. It is true that sometimes deviations do not provide an ideal outcome, but it is, by definition, a deviation that is temporary in its existence. I am inclined to say to those people that we must not have some absurd idea of entitlement that we, as a generation, should be entitled to live without any encumbrance while development goes on. It is an extreme notion of entitlement that we should be able to live our lives without the slightly annoying at times and slightly troublesome problem of a deviation. We are not an entitled generation such that we should not incur the complexities and some of the costs that go with the development of these projects. Generations before us have encountered all sorts of upheaval and disruption while roads were built, so why should our generation be any different? I marvel at the quality of the works that are going on around the state. Thinking of previous generations and their contributions to the road network, one of my favourite sections of highway in the state would be in the Pilbara that goes north from Newman. It is not so stunning around Newman, but once you get a little further north up towards the Auski roadhouse, the red Pilbara rock and the way Great Northern Highway carves through the landscape is absolutely stunning. It is a section of road that provides a sense of connection with that ancient Pilbara landscape. I find it to be a very moving experience travelling through there on my way to perhaps Karijini National Park or somewhere like that. It is absolutely magnificent to see that part of what is, as has been mentioned, a \$55 billion state asset in our amazing road network.

As I have said, we have to be mindful that this road network is currently dominated by internal combustion engine vehicles. It is unlikely that that will stay the case. Internal combustion vehicles may have some role to play in the future, but we can already see that new technologies such as electric vehicles and hydrogen-powered fuel cell vehicles are going to become the dominant users of our road network into the future. It is very important that we are able to design and build that network and then adapt it to accommodate those new technologies. I see this legislation enabling that in the future.

Mention has been made about roadhouses and the ability for new road service centres to be constructed on highways and main roads; that is, of course, important. We have talked before about the importance of our state's tourism potential as a road trip state. I will say again that the quality of the roadhouses in Western Australia at the moment leaves a lot to be desired, especially in terms of food. I shudder to think of the feedback that goes overseas when people report on the food that was available to them in the roadhouses when they were travelling around the state. I am sorry to say that I do not think it would necessarily be a favourable report. Who knows? Perhaps this legislation will provide some capacity for the Commissioner of Main Roads to insist that the road service centres provide food of a healthier and higher quality to make sure that we do something about this reputation we have on the gastronomic scale, which must currently rate very low. We need to lift up and enhance that experience and reputation so that we can be known as a road trip state. It may not be a gastronomic experience, but people will enjoy a healthy eating experience. I think that is very important.

I also note that this legislation refers to the compulsory acquisition of land in the road reserve and the ability for the Commissioner of Main Roads to do that negotiating. Improvements will be made to the Land Administration Act so that when compulsory acquisition takes place, people will be compensated as efficiently as possible. Arrangements are currently in place, but it is important to update and modernise those.

I want to say a little about road reserves across the state. The Brand Highway in particular highlights that width of road reserve that preserves native vegetation. I believe that former Premier Sir David Brand insisted that we have a substantial width of road reserve to preserve the incredibly rich flora in this state along our road network. In terms of diversity, one of its highest points is along sections of the Brand Highway. We have now come to realise that the frangible nature of that vegetation is actually very useful when motorists leave the road pavement. The vegetation type is such that if a vehicle that might be travelling at 110 kilometres an hour comes off the road, the vegetation will not only give way to that vehicle, but also slow it down. It can in fact be a useful road safety mechanism when properly managed. It would be quite different, of course, if a person were travelling along a road on the south coast, perhaps near some karri trees; tragedy would occur if they came off the road there. Therefore, we want to design our road network in such a way that it keeps people on the road surface. That is always the safest option. New technologies and the technologies of the future will provide more answers and options for us in making the road network safer to ensure that people do not leave the road in the first place. It is an interesting thing to ponder that along Brand Highway there is a road safety benefit that was brought about by what was originally a conservation initiative and has turned out to also be a means of helping people reduce their vehicle speed in those very bad cases when they come off the road.

Another thing that I am fascinated by is the length of time of the Main Roads Western Australia planning processes. One road that I have kept an eye on since the early 1990s has the nickname “the orange route”, which will replace the Perth Adelaide National Highway. The orange route will bring traffic across Great Eastern Highway from El Caballo Blanco, out Wundowie and Wooroloo way, to Toodyay Road. Main Roads has quietly been doing land acquisitions since the 1990s, which is the length of time Main Roads has been planning this. People have bought properties there and invested in them. I think of a Clydesdale horse stud on Breeze Road in Gidgegannup that has been very successful and has provided a very fulfilling time for its owners. But, inevitably, there will eventually come a moment when the future of Breeze Road, as beautiful as it is—it is one of those lovely, country, tree-lined roads—will be part of the orange route, which will make its way from the existing alignment of Great Eastern Highway to Toodyay Road. Some tremendous opportunities will come with this legislation.

I want to pay tribute to a person who has worked in a voluntary capacity to keep the Main Roads road network looking its absolute finest around Walpole on the south coast, and that is Michael Filby. On several occasions environment ministers have acknowledged Michael Filby for his voluntary work. He has taken it upon himself to ensure that that part of the road network is free of litter. The Walpole area went from being somewhat disregarded and damaged by the amount of litter there to having Michael, who is a retiree, make it a constant habit to be out there on the road collecting litter. Many other voluntary groups take it upon themselves to clear the road network of litter, and the way Michael Filby has led things on the south coast is an absolute tribute. Walpole has now received various tidy town awards, and travelling through that part of the world is an absolute delight. The feeling there is that this is the nature of the south west of this state at its very finest, and there is no distracting litter that has been discarded by some thoughtless person. That is something that is always really great to see.

I conclude by saying how exciting it is that our road network can be designed in a way that will ensure that we have seamless integration. I can imagine a situation in which someone is commuting to work by electric buses or driverless cars. An essential part of our road network upgrade will accommodate driverless vehicles. Our road network will also interface with people who want to use bike or scooter hire services or a walk, wheel or ride service, so that is very important. Our road network should be designed with the thought in mind that an increasing number of people will work from home. Certainly, on days like today when it is wet on the roads, it is the perfect opportunity for someone to work from home, and it will reduce the pressure on the road network. People might choose to do as I do and not use a vehicle at all but use other means and save themselves the stress of being stuck in traffic jams.

Our road network is undergoing an incredible development. I pay tribute to the brilliance of the engineers and other people involved, such as the director general at the Department of Transport, Peter Woronzow, and the various executive directors there, including Leo Coci, Des Snook, Doug Morgan and Gary Manning. Their planning, designing and contracting is quality work, and it sets our state up very well to ensure that we have the best quality transport mobility network around, which is vital to the state’s economic and social wellbeing. I commend this bill to the house.

MR D.A.E. SCAIFE (Cockburn) [1.36 pm]: I rise today to speak on the Main Roads Amendment Bill 2023. As several speakers have pointed out already, this is an important bill. The bill will modernise our primary piece of legislation that governs our Main Roads network, and will provide the regulatory framework for Main Roads Western Australia to do the important work that it does.

The current legislation, the Main Roads Act, is very old. It is nearly 100 years old, and it has not had a standalone amendment to it since the 1990s—I think it was about 1996. There might have been consequential amendments to the act over the years by virtue of general amendments made to a range of legislation, but specific standalone amendments have not been made to this act since the 1990s. Given the critical importance of our Main Roads network, it is important that we keep the legislative framework that governs that network up to a modern standard. As I say, it is the primary legislation for Main Roads and for the management of our main roads. It is worth noting that the road network that is managed by Main Roads is a \$55 billion public asset and in many ways it is probably one of our most significant assets. Setting aside the dollar value that is ascribed to it, our main roads are the important channels of just about every activity that Western Australians engage in, whether it is getting to work, getting home, getting from one neighbourhood to the next or whether it is for industry carting goods around the state. It is the connective tissue of Western Australia. It is worth reflecting on the point that the member for Thornlie made, which is that roads have been important for industrialised nations for many hundreds of years. The Main Roads network is particularly important for a state like Western Australia because the state is so vast and relatively sparsely populated. Its communities and industrial centres are separated by vast distances, not all of them are connected by rail, so our road network is that critical link between communities, many of which are very remote. Obviously, we have seen how devastating it can be for communities when the road network is disrupted. I am referring here to the recent unprecedented flooding in the Kimberley. I am mindful that I have the member for Kimberley sitting directly in front of me. I will not speak about this in great detail because she is the expert and knows much more than I do, but I want to acknowledge the incredible work that she has been doing in supporting her communities in the Kimberley.

I was recently chatting with the member for Kalgoorlie about the specific challenges that regional members face compared with metropolitan members of this chamber. We all have some shared experiences, but the job of

regional members is significantly harder. It is significantly harder by virtue of the travel and the pockets of specific and unique disadvantage that exist throughout regional electorates. It is also different because of the distinctive challenges that happen in different communities. In my community, Cockburn, some issues affect specific suburbs but, by and large, issues that affect one suburb will also affect the neighbouring suburb. That is not the case in seats like Kalgoorlie and the Kimberley. The Kimberley during the floods is perhaps one of those unusual circumstances in which the whole of the Kimberley, or just about all the Kimberley, was affected by those floods. Even communities like Broome that were perhaps not in the direct path of the flood and not in the Fitzroy River catchment have seen knock-on effects to transport connectivity. I am sure Kununurra is much the same. I want to acknowledge the great work that the member for Kimberley has been doing. She has been flying, driving and travelling all around her electorate over the last few months, and she has been twisting arms, begging, borrowing and bartering —

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member, I hope you are meaning metaphorically.

Mr D.A.E. SCAIFE: Metaphorically, obviously—she has done nothing improper. We have seen just good old-fashioned politicking from the member for Kimberley, supporting and listening to her communities. I want to acknowledge her work and acknowledge the minister's work in supporting the member for Kimberley and supporting the recovery of those communities, whether it has been in the delivery of the barge service across the Fitzroy River or, quite recently, opening the low crossing across the Fitzroy River. Did we do that, member for Kimberley?

Ms D.G. D'Anna: Yes.

Mr D.A.E. SCAIFE: It was really fast work from the minister, the government and the member for Kimberley. I want to acknowledge that.

Given the importance of our main roads network, it is critical that we bring the legislative framework that governs it into the modern era. Even if a main road does not pass through a member's electorate, one would pass nearby. As the member for Mount Lawley pointed out, using main roads keeps people out of suburban roads, so even if a member's electorate does not have a main road, main roads are used by people from the member's electorate. It is critical to all of us and to everybody in Western Australia.

I would like to speak about some of the projects that this government is undertaking in my electorate. This government has made record investments in road infrastructure throughout Western Australia. That investment has been balanced against investments in rail, public transport and port assets, but there have been clear and record investments in our main roads network. I am glad to say that my community has benefited from many of those investments. I would like to acknowledge the minister and the government for delivering so many projects around metropolitan Perth, especially in my electorate of Cockburn.

The first project I would like to discuss is the Armadale Road–North Lake Road bridge and the associated upgrades to the road network around that precinct. That road was opened on 15 December 2021, less than a year after I had been elected. It was my first ribbon-cutting ceremony, and it was a delight to accompany the Minister for Transport and cut the ribbon to open that bridge. We were also accompanied by the then federal member for Swan, Hon Steve Irons, because it had federal government funding. I am pleased to say that the member for Swan in the federal Parliament is now Zaneta Mascarenhas, MP, who is a great Labor woman.

Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski: She's a very hardworking member of Parliament.

Mr D.A.E. SCAIFE: She is a very hardworking member of Parliament and had a great campaign team around her.

The ACTING SPEAKER: That sounds like a bit of immodesty there.

Mr D.A.E. SCAIFE: Never on my part, Acting Speaker. That is a scandalous allegation!

That project involved a significant partnership between the federal government and the McGowan Labor government. The federal government delivered just over \$200 million of the funding for that project, and the state government contributed almost \$52 million. It was a really big \$250 million project. That project delivered the bridge over the Kwinana Freeway so that traffic travelling west down Armadale Road now has the option of diverting off Armadale Road over the bridge and onto North Lake Road rather than going across the freeway onto Beeliar Drive. That is really significant for my community because the intersections around the freeway and Beeliar Drive were very heavily congested. I think at the time we delivered the project, it was the third most congested intersection in Western Australia and in the Perth metropolitan area. That congestion was caused by a variety of things; it was caused by the large growth that has occurred in my electorate over the last 10 years and by the development and expansion of Cockburn Gateway shopping centre, which is very conveniently located next to the freeway. As a result of being next to the freeway, the shopping centre loses a side of access, meaning that a lot of traffic is pushed onto Beeliar Drive and Wentworth Parade. The traffic lights around that area, both at Wentworth Parade and further along at Midgegooroo Avenue, are extremely congested. Now, with the development of that bridge, traffic that might be travelling to the light industrial area in Bibra Lake has the option, rather than travelling directly across Armadale Road to Beeliar Drive and then up through Spearwood Avenue towards the light industrial area, of proceeding directly down North Lake Road. This takes the heavier light industrial traffic off Beeliar Drive and improves access for residents.

Visitors — Swan Valley Anglican Community School

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms M.M. Quirk): Member, can I just interrupt for a second to welcome the Swan Valley Anglican Community School in the gallery, who get to witness their hardworking local member, Minister Saffioti. Enjoy your visit. Thank you, member.

Debate Resumed

Mr D.A.E. SCAIFE: Thank you, Acting Speaker. I, too, will say to the students that I am in the process of acknowledging the very hard work of the member for West Swan, the Minister for Transport, who is easily one of this government's hardest working members of this chamber. I have been outlining the many investments in our main roads network that the minister is overseeing around the state, particularly in my electorate of Cockburn.

As I said, that bridge is very significant in taking traffic off Beeliar Drive and improving congestion around Beeliar Drive and Wentworth Parade. It is also significant because it has improved access around Atwell, a suburb on the eastern end of my electorate. Atwell has two main points of entry and exit. In the northern part of the suburb, they are Freshwater Drive and Tapper Road. Those intersections were pretty tricky for people to navigate, particularly because on the other side of Armadale Road a commercial precinct brings in a lot of traffic. It has a Bunnings and a kids play centre, and it is a very busy part of the network on the eastern side of the freeway. Part of the work associated with the bridge is building Western Australia's first duck-and-dive roundabout and intersection. That will enable freer traffic flow into and out of the suburb of Atwell and also easier access to the commercial precinct for people who want to go to Bunnings or the like. I acknowledge the Minister for Transport for delivering that project in partnership with the federal government. That will be a significant project for my electorate, and I have had a lot of positive feedback about it. People have said to me that it will cut five minutes or more off their journey, particularly if they are travelling west from Atwell or from the electorate of the member for Jandakot to Cockburn Central, so I thank the minister for that.

The second project that I want to discuss is the upgrade to the Beeliar Drive–Stock Road intersection. That \$7 million project is on a much smaller scale, but smaller projects are often the ones that make a measurable difference to not only people's lives, but also safety, which is something this government is also focused on. This government is focused on busting congestion, making people's commutes easier, and making it easier for industry to cart goods around our state. We are also focused on making people's experience on the roads as safe as possible. That is a very busy intersection in my electorate.

Stock Road is obviously a main road. Surprisingly, Beeliar Drive is not a main road. One of the things we discover when we become a member of Parliament is that some roads that we assume would be a main road are not, and some roads that we would not think would be a main road are a main road. Cockburn Road in my electorate is a main road, despite the fact that it is only a two-lane road. The history of that road is that it originally was to be a much larger and more heavily used corridor to the coast. The state government committed to that \$7 million upgrade given that that intersection is on a main road. The aim of this intersection upgrade was not just to ease congestion or assist with traffic flow; it was specifically about safety. A lot of heavy vehicles travel along Stock Road. There is also a lot of residential and pedestrian traffic from suburbs like Lake Coogee and Beeliar.

That intersection upgrade delivered a number of improvements. The first was that the pedestrian crossing was fully signalled; prior to that, it did not have dedicated pedestrian signals. That has made it safer for people in my community to cross Stock Road. The second was that safety barriers were installed on the western side of the intersection. Those safety barriers are a welcome improvement for people who live or work next to that intersection because should an accident occur, particularly with a heavy vehicle, they will protect the houses along that road, and also some of the commercial premises, including a childcare centre, that are close to that intersection. The third was that new extended turning pockets were built that will avoid the need for traffic to bank up and ensure that vehicles are able to turn at that intersection more easily.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr D.A.E. SCAIFE: Now that I am more than halfway through my speech, I am concerned that I might be making other members envious of all the investments that the government has been making in my electorate. It looks as though I am getting a nod from the Minister for Police. I am sure that many good things are happening in his electorate as well. I have been very fortunate over the last few years to have had significant investment in my electorate.

The next project that I want to discuss is the upgrades to Cockburn Road. I have been working closely with the minister and her office on this project. Cockburn Road runs along the coast in the western part of my electorate, next to Coogee Beach. It connects the suburbs of South Fremantle through to the industrial precincts that are developing along Russell Road, such as Latitude 32 and the Australian Marine Complex. That road is coming under increasing pressure, partly by virtue of the growth of industry in that area, but also because more people are going to Coogee Beach. I know that the member for Warren–Blackwood has been known to frequent Coogee Beach on occasion and says it is beautiful. I appreciate that. I have to say I am not sure it is quite at the level of Greens Pool,

which is a favourite spot of mine, but it is a great spot just down the road from where I live. Cockburn Road, which probably was originally envisioned as a heavy industrial road, is now attracting a lot of residential and tourist traffic with people going to Coogee Beach and to Coogee Common and Coogee Beach Cafe. It is a growing beach precinct.

One of the things that members of my community have raised with me is pedestrian safety. People who live in Coogee and want to cross Cockburn Road to swim at the beach, go for a walk or use the amenities face significant challenges, particularly at busy times. Last year, a resident who lives near Amity Boulevard contacted me to raise the need for a pedestrian crossing on that road, because she likes to take her child in a pram to Coogee Beach but feels unsafe having to make that crossing daily. I am very pleased to be working with the Minister for Transport and her office on delivering that pedestrian crossing. In my first year in this place, I raised a grievance with the Minister for Transport about that issue, and it was very pleasing that the minister responded to that by committing to deliver that pedestrian crossing. I actually received an update on that from the minister's office this morning, which confirmed that we are on track for delivery of that pedestrian crossing before the summer rush this year. I thank the minister and her office for its efforts on that.

I also acknowledge the minister and her office for working with me and the community on a couple of hiccups that have happened along the way. Once we announced the delivery of that project, a number of residents became quite concerned that because the proposed pedestrian crossing will be located directly opposite a caravan park and close to Powell Road, it might impact their ability to turn right onto Cockburn Road. Residents on Beach Road were also concerned about their ability to turn right onto Cockburn Road. The Minister for Transport and Main Roads WA agreed to delay the delivery of that project while we explored the possibility of a larger treatment to the intersection by building a four-way signalled traffic intersection along with the City of Cockburn. Unfortunately, that did not turn out to be a feasible option in the short term, but I know that Main Roads and the City of Cockburn have committed to deliver that over the longer term. In the interim, we will be delivering that pedestrian crossing to improve pedestrian safety on Cockburn Road; and, once that crossing has been delivered, we will be monitoring the intersections at Powell Road and Beach Road closely to ensure that any negative effects on residents on Beach Road or on residents of the caravan park are properly addressed. I am thankful to the minister, and also to John Clydesdale, who was formerly in the minister's office, and Jo Vinci, who is currently in the minister's office, who have done an outstanding job in listening to residents, keeping me updated, and, ultimately, later this year, delivering on a project that will improve the Coogee Beach precinct.

I am pleased to say that another upgrade on Cockburn Road that Main Roads is planning in the Coogee Beach precinct—it is a little further south—is a roundabout at the intersection of Cockburn Road and Mayor Road. Mayor Road is an extremely busy road in my electorate. People who live in Coogee obviously use it. Coogee Primary School is located next to it. The obvious route for anybody travelling to the beach from the suburbs of Yangebup and Beeliar and those suburbs further east in my electorate, such as Success and Atwell, is Mayor Road with an exit onto Cockburn Road. We get situations, particularly on a Sunday morning, in which traffic is backed up.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 2064.]

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

HEAVY VEHICLE ROAD USER CHARGE

269. Mr R.S. LOVE to the Minister for Transport:

I refer to yesterday's federal Labor budget which had buried within it a six per cent increase in the heavy vehicle road user charge. I note that the budget papers specifically state that this was with the minister's agreement.

- (1) Did the minister consult industry prior to giving her agreement to this tax increase?
- (2) Does the minister acknowledge that this is an impost on business at a time of stress on our supply chains and one that will contribute to the pressures on the rising cost of living?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI replied:

I thank the member for that question.

- (1)–(2) That charge does not apply to WA; we are not part of the national heavy vehicle registration system. Announcements regarding our charges will be made tomorrow.

Distinguished Visitors — Byford Rotary Club, Tamil Nadu Vocational Education and Training Delegation and Darlington Primary School

The SPEAKER: Before I give the call to the member for Bicton, I have some guests whom I would love to acknowledge. On behalf of the member for Darling Range, I would like to welcome to the Speaker's gallery members from the Byford Rotary Club.

On behalf of the member for Riverton, I welcome to the Speaker's gallery today the Tamil Nadu vocational education and training delegation to Perth, the first delegation to WA as a result of the signing of a letter of intent for cooperation between the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation and the government of Tamil Nadu.

Here today are representatives from JTSI and the Indian Administrative Service, including Ms Rajendran Lalitha, IAS director of technical education; Ms Jegan Innocent Divya, IAS managing director of the Tamil Nadu Skill Development Corporation; and Dr Munirathinam Jayaprakasan, chief executive officer of the Naan Mudhalvan team. On behalf of members of this chamber, I extend my welcome to these very distinguished guests. Thank you.

[Applause.]

The SPEAKER: On behalf of the member for Kalamunda—not to be forgotten!—please welcome from a school that was once in my electorate, the Darlington Primary School year 6 leaders, principal Andrew Newhouse and parent helper Serena Goldsmith, who are visiting Parliament today. Welcome, Darlington Primary School. I look forward to seeing you around this building and out, perhaps, around Midland one time.

STATE ECONOMY

270. Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY to the Treasurer:

On behalf of the member for Southern River, can I please acknowledge the student leaders of Excelsior Primary School in Canning Vale.

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's reforms to the Western Australian economy and the state's finances. Can the Treasurer outline to the house how this Labor government has returned economic growth and prosperity to WA?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

I thank the member for Bicton for the question.

In 2017, when we were elected, the state's economy was in recession—the first recession in living memory. We also had the worst set of finances of any government in Australia. In the period since then, our economy has turned around and our finances have turned around. Economic growth this year is forecast to be the highest in nine years at 4.25 per cent. We have also through this mechanism supported the federal Labor government to get to a surplus in its budget, which was handed down yesterday. Since the last election alone, we have created 122 000 jobs and since our election in 2017, we have created 220 000 jobs in Western Australia. We have also turned around the state's finances to be, until yesterday, the only government in Australia in surplus, so a massive turnaround in the state over the six and a bit years that this government has been in office, and we have done it without selling off major utilities like Western Power.

We have also announced some measures in conjunction with the commonwealth government to support families with cost-of-living pressures and also small businesses. It was great this morning to join the member for Bicton and the Minister for Small Business at Picobello Patisserie in Bicton, a great little patisserie. We were able to announce the \$650 energy rebate for small businesses across Western Australia. Up to 90 000 small businesses will share in this, which is jointly funded by the state government and the commonwealth government. It is one of a range of cost-of-living initiatives we have put in place across Western Australia over the course of the last few years, particularly over the COVID period. One of the great things about helping these small businesses is that it allows them to deal with some of the cost-of-living pressures they are facing—as indeed are households—with the initiatives that were announced by the commonwealth. Members will see more of that tomorrow when we bring down the state budget. It is terrific that we have managed to turn around both the finances and the economy during our six years in office.

GST DISTRIBUTION

271. Mr R.S. LOVE to the Premier:

I refer to the Premier's \$1.6 million "GST fairness fighters" and to the fact that on 14 March, the Premier referred to federal Treasurer Jim Chalmers categorically ruling out removing WA's GST floor as good news. The Premier has now referred to the looming GST reviews as a real threat.

- (1) Why now, six weeks later, is the Premier more worried about WA's GST deal?
- (2) Why has the Department of Treasury not been readying itself, given that Labor Premiers in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia have all said that they are actively campaigning to raid Western Australia's GST share?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

- (1)–(2) The first part of the question is "Why are we doing it?" and the second part of the question is "Why haven't we done it yet?" The Leader of the Opposition's is internally contradictory, but that is not unusual. It is something that I am used to.

Remember that between now and 2026–27, when the whole matter normalises, there is a federal election. Who knows what the Liberals and Nationals will do? We are going to ensure that we put the best case forward as part of these reviews. There are two reviews into these matters: one by the Productivity Commission and the other by the Commonwealth Grants Commission. For those two reviews, we will make sure that we put the best case forward, which, I think, most Western Australians would think is entirely appropriate.

GST DISTRIBUTION

272. Mr R.S. LOVE to the Premier:

I have a supplementary question. Given that there are Labor Premiers right across Australia, is the Premier more worried that his Labor colleagues in Canberra will look after them rather than look after Western Australia?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

There is this place—I do not think that geography is the Leader of the Opposition’s strong suit—called Tasmania, which does not have a Labor Premier, and it is part of Australia, just so the member knows! As I said, there is a federal election between now and the conclusion of these reviews. Who knows what people like Barnaby Joyce and that crowd will do? I think they are very unpredictable. I think people like Barnaby Joyce, Peter Dutton and all those characters are a very unpredictable group of people, so we have to make sure that we have the best case presented so that Western Australia is defended.

BANNED DRINKERS REGISTER

273. Ms L. DALTON to the Minister for Racing and Gaming:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government’s commitment to reducing alcohol-related harm in communities across Western Australia.

- (1) Can the minister advise the house what steps this government is taking to strengthen and improve the effectiveness of the banned drinkers register?
- (2) Can the minister outline to the house how the expanded banned drinkers register will complement existing liquor restrictions such as those recently applied in Carnarvon?

Mr R.R. WHITBY replied:

I thank the member for Geraldton for raising this issue and for being an advocate for a mature and considered approach to alcohol-related harm, particularly in the midwest.

- (1)–(2) It is true that the McGowan government is introducing new legislation to strengthen the banned drinkers register trial. We have listened to feedback. We have listened to all stakeholders, including licensees, police and health and community services, and we will get the balance right. The legislation will make the banned drinkers register mandatory for licensees in the trial areas. It will allow police and the courts to register individuals for alcohol-related offending, including alcohol-related violence and drink-driving, not just those offences in or near licensed premises. It will allow certain prescribed professionals, such as health professionals, specialist frontline staff and others, to refer individuals to the register. It will require online liquor retailers to check the register before going ahead with any sale and it will make it an offence for knowingly supplying liquor to banned individuals. However, it should be noted that the BDR is not a silver bullet; it is just one of the tools being used to reduce alcohol-related harm.

After a great deal of consideration, the director of Liquor Licensing recently made a decision to introduce alcohol restrictions in Carnarvon, effective immediately, to reduce alcohol abuse, violence and antisocial behaviour. This government makes no apologies; it congratulates the director of Liquor Licensing for the toughest restrictions in Western Australia and some of the toughest restrictions in the nation. Liquor stores and drive-throughs are no longer allowed to open in Carnarvon on Sundays and Mondays, and there are daily volume limits for takeaway liquor sales. Carnarvon has never had ongoing alcohol restrictions. It was time for action after the local liquor accord simply refused to act and respond to community concerns for action. It refused to implement any sensible restrictions of its own accord. There were two members of this chamber who were in a liquor accord meeting who can recall how a representative of a takeaway outlet and a certain hotel proprietor argued strongly for even the lightest restrictions. That accord could not do its job. The director of Liquor Licensing made a decision to act on this issue, and this government applauds her action.

The conditions being imposed on 10 licensees strikes a balance between the need to minimise harm by restricting the volume of alcohol that can be purchased daily and the ability for licensees to properly and efficiently run their businesses. People can still enjoy a drink responsibly at a licensed premise such as a hotel, restaurant or club, and tourists, station owners, pastoralists and anyone operating from a remote worksite are exempt from these restrictions. No-one is going to go thirsty in Carnarvon.

The extent of alcohol harm in Carnarvon, however, is evident and supported by these statistics, by the evidence that comes from that community almost daily in terms of information from St John Ambulance, police, school authorities and other agencies. We have seen homes destroyed, streets littered, bottles smashed, and children allowed to walk the streets after dark and sometimes too afraid to go home. This is a confronting crisis. The strong message from everyone—from the shire to police, community services and Indigenous leaders—is that alcohol abuse is the key cause of problems in Carnarvon.

As a government, we have been on the ground numerous times to listen and we are responding through the BDR. The director of Liquor Licensing has made her decision. That is why we are taking action to expand and strengthen the BDR. Again, I applaud the director for making the necessary decision to see meaningful change at last in Carnarvon.

Distinguished Visitors — Paolo Crudele and Nicolo Costantini

The SPEAKER: Just before I give the Leader of the Liberal Party the call, I would also like to welcome to the public gallery His Excellency the Ambassador of Italy, Mr Paolo Crudele, and our local consul, Mr Nicolo Costantini.

OSBORNE PARK HOSPITAL — NEONATAL UNIT

274. Ms L. METTAM to the Minister for Health:

I refer to reports that the \$25 million neonatal unit at Osborne Park Hospital has sat idle for three years since it opened in 2020.

- (1) In response to questions about why it had not been operating to its full capacity, the minister and her office claimed it was a shell ward, then the ward's purpose was to futureproof the site for population growth and then the reality was that the ward had been very difficult to staff. Which is it?
- (2) Or is it that, according to the Australian Medical Association (WA) president, the minister had failed to set aside an operational budget for the ward?

The SPEAKER: I will just say that there was quite a lot of argument in that question. I think it would be clearer if you could make your questions more direct.

Ms A. SANDERSON replied:

- (1)–(2) To the very last point, it is absolutely, categorically untrue that the government had not provided funding for the ward or for the operational funding. That is categorically not true. Osborne Park Hospital is run and managed by the North Metropolitan Health Service. The government provided the funding to expand the ward to futureproof and potentially expand neonatal facilities at Osborne Park Hospital in the future. It is an operational decision of North Metropolitan Health Service as to when and how it does that. The purpose of the devolved health system is that those decisions are made locally and they make the best determination for the circumstances that they have. It is absolutely not a matter of not being provided the funding.

North Metropolitan Health Service fitted out the ward to prepare for COVID. That is why we saw it fitted out more than a shell ward of any kind. North Metropolitan Health Service had not requested further operational funding for that ward to expand what it is currently used for. It is used now. Any suggestion that it is not used and it sits empty is completely wrong. It is used now. A number of babies go through that ward. If they are born and they are a bit dusty and they need a little bit more intensive care, that can be done in either the neonatal ward onsite or they go there for that care and are then transferred out. It absolutely does get used now.

In the future, we intend to expand that. When we are able to expand the maternity services, which is one of the key decisions that we made with the relocation of the women's and newborns' hospital, that will also result in significant expansion of neonatal services and therefore expand the number of high-risk women who come to that hospital who are able to birth and therefore birth closer to home.

OSBORNE PARK HOSPITAL — NEONATAL UNIT

275. Ms L. METTAM to the Minister for Health:

I have a supplementary question. What does the minister say to her senior ministerial colleague who said that the non-functioning Osborne Park Hospital neonatal ward was not a good look?

Ms A. SANDERSON replied:

Madam Speaker —

A member interjected.

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is silly for you to make comments like that in the Parliament when you purport to be a serious player and leader in health and you want to seriously respect the health sector. It is silly, and playing silly politics.

We are serious about delivering expanded birthing services and neonatal services across the state, and that is what our recent announcement demonstrated. When a minister is asked in a press conference about something that is entirely out of their portfolio, that is challenging. We do not shell train lines or train stations, so in the prism of transport, it probably is not a good look, but in health, we do shell wards.

Ms L. Mettam interjected.

Ms A. SANDERSON: No, that is a standard procedure. Shelling wards and futureproofing has happened over decades. If the member had any depth of knowledge of this sector, she would know that. We do shell in health because when we build multibillion-dollar assets, we need to make sure that they are fit for the future. We saw what happened with Perth Children’s Hospital when it was not futureproofed. It is two floors too short, and that happened under the Liberal–National government. It refused to budge. Even with the new information and the new modelling, the former Liberal–National government with Colin Barnett and Kim Hames refused to budge. We are not that government. When we get new information, we will absolutely act on it and make sure that we are building a health system for the future.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

276. **Dr J. KRISHNAN to the Minister for Energy:**

I refer to the McGowan Labor government’s commitment to delivering a safe, stable and secure electricity system.

- (1) Can the minister update the house on action underway to prepare our electricity system for Western Australia’s clean energy future?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house how the *SWIS demand assessment 2023 to 2042* will assist in delivering a stable transition?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON replied:

- (1)–(2) That is an excellent question from a member who has unbounded energy as we all know!

This government is doing what is necessary to get Western Australia ready for our high renewable energy future. We have done that by having a careful plan to transition Synergy away from the use of coal in Collie as the coal plants cease to have a capacity to operate in the system. It is not well understood by many people that for large periods of the year, the coal-fired power stations are not able to function in the way they are designed. Sometimes they have to be completely switched off and other times they have to be run at low capacity in what is called “ramping mode”, by which their power output goes up and down constantly. That is not what they were designed to do. The government has responded to that with a \$3.8 billion plan to decarbonise Synergy. Many people, including the shadow Minister for Energy, do not understand that a bigger piece of work is needed, which is the decarbonisation of industry in Western Australia. I make it clear again that the \$3.8 billion that was allocated to Synergy is for the efforts to decarbonise Synergy, not to decarbonise the south west interconnect system. Last year, we set up a task force led by the Department of Treasury called the SWIS Demand Assessment. That has now reported. I presented the report to the Australian Institute of Energy with my 220 favourite energy nerds at the Hilton hotel.

Ms R. Saffioti: That would have been a great time!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: It was; it was a great time had by all!

Ms M.M. Quirk: A charged atmosphere!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: It was a charged atmosphere—thank you, member for Landsdale!

The SWIS Demand Assessment shows the future, not for decarbonising Synergy but decarbonising the users of the Western Power network that currently use natural gas, either as part of their production processes or as a feedstock for the processes—not in energy—and for the future hydrogen industry that is very exciting here in Western Australia. The SWIS Demand Assessment shows that we will build an additional 4 000 kilometres of network to bring the high-voltage energy to where it is needed. This has nothing to do with the \$3.8 billion project we are running with Synergy. This is about allowing the private sector to build the power infrastructure it needs to decarbonise its projects; it has nothing to do with government. I know it is challenging for the shadow minister, but that is what it is about.

It is interesting that not everybody in Australia supports using renewable energy as part of the decarbonisation strategy. In particular, the National Party thinks we should go nuclear. That is its position. David Littleproud is proudly out there saying that when we retire coal, we should replace it with small nuclear reactors. David Littleproud has said that the place where the coal plant is retired is where the small nuclear reactor should be put. I wonder whether the member for Collie–Preston is aware that the National Party’s argument currently is that we should put a nuclear power station in Collie. That would be news to the residents of Collie. Is it not interesting that the National Party does not own its own policy? It does not come out and acknowledge it; it does not talk about it. Is that because it is a silly policy that nobody supports or is there another reason that it runs away from that policy?

WESTERN POWER — LOCAL GOVERNMENT STREET LIGHTING

277. **Ms M. BEARD to the Treasurer:**

I refer to the Treasurer’s upcoming budget and Western Power’s proposal to raise the cost of street lighting to local governments by an average of 44 per cent from 1 July. Does the Treasurer support this proposal; and, if so, does he accept that this is a cost shift from state to local government that may necessitate rate rises across affected local government authorities with costs likely to be passed on to ratepayers and households?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

The matter will be examined by the Economic Regulation Authority, as is required by law, and obviously it will be subject to further consideration in the future. I understand Western Power is in the process of changing out a lot of the streetlights around communities in Western Australia from the current lighting arrangement to LED lighting, which has some significant capital costs associated with it. Of course, LED lighting in the longer term has lower costs associated with it as well as lower emissions and consumption of electricity. I understand that that is what is driving this, but it is a matter that the ERA will consider in the future.

WESTERN POWER — LOCAL GOVERNMENT STREET LIGHTING

278. Ms M. BEARD to the Treasurer:

I have a supplementary question. How will the Treasurer ensure local government authorities can afford to keep the lights on even if it is in the interim?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

As I said, the matter has not been considered as yet; it is something for future consideration. I know that the National–Liberal coalition had a policy, before the member was elected, to sell off Western Power, just so she knows. If she looks at what has occurred in the eastern states, power prices in Sydney in the last year have gone up 25 per cent for everyone. Think about that. That was the direction that the Liberal–National government was heading us in when it was in office. Fortunately, the people of Western Australia had the good sense to elect this government and vote the coalition government out, and they fortunately had the good sense to repeat that at the last election; otherwise, who knows where we would be? The member might remember the coalition policy at the last election. The policy of the Liberals and Nationals WA at the last election was to completely shut down the industry in the space of three years. That was that policy. Remember that? Members opposite have run away from that and complain about decarbonisation now, whereas the policy they took to the last election was that the whole electricity generation component would be shut down by 2025, which is clearly completely unattainable. That was the policy members opposite took to the last election. In the election before, they were going to sell Western Power. To say the least, their ideas are novel. I look forward to the next policy in 2025. Let us see what they come up with next time. The only people who are sensible about all these issues are in this government.

WATER INFRASTRUCTURE — HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS

279. MR S.J. PRICE to the Minister for Water:

I refer the McGowan Labor government's \$55 million investment in water infrastructure to create new housing opportunities in key transport hubs.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house how this investment will unlock affordable housing development opportunities across Perth?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house how this vital infrastructure will connect new housing development to new and existing transport links?

Ms S.F. McGURK replied:

I particularly thank the member for Forrestfield for this question and for his advocacy on behalf of his community on this matter.

- (1)–(2) When it comes to difficult issues facing communities in this economy, this McGowan Labor government has shown its capacity to deal with practical solutions and to be flexible with those solutions for the immediate need, but also to look further down the track to what will be required in five or 10 years. We know that housing availability is a pressing issue in Western Australia, as it is across the country. We have been focused on finalising existing builds, new approvals, workforce availability and materials availability to ensure that housing needed now is delivered. We are also focused on what will be needed five and 10 years down the track. To that end, in the lead-up to the budget, we have announced a \$55 million investment in the water infrastructure needed to create housing opportunities around key transport hubs in eight to 10 years' time. I announced with the Minister of Transport nine locations, seven around Metronet hubs, for which the \$55 million will enable up-front availability of infill sewerage, water and wastewater infrastructure needed for new developments. That will be for around seven Metronet sites. Interestingly, and importantly for the member for Forrestfield, they will be around two existing sites in Kenwick and Maddington. Those two sites are around key transport links, particularly around train stations. It is really exciting to be part of that announcement. This announcement sends a signal to developers and the community that the sort of infrastructure that is needed below the ground—the under-the-hood infrastructure—will be able to be delivered up-front. In both cases, there will be some cost recovery. In the case of Kenwick and Maddington, it will be about \$5 500 per lot. The full cost of the infrastructure at those two sites could be up to \$90 000 per lot, so there will be significant subsidisation. In the case of the Metronet sites, there will be a developer contribution. That will depend on the amount of infrastructure that is required, but it will be somewhere between \$1 500 and \$2 500 per site for the other seven sites.

It was great to be part of that announcement, which was warmly received by the community. As I said, I particularly want to acknowledge the member for Forresterfield for his advocacy. Do not just take my word for it. I want to quote from the front page story of the *Gosnells Examiner* on this matter. The article is headed “Kenwick flushed with success”. It states —

Kenwick residents could be forgiven for thinking they are living in a dream this morning with the State Government announcing yesterday their 28-year sewerage nightmare was finally over.

The article also states —

Kenwick will be included in this \$55 million project and will be the first cab off the rank, with works anticipated to start before the end of the year.

This project delivers the good news by confirming that a budget commitment would be made to connect more than 15 000 new homes to water and wastewater infrastructure.

The article also states —

Gosnells Mayor, Terresa Lynes is a Kenwick resident and said the announcement was fantastic news.

I quote —

“They’ve listened to the community, and it’s a no-brainer, that area is in prime position for development being so close to the train station, it’s got high-density zoning,” she said.

“It’s definitely a commitment that should have been made a long time ago but we are grateful it’s now been made.

“The residents are extremely happy, I rang one person from the Kenwick Infill Sewerage Action Group to let them know and they were in tears, they were so happy they didn’t need to know where their toilet water was going to go any more.”

Simone Perkins is an administrator of the Kenwick Infill Sewerage Action Group Facebook page, and she said she was lost for words when Mr Price informed contacted her to inform her of the decision.

“I couldn’t put it into words, I was overwhelmed and thrilled,” she said.

“There were times we thought this would never happen so to get this outcome is amazing.

I am very glad to be part of a government that is listening to the community and doing cooperative work across agencies and ministers to get good outcomes for the community that means we have housing not only immediately and in the near future, but also in the next eight to 10 years.

WESTERN POWER — CONNECTIONS

280. Ms L. METTAM to the Minister for Energy:

I refer to media reports that Western Australians with new residential housing builds are waiting between 12 and 15 months for Western Power energy connections, which is a significant increase from the usual time frame of 12 weeks. One builder with new homes that are ready to live in but have no power says that he is facing losses of over \$200 000, and another is facing bankruptcy as a result of the energy connection delays.

- (1) What does the minister say to those Western Australians facing financial stress thanks to the Western Power energy connection delays?
- (2) What is the minister going to do to fix the mess and speed up the process?
- (3) How is this contributing to addressing Western Australia’s housing crisis?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON replied:

- (1)–(3) Firstly, I apologise to Western Australians who are caught up in this issue. The second question was about what is causing the problems. Western Australia’s booming economy is causing the problems. The number of connections required to be processed by Western Power has gone up from 3 000 applications in 2020 and is now over 7 000. Unfortunately, we are in a successful economy and one of the strains on a successful economy is labour and also materials challenges. If we could find some additional engineers, that would be wonderful because that would allow us to execute the projects faster. Of course, unlike the previous government when it stopped training Western Australians for jobs, we have continued to train Western Australians for jobs. That has included a graduate engineering program so that we have a pipeline of Western Australian engineers available for work. That has been successful. Unfortunately, the number of connection applications in Western Australia has gone up by over 100 per cent, and we are having trouble finding both the materials and the people to do the work. Western Power has also gone to the UK and run a recruitment program and recruited out of the UK over 50 new workers for the business. Unfortunately, none of them are engineers. Many other trades and technical staff were recruited in that process.

Western Power is undertaking a number of steps to mitigate delays as a matter of priority, including outsourcing work and hiring new employees, working with industry on the current challenges and the potential improvements, and proactively engaging with customers to ensure effective delivery within current resources. To provide further support and assist land and property developers, Western Power is engaging earlier with developers to help prioritise their work based on their civil construction readiness; continually reviewing current processes in collaboration with developers to identify efficiencies; facilitating a working group with the Urban Development Institute of Australia and other industry representatives to provide a forum at which contentious issues can be discussed proactively; meeting with the UDIA and industry representatives to understand the concerns and provide a commitment to continue to take steps to improve performance; and working with designers to ensure a sole focus on land development parcels of work. Additionally, Western Power has reprioritised existing resources and is actively recruiting specialists as part of the distribution design team to increase capacity and output.

WESTERN POWER — CONNECTIONS

281. Ms L. METTAM to the Minister for Energy:

I have a supplementary question. How can the minister suggest that this is a sign of a good economy when people are going bankrupt and others are struggling to find a roof over their head?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON replied:

I am not quite sure how that related to the answer I gave. The supplementary question should relate to the answer. I actually provided a detailed response from Western Power explaining to the member the action that it is taking. Instead of representing the interests of the people the member has spoken to on this issue, she has pivoted to politics. This is why she is not a successful member of Parliament. She needs to start thinking about what she is doing. She is the leader of a party with no policies. There are fewer than 700 days to the election. Not only does the member not have any policies to present to the people, but she is not even telling us what her policies will be about. I always say that the four-year election cycle goes like this: in the first year you rewrite history, the second year is the gap year, the third year you get ready, and the fourth year is the fight.

Ms L. Mettam: You're such an expert, aren't you?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Yes, I am an expert on this issue!

Several members interjected.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I spent 25 years at the heart of campaign infrastructure. That is the one thing that everybody knows about me. This is the year the opposition gets set.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please! Minister, you were very correct when you referred to the relevance of the supplementary question. Whilst this may be a matter in which you have some expertise, I do not think this actually relates to either the supplementary or the main question.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: In the end, it is like this: there is a delay because the economy is so strong that the number of applications has doubled. That is why I say the challenge is a strong economy. I am not the one who increased the number of applications from 3 000 a year to 7 000 a year. Yes, Western Power, like every other business, is having trouble finding the equipment because there is a global shortage of manufactured equipment caused by the pandemic and there is a shortage of skilled labour. If we can overcome those two problems, we can shorten the time lines. The chief executive officer of Western Power made an interesting point to me recently. In conversation with a developer he asked, "What are you doing about the part of the infrastructure on your land?" The developer said, "I've got real problems. I can't find anybody to do the work." That is exactly the same problem that Western Power has. This is a very difficult problem and we need a mature government to solve it.

AIRFARES — REGIONS

282. Ms D.G. D'ANNA to the Minister for Transport:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's effort to reduce the cost of living for families across Western Australia.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house how this government's regional airfare zone cap scheme is supporting Western Australians living in regional WA?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house how this scheme is connecting regional communities with essential services?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI replied:

Thank you very much, member.

- (1)–(2) Across the government and across my portfolio we are very much concentrating on making sure that we can relieve cost-of-living pressures. That is why there has been a number of initiatives across the state. Of course, across the metropolitan area we have the two-zone fare cap. On the first Sunday of every month public transport will be free. A major initiative for regional Western Australia has been the cap on regional

airfares. This is the first time across the nation that this type of policy has been introduced. We have seen incredible success. Over 66 000 flights were under that capped scheme in the first six months of its operation. From the member's electorate alone, we have had 8 000 flights from Broome and over 1 000 from Kununurra, whereby people have taken advantage of guaranteed capped fares that are supporting regional Western Australians. In this budget, we will again be increasing the budget for the capped scheme by another \$20 million to ensure that we can continue to roll out this scheme and ensure that regional Western Australians can take advantage of this truly nation-first initiative.

We are also implementing other initiatives. We will provide \$800 000 over the next four years for a third weekly return service on the Kununurra–Halls Creek–Balgo route. We will provide another \$1.3 million to continue the subsidised flights between Broome and Derby, and \$2.3 million to seal the Warmun community airstrip in the East Kimberley, allowing it to receive flights, in particular for medical emergencies. On top of that, we will be investing \$750 000 to carry out a study of 34 airstrips in remote Aboriginal communities, understanding that in extreme weather events, it is the ability to land to deliver essential services and to take off in these remote communities that is essential, in particular at times of natural disaster.

It is a significant package of nation-first initiatives that supports the cost of living, but in particular all our workers and residents in regional WA to make sure that they can fly in and out of the city at a guaranteed affordable rate.

The SPEAKER: The member for Cottesloe with the last question.

BANKSIA HILL DETENTION CENTRE — PREMIER'S COMMENTS

283. Dr D.J. HONEY to the Minister for Corrective Services:

Does the minister agree with the reported statements of the Premier indicating that the Banksia Hill Detention Centre detainees involved in the latest riots are using foetal alcohol spectrum disorder brain damage as an excuse to act like terrorists?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON replied:

That is completely a false question. I listened to every word that the Premier gave at his press conference. That is not a quote that the Premier made. This is a problem with the member. I think it is actually a breach of the standing orders, Madam Speaker, because a member is not supposed to fabricate information. At no time did the Premier say those words.

Dr D.J. Honey: Go and have a look at the statements.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I am sorry. I have listened to every single word the Premier used. The Premier was asked a question about FASD and his reply was something along the lines of you cannot have excuses for violence—I put that in myself. He also said that the detainees involved in the riot last night were behaving as terrorists. Both those statements are true —

Mr M. McGowan: A form of terrorism.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: He said a form of terrorism. Both those statements are true. They are not what the member asked in his question. They were separate statements at different times to different questions. The member has improperly put the two things together as if they were the same issue, and that simply is not true. I tell you what: I back the Premier and his leadership of this state before I back your leadership.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please!

BANKSIA HILL DETENTION CENTRE — PREMIER'S COMMENTS

284. Dr D.J. HONEY to the Minister for Corrective Services:

I have a supplementary question. Is this latest riot proof that the Premier's much hyped 90-minute crisis summit last November was simply a political stunt, as claimed by leading advocates at the time?

The SPEAKER: Member, your original question was nothing to do with that summit last year, so I am going to rule it out of order. That concludes question time.

BANNED DRINKERS REGISTER

Question without Notice 273 — Supplementary Information

MR R.R. WHITBY (Baldivis — Minister for Racing and Gaming) [2.45 pm]: Under standing order 82A, I want to provide further information and clarity to an answer I gave about alcohol-related abuse in Carnarvon. I mentioned two licensee members of the liquor accord in Carnarvon and I may have said that they were for light-touch restrictions in the town. I want to make it absolutely clear so that *Hansard* is correct that they spoke against light-touch restrictions in the town.

The SPEAKER: Yes, I think I heard that at the time.

MAIN ROADS AMENDMENT BILL 2023*Second Reading*

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

MS M.J. HAMMAT (Mirrabooka — Parliamentary Secretary) [2.46 pm]: I rise to also make a contribution to debate on the Main Roads Amendment Bill 2023. As always, I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak about another bill that has come before this house. As a number of speakers before me have already outlined today, this legislation has been around for nearly 100 years, a long time, and I will come back to that.

I want to start by reflecting on, as others have done before me, the importance of the road network in Western Australia. It is something that we take for granted, but is essential for not only being able to travel from point A to point B, but also making sure that we have a prosperous economy. The state of our road network contributes substantially to the overall productivity of the state and the economy. In a state the size of Western Australia with so many of our natural resources in regional areas, having a road network is essential to being able to unlock the resource richness of Western Australia. Being able to travel to work is an important precondition for people to get to their jobs and to keep their employment. Having a road network that facilitates and allows access to public transport and people to move about the city to where they live or where the jobs are is an important precondition for ensuring that people can access jobs. That sounds self-evidently true, but it is incredibly important to remember. This government is committed to getting people to work, to having people keep their jobs and to making sure that those jobs are good quality jobs, and the road network is an important part of that as well. The road network also plays an important part in building good neighbourhoods and making sure that people can move about their communities in a way that is beneficial to how they interact.

The bill before us today is very important in that it points to the central place that our road network has in our lives, our employment and the economy, and in building a strong and cohesive society. As I said earlier, this bill is from a minister who we know is incredibly productive. She has done a lot of important work in her role as the Minister for Transport. I have spoken before in this place about the substantial body of work that is connected with Metronet to improve our public transport. This minister has done an incredible amount of work to ensure that we have a road network that is fit for the future, to build roads right around the state and to focus on getting funding from the federal government to support that. The member for Mount Lawley spoke eloquently about the substantial body of work around not just the metropolitan area, but also the regional areas to ensure that we have a road network that will meet the needs of the state not just today, but also into the future.

The Main Roads Act 1930 is nearly 100 years old, and it is important to reflect on the context in which the original act was adopted by this Parliament. Only five years before 1930, we had undertaken the first major car manufacturing in Australia. In 1925, the Ford Motor Company established itself in Australia, and five years down the track the Main Roads Bill was passed by this Parliament, so motorcars were brand new and not widely owned by people in Australia. I will say a few words about the history of car manufacturing because it is important to contrast this government's approach to manufacturing and building the economy compared with the federal Liberal–National government's approach, which shamefully allowed the Australian car manufacturing industry to wither and die. Knowing the history will also provide a really important contrast between this government's commitment to build manufacturing, the economy and skilled work for the future, which are the things at the heart of this government.

Car manufacturing established itself in Australia in 1925, and then in 1926, General Motors Australia was officially formed. It imported American chassis but used Holden designs and parts to build the vehicles. By 1936, Holden had opened a new assembly plant in Port Melbourne and three years later it opened another plant in Sydney. At the end of the 1930s, Australia entered the Second World War, which disrupted the manufacturing industry because the manufacture of military goods was given precedence over car production. Manufacturing was interrupted during the war period; however, those factories were allowed to continue to work and people developed their manufacturing skills and built a skilled workforce during that time. After the postwar period, governments first became interested in providing support to what was still a fledgling car industry. There was a lot of support from parliamentarians of all persuasions at the time, because they saw that supporting the automotive industry was important to allow that industry to grow. Cars were seen as a symbol of modernity, progression and the future. It is interesting to note that there was enthusiasm for investing in the industry, but by the 1950s still only one in 10 households in Australia had a car. This context is important because it illustrates that the 1930 act was written for a very different set of circumstances and at a different time, when cars were not commonplace and our road network was nothing like it is today.

The car industry grew and thrived through the 1950s and 60s, but, sadly, went into decline for a range of reasons. However, it is important to pause and reflect that the decline of the car industry, which was important in places like South Australia and Geelong, was hastened by the federal Liberal–National government that took deliberate decisions not to continue the support that had been part of that industry since it was first established in Australia. Having a car manufacturing industry and providing support to it was significant not just because we wanted to make cars, which were a symbol of modernity, but also because that substantial manufacturing process provided a centrepiece that allowed many other component manufacturers to grow up around it.

It allowed us to have a large industry to train skilled apprentices, who would then leave that industry to go off into other parts of the Australian economy and help build those parts of the economy as well. That large manufacturing base was like having an incubator, which allowed us to build up other component manufacturers around it and spread those skills and that expertise into other industries, thus building the Australian economy. Alas, it was not to be; it was not to stay.

From about 2015, or thereabouts, key car manufacturers in Australia started to wind down and then close. This was a matter of great concern for many people. As the substantial manufacturing bases closed down, we saw people who had worked there for their whole lives—sometimes entire families—were put out of work. Usually it was the dad who had worked there and then his children had taken jobs there as well. Generations of workers lost their jobs, many of whom found it difficult to find work again depending on their age and circumstances. Some workers who lost their jobs were in their 50s, which is an age at which we know is difficult to be re-employed in other industries. It had a devastating impact on many of the communities that had grown up around those manufacturing hubs. I am thinking of Elizabeth in Adelaide in South Australia and parts of Geelong as well.

People will recall that Joe Hockey, the then federal Treasurer, dared the car industry people to leave. He basically threw down a challenge and egged them on to leave the country, which is exactly what they did. It was hardly surprising. That was the level of support that we got from the federal Liberal–National government. It dared one of our key manufacturing industries to pack up and leave, which is exactly what it did, rather than taking proactive steps to support an industry, recognising its importance in the fabric of the Australian economy and the fabric of the community and not investing in that. I think that is such a stark contrast to the approach that this government has taken, and, again, I want to recognise the minister's leadership in this area.

I have spoken before at length about the establishment of the manufacturing facility for rail cars at Bellevue because it is a fantastic investment in the future of this state. It is a fantastic investment in our economy and the delivery of skilled jobs. We are doing some really exciting things. The Metronet project is building a world-class railway line, which in itself will be a terrific outcome. It will have a huge impact on communities and transportation. It is also an opportunity to say that we can do much more than that. We can start to provide a basis for the return of the manufacturing industry to this state, and encourage manufacturing. The Bellevue facility will do exactly that. It is a terrific example of how the government's strategic view to diversify and grow our economy will have an impact that will also deliver real benefits for everyday working people in the state. The WA government has ordered over 200 Metronet railcars and six *Australind* railcars to be built in that facility.

It did not just stop there, of course. It is exactly the same point about the car industry: once governments have the investments and build a critical mass, others will come and other opportunities grow up around that. Although the order of those railcars is in itself very exciting because it creates those 200 local skilled, quality, well-paid jobs, it led to Rio Tinto's announcement that it would also use that facility to manufacture iron ore railcars, which are currently being manufactured in China. It is a real example of how government can by strategic, clever and well-thought-out plans invest in facilities that allow us to grow the economy and deliver work and skilled jobs here.

The other thing that is really interesting and exciting about the Bellevue manufacturing facility is its work with the local TAFE. It recognises the connection between training, skills, finding jobs and then growing opportunities for the future. There is a stark contrast between the approach this government takes to the economy and jobs and the approach of the Liberals and Nationals, who never really understood the opportunities to grow the economy here in Western Australia from governments working strategically on big projects with private companies to deliver real benefits for everyday working people.

I echo the member for Mount Lawley's comments about the commitment to bring contracts back in-house at Main Roads. A great example of this government's approach has been to look at contracts across a range of areas and ask the question: do these deliver good outcomes for the community, for workers and for the budget? When the test is applied, we often see that the answer to that question is no. In fact, previous governments contracted out work not because it was better for the communities or the budget but because of an ideological obsession with small government, regardless of the outcome. When we undertake a careful analysis to work out whether the community will get better results from decisions to contract out services, in a number of cases the answer has been no. We can then bring those jobs back in-house.

There have been significant changes at Main Roads. This is a really important example because those are jobs in regional areas. We hear over and over again about the challenge of ensuring that we have good, quality and permanent jobs in regional areas because those employment opportunities allow us to grow regional towns and strong communities. I take this opportunity to congratulate the minister for that work, which I think goes straight to the heart of the difference between the approach of our government and the approach of the Liberals and Nationals on these issues.

I want to talk today about roads, the subject of this bill. I was reflecting on the context and the fact that it has been almost 100 years since the initial Main Roads Act was enacted by this Parliament. It is true that our roads and our road network have changed substantially in that intervening period. In my inaugural speech, I talked about my parents, who both grew up in station country in New South Wales, got married, and packed up their car and moved

here to Western Australia, driving across the Eyre Highway and the Nullarbor Plain. I was always interested to hear their stories of that journey across Australia in the early 1960s. It was a gravel road. People often had to cross cattle pits. It was a long trip in a car that certainly was not able to go as fast and was not as comfortable to ride in as the cars of today. Anyone who has undertaken that trip recently will know that we now have an amazing highway across Australia. It is, in fact, a beautiful trip. We can see the contrast and how things have changed—namely, how our ability to move not just around the state, but also around the country has changed substantially.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms M.J. HAMMAT: In my comments today and in reflecting about how roads have changed, I now talk about the work that Main Roads has done in producing the book *Aboriginal Journey Ways: How Ancient Trails Shaped our Roads*. People might be familiar with this book because a number of copies have been distributed to public libraries. It has been distributed to members of Parliament to pass on to high schools so that all our high schools and all our public libraries have a copy. It is a beautiful book written by Dr Noel Nannup and Dr Francesca Robertson. The project commenced in 2016, took three years to complete and mapped traditional Aboriginal trails and pathways, which were often the precursors to the roads that we are now familiar with and drive along all the time. It illustrates that our road network, which we might think has been around in its modern sense for 100 years, has been around for much longer than that and has taken very different forms over that period. The book is beautifully presented and was produced as the result of a partnership between Main Roads and Edith Cowan University. A substantial body of work was undertaken to work with elders around the state to hear their stories of the history of our roads and pathways. I have already presented a number of copies to schools in my electorate in Mirrabooka, and it has been incredibly well received. On every occasion I have presented it, people have said that it is a great book and asked where they can get a copy. There is a lot of interest in it. I congratulate the Minister for Transport, Main Roads and Edith Cowan University for the work that went into producing an important historical record that tells us much more about the history of the state.

I want to talk a little bit about it because people know that I grew up in the Broomehill–Kojonup area, and I am happy to report to the house that both of those places get a mention in the book. Much of my high school years were spent in Kojonup; I was there for some time. I think most striking, upon reading the book and understanding the local story now, is how little of the Aboriginal history of the area we were taught in school at that time. Perhaps it has changed over the years as we have grown in awareness and are now much more conscious of ensuring that the path of reconciliation acknowledges the Aboriginal history of areas. I was really interested to read the history.

The history of Kojonup is based on an oral account given by Jack Cox, who has lived in the Kojonup area all his life. I knew the Cox family and went to school with some of the Coxes in Kojonup. Jack Cox talked about how the place name Kojonup comes from the word kodj, which in those parts is an Aboriginal axe made from stones. He talked about the spring in Kojonup that we all knew about as kids; the spring was one of the local features. He talked about how the spring's existence meant that Kojonup throughout history had been a really important place for the Noongar people. It was a good spring, and it always had fresh, clean water running in it. Three tribes used to come to that area to make and sharpen axes and to camp there. The existence of the spring also made it attractive to the whitefellas, and, of course, it was on the road between Albany and Perth. We now know the road as Albany Highway, but it was a path that Aboriginal people have walked for many, many years; it was an important pathway for them. It became a place for a fairly early settlement. Settlers were attracted to it because of the spring and its location on the pathway between Albany and Perth. It was also good land for sheep; it still is. I thought that was quite interesting to read about. The book highlights the importance of documenting those Aboriginal stories so people can understand not just the European settlement of places we know in Western Australia, but also a history of Aboriginal people that extends more than 60 000 years.

The other reflection that I want to make in the time available to me is that the book also talks about Broomehill and the road that runs through Katanning, Broomehill and Tambellup. I spent some of my early years in Broomehill, and I used to travel along that road quite often with my mum and dad—usually my mum—mainly when we travelled to Katanning. Like all kids in a car, I used to stare out the window blankly and watch things flash past me. What I recall from those years of travelling along that road is a hall that had on it the name Carrolup. At that time, it was just a building on the side of the road. There were lots of buildings on the side of the road throughout the great southern. There were churches that were no longer used as churches. There was a tennis club in the middle of the Flat Rocks region that used to be a school, for people who are familiar with that region. I never knew what Carrolup was. I never thought to ask my parents about it. I certainly never learnt anything at school about the history of that place. I think we now have a better appreciation of these things. When I started university and was studying Australian history, I learnt that when Aboriginal children were removed from their families and became part of the stolen generation under this state's policy in the early part of the last century, Carrolup was one of the places to which they were sent to live. I had no sense of that when I used to be driven past it. It had never been taught to us or explained to us. When I look back now through the eyes of an adult, I think that was such a wasted opportunity for us to have learnt about and deepened our understanding of reconciliation. In Broomehill I was at school with Aboriginal kids from the local families—the Rodneys and the Hansons. I often think now that I bet they knew the history of that place. I bet their families had told him about that place and that that was part of their oral tradition

and awareness. Of course at that time it was not something that was talked about, taught or known. I do not think there was any particular sense that people did not talk about it because they wanted to cover it up. It just was not part of the history that was recognised and understood by people at that time.

People may know that in more recent years, there has been a collection of the art by the young people who lived at Carrolup. One of the teachers who had come to Carrolup encouraged the Aboriginal children to paint and draw. They produced a number of paintings. Those paintings have an interesting story. I believe that in the 1940s, those paintings were exhibited around the world. The collection finally ended up in the ownership of a person in New York. The paintings have recently been repatriated to this state and there is now a collection of pictures that depict what life in Carrolup was like in the 1940s and 1950s. This is an interesting story. I am conscious of the time, but I want to say a bit more about it. That teacher who went to Carrolup was keen to teach the children how to paint and draw, and that is the context in which that art was produced. She exhibited that collection internationally, in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. I believe that she later became bankrupt and lost possession and ownership of the collection and it was transferred to a person in New York.

This is an important opportunity to capture some images from a time and from a place in which I grew up and knew well, but knew none of that history. This is an important part of our Western Australian story, and part of understanding what went on in our local communities and in places just down the street from us. Understanding those stories is one of the important ways in which we can ensure that we undertake reconciliation with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I have spoken in this place previously about the importance of the Voice referendum that will come up this year. People who are familiar with the Uluru Statement from the Heart will recognise that it has three elements: voice, treaty and truth. We will have the opportunity to have our say on the Voice. I urge people to vote yes for the Voice. Being truthful and reflecting on our history is an important part of ensuring that we embrace the opportunities presented by reconciliation. For that reason, the piece of work *Aboriginal Journey Ways* that has been produced by Main Roads WA and Edith Cowan University is important to shine a light on the history of this state and to help us understand that the road network that we drive along today and that delivers important economic and social benefits is also part of a longer story. Having an appreciation of the Aboriginal history of our road network is part of how we can do justice to the important work that we have to do to achieve reconciliation.

I have run out of time. I was keen to talk about a lot of other things, including some road upgrades in my electorate of Mirrabooka. I will finish by acknowledging the incredible work that is being done by this government and the Minister for Transport, not only in big road projects, but also in delivering important local road projects through the black spot funding. One project in Girrawheen that is incredibly important to the local community is the upgrade of the Marangaroo Drive–Girrawheen Avenue intersection. Support from the black spot funding is enabling the City of Wanneroo to progress with that project. About three years ago, a fatality occurred at that intersection. I have met with the woman who lost her son in that accident. She is greatly pleased that this government is progressing that project.

Roads are important for a whole range of reasons, from deeply personal reasons, such as for Linda Fermia, who lost her son in that accident, through to the broader objectives that we face as a community to achieve reconciliation, economic prosperity, and strong and cohesive communities. With that, I will end my contribution and commend the bill to the house.

MS M.M. QUIRK (Landsdale) [3.16 pm]: I also want to speak on the Main Roads Amendment Bill 2023. In speaking, I have to acknowledge the very eclectic and urbane contribution from the member for Mirrabooka. I also want to thank the member for Kingsley for letting me speak before her because of a commitment that I have tomorrow morning. I have to say also that I will be going off-piste, which perhaps is not an appropriate metaphor given that we are talking about roads, so I will apologise in advance for giving what will be one of my more stream-of-consciousness contributions. We on this side of the house are all very passionate about transport issues, so I will apologise in advance for making a similar eclectic contribution today.

In its most restrictive terms, this bill will enable Main Roads WA to complete projects in a more efficient, timely and cost-effective manner. Like my colleagues, I have to say also that we are very fortunate to have a Minister for Transport who is extremely passionate about these issues. We could say that she has drive, but again that would be a very bad pun. The minister knows that our transport must be integrated and that each mode must be complementary with other modes in order to facilitate the logistics of the movement of freight and people throughout this vast state. The minister further knows that transport must maximise road safety, and that this can be achieved only by intelligent road design and engineering.

As I have said, the minister is striving for the integration of transport modes. I expect to be working very closely with the minister once the Malaga Metronet station becomes operational. We will need to provide excellent transport links on the eastern side of my electorate to service the suburbs of Landsdale and Alexander Heights by linked bus routes and bike paths.

In terms of truck transport, on behalf of my colleagues in the union movement and the Transport Workers' Union of Australia in particular, I want to acknowledge their advocacy in getting rest stops for drivers in remote WA; it is very important. Part of the road safety picture is not to have drivers driving tired. I want to commend their advocacy, and, more to the point, the minister for listening and providing funds for that to occur.

I now want to talk a bit about local traffic. Might I take the liberty of asking members in the room, by show of hands, how many have constituents who come into their electorate office or contact them about local roads? Yes; a full show of hands. This issue is made even more problematic in resolving them, because responsibility for roads can be local or state government. We have already heard the member for Cockburn talk about that regarding one of his major roads. On top of that, as well as the responsibility being shared between local and state government, we also rattle the tin occasionally for the larger projects to get federal government contributions. That makes it very difficult. Not least on the western side of Gnangara Road, the long-term plan for the Gnangara Road–Wanneroo Road intersection in my electorate is to join Gnangara Road on to Whitfords Avenue and create a flyover. That is a major engineering exercise. Added to the complexity of this is that a lot of work has been done on the eastern side of Gnangara Road, so, in a sense, traffic is encouraged down that route, but once it gets to my electorate, there is heavy traffic, much of it trucks. They speed through medium-density housing and residents within that area find it hard to even get out onto Gnangara Road. There is also a landlocked industrial estate, which I know the federal member for Moore has for some time been lobbying about, but again, rat runs are created. As I said, the solution is a flyover, but this causes major logistical issues, not least of which is the compulsory acquisition of land. It is a major undertaking that would require federal funding.

That leads me to a segue about acknowledging funding. It is a *bête noire* of mine that although the state government might provide substantial funding for a particular road project, that is quite often not acknowledged. I have had some robust discussion with the CEO of Wanneroo and the former mayor about the fact that Hartman Drive in my electorate was principally funded by the state government to the tune of over \$2 million. The City of Wanneroo contributed about \$300 000, yet the signage that remained there for almost two years said, “Another project for the City of Wanneroo”. Even after I brought it to their attention, the sign stayed. I mentioned it to the minister and said that I believe that funding to local government should be conditional upon the fact that it acknowledges the contribution of the state government as well.

The next project that will come to my electorate is the Hepburn Avenue–Wanneroo Road intersection. That is always in the top 10 of black spots. I have been advised —

The current at-grade signalised intersection of Wanneroo Road and Hepburn Avenue is highly congested and poses a safety concern to Main Roads; it is regularly ranked in the top 20 worst intersections in the metropolitan area for these reasons and it is vital that it is upgraded in the near future. Main Roads has allocated funding for next financial year —

This was written in 2020, but it has not been done yet —

to progress project development of the grade-separated concept.

There are many considerations in determining the layout and configuration of complex intersections like Wanneroo Road and Hepburn Avenue and the planned concept is similar, albeit with a different orientation, to what is currently being constructed at Wanneroo Road and Ocean Reef Road.

That has been a highly successful project.

I have to say that I am one of the people who features in those statistics, because someone ran into the back of me at that intersection. I could see this large four-wheel drive with a roo bar in the rear-vision mirror coming for me, and I could do nothing about it. The road has been reserved for many years. It is near the Kingsway City Shopping Centre. Some of the tenancies close to Wanneroo Road have to wind up their businesses, but that land reservation has been there for many, many years.

The second issue I want to raise briefly is local traffic law enforcement. Again, my colleagues who put their hands up about complaints from constituents will be well aware that many of those complaints are about lack of traffic enforcement on local roads. I was involved some years ago in a parliamentary committee inquiry that looked at traffic enforcement by police. It was apparent from that that there is rarely much traffic enforcement by police on local roads. Not only that, but what is on the main roads tends to be by Multanova radar and camera. The days of seeing a police officer on their bike around the traps deterring individuals is long gone. That is a problem. There are also more subtle issues. For example, Main Roads—I can understand why in terms of the expense and to avoid unnecessary graffiti—has a policy that if there is no indication, the default speed limit for a road is 50 kilometres an hour. Frankly, that default position is not often effective. For example, there are areas in my electorate that go from a main road at 70 kilometres an hour down to the default position of 50 kilometres an hour, and it is not readily apparent. I want to commend one of my constituents Shane Pope, who has been lobbying assiduously for the street that he lives in, where the failure to have a 50-kilometre-an-hour sign has been a real issue. I think Main Roads needs to be a bit more flexible, look at traffic movement and put up signs in those places.

Similarly, in terms of flexibility, I want to talk a bit about school crossings. The Department of Education has a tendency of placing a catchment area for schools without taking into account the existence of main roads. The latest school opened in my electorate, Landsdale Gardens Primary School, has Mirrabooka Avenue, a 70-kilometre-an-hour road that slopes—the visibility is somewhat restricted—smack bang in the middle of that catchment area. We have

the usual problems, and the number of students at this stage means that we cannot have the school crossing people involved because not enough students attend the school. The member for Bicton gave a grievance about this and she has been able to get red-and-white flashing traffic lights on Canning Highway. My general practitioner is on Cambridge Street, and the other day I was stuck at one of these sets of lights on Cambridge Street in West Leederville. I was thinking, “Why was Main Roads prepared to put one there, but not at where I consider to be very dangerous position?” I have to say that it is probably deterring kids from one side of the road enrolling in that school, even though—thank you very much Minister for Education and Department of Education—it is a fantastic school.

Another inquiry I did with the same committee that I was talking about earlier related to policy changes that are needed to accommodate for seniors in an ageing society. We cited some traffic lights in Singapore. People with disabilities or older people were given a swipe card. They could go up to the traffic light, swipe their card, and that would automatically program a longer period for them to cross. I raised this with the former Minister for Transport, Hon Dean Nalder, whose electorate included Garden City and, of course, Riseley Street. I could contemplate that there would be a lot of seniors wanting to cross Riseley Street to go to the shops. I raised that issue with him, to which he said, “It’s Main Roads policy to keep traffic flowing.” Even that gap of allowing a person to cross the road was seen as unacceptable. But the plus side of that gap is that it would give breaks for traffic so that people coming from side streets could then get onto these main roads, which is the very problem that we are having in my electorate in Pearsall and Hocking with residents turning onto Wanneroo Road since the creation of the Ocean Reef Road overpass. The Minister for Community Services and I went out to Wanneroo Road to check on the capacity for students to be able to cross Wanneroo Road at school time, given the traffic flow down to the Ocean Reef flyover. It was very fast and there was a large volume of traffic. If there were the odd crossing here or there, it would actually open the road up for people in the side streets to be able to enter more easily.

The next topic I want to deal with is electric vehicles. There was an article in *The West Australian* of 6 March of this year titled “6009 the EV winner”. This article deals with the penetration of electric vehicles by suburb. The usual suspects are there, which are Nedlands, Applecross, Churchlands, Crawley and Dalkeith, but the lead paragraph was interesting. It states —

Wanneroo, Wangara and Tapping are among the more surprising suburbs making up the postcodes with the most registered electric vehicles in WA.

The article mentions the postcodes of Madeley and Darch, as well. It continues —

The Australian Automobile Association’s new Electric Vehicle Index shows 3078 battery EVs were sold in WA last year. Tesla was the top choice.

The article continues. We now have a situation whereby one in 20 cars purchased in Western Australia is an electric vehicle. In my view, there is clearly range anxiety, and we need to lift our game with more public charging stations. The Electronic Vehicle Council’s calculations state that there are fewer than 3 700 public charging stations across Australia at 2 100 locations. This compares with Canada, where there are 16 000 public charging stations at 7 000 locations. In September 2022, the WA government launched its electronic vehicle policy. Under that policy, it commits to complete the network of fast charging stations by January 2024.

[Member’s time extended.]

Ms M.M. QUIRK: There is also a government subsidy of \$3 500 for the purchase of an electric vehicle.

The final matter I will briefly talk about—I warned people that I would be somewhat eclectic in my coverage today—is getting workers for Main Roads in remote WA. Decades ago, I had the privilege to visit work camps in the Kimberley, the goldfields, Pilbara and the south west, and I know that the member for Thornlie mentioned Walpole. A lot of the local government work undertaken by prisoners at those work camps relates to road building or maintenance. I noticed that the member for Thornlie gave Walpole a big rap and said what a great community it is, how tidy and environmentally sensitive it is, and so on. The issue I have with work camps is that there is no formal training for those prisoners. It seems to me that if there were TAFE lecturers or some formal training at the work camps for those prisoners, who are low security, there could be a much better pool of workers to work on regional roads. There is the added benefit that they would acquire skills. We all know that recidivism rates are significantly reduced if prisoners can go from custody into a job. There are many jobs available in road maintenance, and the trauma that the people in Fitzroy Crossing and the Kimberley have had to go through for road maintenance I think indicates that there is a crying need for more skilled personnel. Many of these prisoners are First Nations individuals. Again, First Nations individuals are over-represented in unemployment, so it makes sense. At the moment—I have to add the qualification that I have not been there for many years—work camps are not really taken as seriously as they should be with their potential to provide excellent training with a qualification at the end of it that would help local communities and not only limit the risk of recidivism, but also, I think, assist with prisoners’ self-esteem and their feeling that they are contributing to their communities.

I commend this bill to the house and I apologise for the bad puns and rather discursive manner in which I have delivered these words today.

MS D.G. D'ANNA (Kimberley) [3.37 pm]: I rise today to make a contribution to the debate on the Main Roads Amendment Bill 2023, but I really wanted the opportunity to get up and say how much the people of the Kimberley, as well as, I am sure, the rest of the state, are actually quite grateful for the work that the awesome Minister Saffioti and the Main Roads crew have put into the regions to keep communities and towns connected. We know that this year alone, and over time, there have been a lot of works, and Main Roads and its projects have delivered many opportunities for not only Indigenous people but also people from regional and rural communities to gain training, purpose and skills to work and earn their own livings and contribute to their communities with a sense of pride.

An example of this is the Broome–Cape Leveque Road, which was a long time in the making. Some of my family—not all of them—live in Cape Leveque, up on the Middle Lagoon road, and in Lombadina, Djarindjin and Beagle Bay. Before that road was sealed, there was a huge debate—Should we? Shouldn't we?—and I know that the department did a lot of work and consultation with not only the stakeholders that make the community run and the community people on their feelings, but also the traditional owners, so that they could have their say about the impacts a road like that can have.

For me personally, I was worrying about my nanna and my mum—my nanna is gone now—having to travel up and down to access services such as regular hospital checks and not having the money to continually service their car, because those rough roads took a toll; I think my dad alone went through three cars. As I drove along that road, I remember seeing a lot of community people I knew directing traffic, grading the sides of the road and operating rollers—men, women, young and old. There are limited economic opportunities up there, but community people had a real sense of inspiration—that they had something to get up for, they could work on the road and get it done. Many of those people went on to start their own businesses. I just wanted to mention that.

As many people know—and if they do not, I do not know where they have been for the last four months—there was a huge flood in the north last year and early this year, the Kimberley flood, which some have referred to as a once-in-a-century event. That is debatable, with climate change, but that flood was a result of ex-tropical cyclone Ellie. I remember hearing the news about that cyclone. It was the Christmas break and I thought, “Okay, I'll work through December and take my break in January, in the new year. I'm going to drive up to Kununurra and that's when I'll take my holidays.” I watched that system move down from the north and then back again and I thought, “I'll give it a day and transfer my travel. I'll wait until this rain passes and watch the river.” Well, that was a mistake on my part! I never got to take my leave and I never got to cross that road.

That flood impacted two major pieces of infrastructure. A lot of emphasis was placed on the Fitzroy River Bridge, which is a huge piece of infrastructure that is important for not only Fitzroy people but also people in the whole of the Kimberley in respect of transport, service access for community people, freight and deliveries. Another small section of Great Northern Highway was damaged, near Willare Bridge, which cut off Broome and Derby. I want to acknowledge the impact of those road washouts, but also the resilience of the people of the Kimberley. They are used to being cut off every year by floods, but the uncertainty brought about by the devastation of the floods and the extensive road washouts really made people stand up and pay attention.

I mention that because it led to a realisation of how important those roads are for connectivity in the Kimberley. Main Roads and other departments rose to the occasion and almost immediately got up and reconnected those roads. That was humanly immediate, because it was like a series of unfortunate events up there. Not only was there flooding; when the water went down in Fitzroy, the thunderstorms arrived in Derby. When the thunderstorms went down in Broome, the river went up in Fitzroy. It was extremely challenging for the people who live there, and I really want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the quick action and support from this house, especially from Minister Saffioti. She really rose to addressing the challenge of keeping our communities and towns as connected as was humanly possible—keeping the Kimberley connected with the rest of the state, Broome with Derby, Derby with Fitzroy, and the eastern bank of Fitzroy with Kununurra. Even though the break was in the middle of the Kimberley, the impacts were felt throughout the region.

The isolation resulting from damage to the road system created huge anxiety for local residents. A lot of residents could not stay in their homes or home towns. They could not maintain contact with family and country, and even tourism was affected. There was destruction to medical facilities and to food and fuel supply chains that was felt throughout the Kimberley. I am repeating myself, but I again acknowledge the actions and quick responses of this government, Minister Saffioti and the teams of local people on the ground, grading, moving dirt, getting things ready and working on plans for bypass roads. They would build a road and it would wash out two days later, so they would get up again and build another road and see it wash out yet again. That shows the incredible resilience and patience of the people of the Kimberley. Main Roads workers and others did not just sit on their hands and say, “Let's just wait until later; it's more cost-effective.” It was, “We need to keep trying.”

I remember having a conversation at a fuel station on a Saturday when the Willare Bridge section of the highway was accessible for brief windows of time for people to come across to Broome; for example, to collect their cars and drive back. I met someone and said, “Hey, how are you? What are you doing here?” She said, “I've come to finally pick up my car.” I said, “How is it?” She said, “It's amazing. I can't believe how much they've worked to make that

dirt track useable for us to cross.” She was a local person who had seen these roads washed out before and knew the extent of the damage, but she had enormous appreciation for the local crews and contractors, and their resilience in that situation in continuing to push ahead to keep communities connected.

I really wanted to highlight that, because a lot of people have complained that things were not done quickly enough and that it was not this and it was not that. I can tell members that those crews worked tirelessly and the local community truly appreciated the efforts that went into their work. I remember inspecting that section of the road with the Premier and Minister Saffioti. Members could not truly appreciate the level of work that went into that if they did not see the extent of the damage. Believe me, I have lived there my whole life and I have never seen that much devastation. There was an enormous amount of work put in by those crews, and investment from the government, to make sure that those communities remained connected, and that is something that should not be dismissed.

The commitment from Minister Saffioti and the work crews to fix the bridge and the lower river crossings was a saga in itself. Again, the lower river crossing opened and closed again within a period of 24 hours. It then opened and closed again. Somebody came up to me and said, “Can’t you get the road open and leave it open? We need it to be able to come across.” I said, “Why, thank you. I feel quite privileged that you think I’m God and I control the weather! Unfortunately, I can’t, but I’m glad you think I can stop the rain from coming!”

Despite that level of anxiety and uncertainty, the people of the Kimberley—from Broome, Bidyadanga, the Dampier Peninsula, Kalumburu, the Tanami communities, Balgo, Billiluna and right up to Kununurra—have had a wake-up call and a renewed appreciation for what our roads mean to us. On a side note, Main Roads has been delivering in our regions, especially in the Kimberley, for a long time. Again, I have mentioned Cape Leveque Road, but now there are also single-lane bridge upgrades, especially in the East Kimberley. We have a project to upgrade single-lane bridges in the East Kimberley at Tickalara Creek, Arthur Creek and Frog Hollow Creek. When I used to live up there, they were quite small, but quite risky, single-lane bridges, especially with the amount of traffic and trucks that came through. When Main Roads was doing one of the other East Kimberley bridges, there was a large amount of work and opportunities for not only Indigenous companies and individuals from those remote communities, but also other businesses. I feel proud when I drive through the Kimberley and I pass a Main Roads camp or roadworks and see local people not only doing traffic control work, but also conducting inspections and operating rollers and graders. I see them at knock-off time when they take pride in what they have achieved. It is a hello when I am passing.

With that, I just wanted to stand and say that I am truly grateful for what this government has done under Minister Saffioti with the Main Roads crew. Keeping our communities connected is essential and the other opportunities that stem from the road network are true and real. I commend the bill to the house.

MRS J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI (Kingsley — Parliamentary Secretary) [3.51 pm]: That will be a hard act to follow, because the member for Kimberley always delivers her speeches with such passion and generosity for not only the people in this house, but also those who work for our government. My speech will pale in comparison with the speech that the member for Kimberley just gave.

I rise today to speak about the Main Roads Amendment Bill 2023. When researching the legislation, it came to my attention, as other members have highlighted, that the Main Roads Act is nearly 100 years old. For the horse-loving people in my life, just by chance I came across a very funny meme that put into context the mindset around when this act was written and whom it was written for. It says —

100 hundred years ago everyone owned a horse and only the rich had cars.
Today everyone has cars and only the rich own horses.
The stables have turned.

That certainly sounds like something the member for Landsdale would say. It really puts into context when this act was written and whom it was written for and why we need to look at modernising the legislation. These amendments to the act will help to clarify the head of power for Main Roads, particularly for identifying commercial opportunities. Obviously, we all understand that our roads are a massive infrastructure asset. We need them to get around. We need them to get to our jobs and recreation, to see our family members and to visit our beautiful state or wander out yonder. They also increasingly have a commercial aspect to them. The bill will provide clarity around Main Roads’ powers to use that commercial aspect to the advantage of the state. This is a really important piece of legislation because we increasingly need to create new revenue funds for the state, and this is one way we can do that.

As other members have said, this bill will allow Main Roads to identify and enter into commercial opportunities along our vast road network in Western Australia, such as unmanned heavy vehicle fuel outlets, commercial leases of land and premises for service stations, and ancillary activities, such as a cafe along Matagarup Bridge to support the bridge climb and zip activities. All these will add to not only our Main Roads network, but also the vibrancy of our state. I know that climbing Matagarup Bridge and zip-lining off it—I have not quite got up the courage to do it yet—is a tourist attraction for many people. Even just walking across the bridge, people get to see the beautiful vistas along Derbarl Yerrigan, the Swan River. I imagine that the views from the top of the bridge would be amazing.

I have climbed the lighting towers at the WACA, so I have some sense of how far someone would be able to see if they were on top of Matagarup Bridge. Having a café there to support this unique activity in our state would be a great move. We also have the opportunity to lease land next to our transport hubs to support commuters. Having childcare facilities, gyms and bike repair shops there would provide the capacity for people to use our road network efficiently. If we can create these hubs around our transport nodes, it will help to reduce the amount of time we spend on the roads and increase the amount of time we spend at home with our families.

The McGowan government has undertaken massive investment in infrastructure, but we also need to acknowledge that this is a rather large asset. We are investing \$9 billion in major road projects and upgrades throughout Western Australia over the next four years, with \$3.4 billion allocated for metropolitan road projects as part of the 2022–23 budget. We made that announcement in May last year. Of that money, \$80 million is for the Nicholson Road and Garden Street grade separation, \$290 million is for a dual carriageway on Thomas Road from South Western Highway to Tonkin Highway, \$100 million is for the Tonkin Highway corridor upgrades at the north Ellenbrook interchange, and \$35 million is for the East Perth footbridge. I know that many ministers are interested in the activation and vibrancy of East Perth, so I am sure that that will be helpful in achieving that goal.

I have a list of a lot of projects that we are currently doing in Western Australia, and a number of them are very interesting to me. In 2020, my husband, my family and I were saving money as we intended to visit his family in Macedonia. We had saved a good amount of money for tickets for four of us to head to Macedonia. Then, unfortunately, as we all know, we were hit by a global pandemic. Luckily for us, we had not purchased the tickets, so that money was sitting there. I purchased a pop-up camper trailer, a Jayco Flamingo—and I may or may not have decked out the inside with lots of flamingos! The reason I am telling members this is not that I am proud of my camper trailer, although I am, but that it allowed us to travel as a family along the many roads in this beautiful state. We travelled to Kalgoorlie, Esperance and Exmouth with this camper trailer. Every place that we travelled, we could see the upgrades and works that were being done on our regional roads. Not only were the roads being sealed, but also, most importantly—I think this is one of the greatest safety features on our roads—audible lines were being installed on the side of the roads and between the two single lanes of traffic heading north and south or east and west. Having audible lines on roads in remote and regional areas is vitally important when travelling long distances. Having travelled with my children in a car for 12 hours in one day, sometimes I wanted to close my eyes! Thankfully, I was not driving; my husband was. That could happen quite easily, so audible lines are a lifesaver on the roads. I think the minister should be commended for instigating that program, because not only is it the right thing to do for the regions, but also it is absolutely the right thing to do for anybody who is exploring the regions on our roads.

I will also note very quickly the project to seal the Gibb River Road, given it is next on my husband's bucket list. I am sure he will be very pleased to take his four-wheel drive up to the Gibb River Road. The member for Kimberley told me it is an absolute must do, even with the crocodiles! She assured me that they are freshwater crocodiles and will not attack. The Gibb River Road is definitely on the bucket list, and I know that we will be grateful for the extra sealing of the roads when we travel there. Members who have travelled on corrugated roads, will know it can be a bone-jangling trip.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

STATE BUDGET 2023–24 — FAMILIES AND HOUSEHOLDS

Motion

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Leader of the Opposition) [4.00 pm]: After that overwhelming vote of confidence that we should proceed, I move —

That this house calls upon the McGowan Labor government to use the upcoming 2023–24 state budget to address the many failures impacting Western Australian families and households.

This debate is an opportunity for members of the opposition to outline the very many failures in the government's budget process over the last six years insofar as things are announced but rarely get delivered on time. It is the government's failure to actually deliver programs that is of most concern. The government has also failed to meet the standard of transparency that it promised it would introduce if it won the 2017 election. When in opposition, government members sat on this side of the chamber and complained about the former government's lack of transparency. They have now moved to the government benches. What do we see? The McGowan Labor government is itself an affront to democracy. The government went to an election saying that it would not seek to change representation in the upper house, but we know what happened there. We have witnessed an extraordinary level of arrogance over the last six years. In just about every portfolio, this government has failed to listen to the people of Western Australia, show interest or take on board people's lived experience to inform its policies. We know that the government is not interested in the expertise of people in local areas because it completely stripped away local decision-making and input in areas such as the development commissions, which under the previous government had a great deal to offer in providing information to government about the priorities for local regions. Instead, the government wants to centralise decision-making for those areas in Perth. The government does not listen to our

opinion or the public's opinion and, increasingly, it seems to be ignoring what the Auditor General says. Increasingly, the Auditor General is coming out with some rather damning findings on this government's performance in many areas.

Government members of this place have expressed to me that these Wednesday sessions are nothing but "whingeing Wednesday". Whingeing is complaining about something that is not important. We raise issues of great importance to the people of Western Australia, and it is a disgrace that government members consider that to be us whingeing. It is not whingeing; we are doing our job of bringing to this place examples of this government's many failures, including on transparency and the very many broken promises in that regard.

The government has been spending money with abandon, including half a billion dollars on rapid antigen tests, many of which will probably end up on the rubbish heap. We know there was no strategy in place to justify that enormous expense because it was outlined by the Auditor General. She expressed concern in that area. It was also outlined by members of Parliament. When the announcement first became public, the opposition expressed concern about the amount of money being spent. We now know that two government departments were competing with each other to find RATs. It was a monumental waste of time and money. As the Auditor General put it, the money expended was twice the cost of the Bunbury Hospital at South West Health Campus redevelopment. Twice the cost of the Bunbury Hospital redevelopment was wasted on that program. The amount expended would be probably a quarter of the funding required for the proposed women's and babies' hospital.

The government completely dismissed concerns raised in this place by members of the opposition about the sale of the Landgate building at Midland. It sought to downplay any concerns about the process involved in that sale and failed to outline what had happened and where it had gone wrong. The Auditor General has now identified that the sale was a substantial deviation from the published market-led proposals policy. An article on this issue by Hamish Hastie published on 6 January states —

The public sector watchdog has put the state government on notice it will investigate other projects progressed through a controversial government bidding process known as market-led proposals after identifying significant issues with the sale of Midland's Landgate building.

...

The government maintains that modelling suggests taxpayers will be \$12 million better off under the deal by avoiding refurbishment, fit-out and maintenance costs, but Spencer found that decision-makers didn't have all the information about the value of the sale before it was approved.

"Most significantly the net lettable area and rent rates, both of which were critical inputs to the value for money assessment, were still to be negotiated when the deal was conditionally approved," she said.

...

"The final decision makers were therefore not provided all the information relevant to considering final value for money of the arrangement."

That was never revealed in this place when we asked questions about it. An officer of the Parliament has outlined that that was a clear failure in terms of transparency and process, and I commend her for her work in bringing such matters to notice. Other controversial market-led proposals were mentioned in that article. One is the Swanbourne train station and another is the Fremantle film studio. An article of 11 October 2021 titled "Lights, camera, election: How Labor danced around 'caretaker mode' for Freo film studio promise" says —

Freedom of Information documents reveal the McGowan government told the Department of Finance to hold off on announcing the developer for the major project, which still has no finalised contract.

The documents show then-finance minister Ben Wyatt's office requested the department disclose that —

A certain group —

... had been selected through the government's market-led proposals process as the preferred developer on February 19—right in the middle of the election caretaker period, when major government decisions are put on hold.

Again, there was a conspiracy, if you like, to release that information in the middle of an election campaign. It was preset before the election and caretaker mode by the former Minister for Finance. It was something quite the opposite with the Cedar Woods development. I refer to the WAtoday article of 15 March 2021 with the headline, "Saffiotti knew about Swanbourne Apartment proposal 'months' before election", which says —

Planning Minister Rita Saffiotti knew about a proposal to build a high-density development near Swanbourne train station months ago but denied an agreement was struck to hold off any public announcement until after the election.

Speaking to 6PR's Liam Bartlett on Tuesday, Ms Saffiotti said she became aware of a proposal by property developer Cedar Woods to build a 300-apartment, 10-storey development on Crown land adjacent to the Swanbourne station "a number of months ago".

The plans were submitted to the state government through its market-led proposals process, which allows unsolicited bids from private enterprise to the government.

Bids are assessed by a Department of Finance steering committee, which then makes recommendations to the government.

WAtoday understands public announcements were put on hold until after the election to avoid politically difficult questions about high density and Labor's relationships with developers but this is vehemently denied by Ms Saffioti's office.

That is as it was reported. Apparently the minister did know beforehand. We again see this murky uncertainty around transparency and we do not get the straight answers that we should be getting from a government that is committed to being transparent. That shows that this government believes that parliamentary processes, parliamentary accountability, the work the opposition does, our representation of our constituents and the concerns of Western Australians amounts to nothing but whingeing. We are being told that, yet we understand that the issues we bring here are important issues and they need important consideration by those opposite.

Let us look at some of the issues we will bring to the debate today for the other members as they progress through. There are failures in crime, health, housing and cost of living. We think those things are vitally important. It astounds and disturbs me that members opposite would think otherwise. When we reflect on those failures, we are told that we are not being positive about the state, or we are mistaken, or we do not understand. The women's and babies' hospital decision-making seems to be shrouded in secrecy. There was a process that led to the development of a plan. There was then a backflip with very little explanation. When the member for Vasse has tried to get to the bottom of that, we have seen deflection. We have had no clear answers and very little information has been provided. The situation is the same with the Osborne Park Hospital baby ward that the member asked about today. We saw the uncomfortable responses from the government around that. It has been found to have had a program of developing an asset that was not being utilised and is now trying to claim that it is somehow normal for the health system to build things in places where they are not needed, in case they are needed. In other areas of the state, hospitals are desperately needed that are not being built and not being attended to. Health services throughout the state need a boost. Some regional hospitals in particular are in a desperate situation and are awaiting redevelopment and for their infrastructure needs to be addressed.

The Minister for Health announced last week that she would implement electronic medical records in hospitals—something groups such as the Australian Medical Association have called for for years. An announcement was made about that in last year's budget, but we have seen no progress on that issue. That is the problem. Matters are announced and put in the budget, but there is no commitment to time lines. There is no commitment to when any of these things will be delivered. When commitments are given, they are included in a press statement, but rarely do we see them met.

I turn to youth justice. Once again, the situation at Banksia Hill Detention Centre has erupted. That has been going on for months and months. For years we have seen a lack of action to the crisis that has unfolded at Banksia Hill. Last night that situation blew up and riots occurred. No doubt the minister has been there to look at the situation. However, we understand there has been chronic understaffing and a failure to deliver the improvements that were promised in that facility. Looking more broadly, the promised improvements to the Kimberley and the provision of an on-country residential facility seem to have stalled. Again, there has been a complete lack of ability to meet the time lines that the government has said it would.

No doubt the member for Roe will highlight some educational issues when talking about other areas of government expenditure. Esperance Senior High School is one of the top performing high schools in the state. Despite the member's advocacy on this matter and repeated calls for funding, that school is a crumbling facility that is not up to standard and that has not been addressed by this government.

Yesterday we had a matter of public interest on housing. The Minister for Housing is again here now. We went through a number of issues in housing. For instance, at the end of January, 1 857 public housing properties were vacant, of which 1 452 were considered to be undergoing maintenance, repairs or refurbishments. There is an increasing waitlist for social housing. Government announcements were made recently about that, but, again, no time lines were given in those announcements. A very large amount of money has been announced, but no time line given for the delivery of those. I put it to the government that it would be much more believable if it were to at least give people an idea of when those houses would start to be available and when the program would be completed, so there could be some certainty. It could also release a map of where it would be putting the houses and where the land is that it needs to meet that target. We could have some confidence in such a program, but what we see is a program that is devoid of any real information and is just a promise—a promise that we do not expect will be delivered on time. We had that debate yesterday, so I will leave that there for now.

In the Kimberley an issue with crime has led to the Kimberley Regional Group, an alliance of four shires—Broome, Derby—West Kimberley, Halls Creek and Wyndham—East Kimberley. In its February 2022 communiqué it reported that it had a series of meetings with state government ministers and officials about the Kimberley and strategies to

address family dysfunction and overcrowded housing, alcohol abuse and low school attendance rates experienced across the Kimberley. Time and again those advocates have called for the wraparound support services that would address the problems those communities face. There are issues in the Kimberley that are not being addressed. The funding for the Kimberley on-country residential facility was finally allocated in May 2022. The minister said in answer to questions that the government hoped to have the facility up and running in early 2023, but we still have no such facility. The crisis care centre that was to be built at Banksia Hill as part of the \$25 million investment has not been built. The promised new Aboriginal services unit has also not been fully delivered. The Target 120 extension to four locations in the Kimberley was announced at the same time as the funding for the on-country residential facility in May 2022; however, Halls Creek is still not up and running. Family and domestic violence programs in the area are also not being delivered as we know they should be in that area.

There have been huge problems in retaining police numbers. Promises have been made about having a fully staffed police force, but we see experienced police leaving and new recruits coming in. We know that that is putting pressure on the service. We all want to see our police properly rewarded. We want to see them in a job in which they feel valued. I must ask: Why are the police leaving the service at such a level? What is the government doing to try to get to the bottom of the issue? Is there some sort of problem with their conditions? Is it their remuneration? Is it that they do not feel valued within the service? Perhaps if the Minister for Police were here, we could get an understanding from the government. Maybe one of the other ministers may be able to offer some advice on what is done to interview those officers when they leave, to get an understanding of what they are experiencing and why they are moving on. Maybe then we could start to compile a program that would retain officers in the police force rather than losing them. We just saw a significant breakdown between the police and prosecutors in the situation of the person who had been charged for corruption offences in connection with the Paul Whyte affair. Some of the reports referred to the fact that many police had been moved through the process, which gives us an understanding of what is going on in the force. Shortages of staff and pressures on people might be contributing to that. In fact, it could well be that a lack of support has led to some of those situations. I do not know, but these are the situations that can arise with staffing shortages, and, no doubt, we will hear more about that as time goes on.

We know that all Western Australian families and many Western Australian households, whether they are families or singles, are having trouble dealing with the increasing cost of living, which is hitting Western Australians very hard indeed. Ahead of the state budget, Anglicare recently released new figures for April showing a yearly increase in the number of people seeking help to pay their bills and feed their families. During April, Anglicare received 2 250 calls for help, which is a 38 per cent increase on the same time last year. More than 1 000 people were supported with food relief and financial assistance to help pay for their transport, medical costs, utilities and rent. Mr Glasson of Anglicare said —

“This data confirms the rising rate of financial stress being experienced by WA families—and the widening gap between those who have the income to make ends meet—and those who don’t ...

“Put simply, the benefits of our strong economy have not been share equally.

We know that this budget is an opportunity for the government to make some announcements. We know that there is a need to address many failings in housing, health and people’s ability to make ends meet. We would like the government to bring out a budget that addresses those issues and makes a meaningful commitment to carrying out the programs it has introduced.

I will conclude on that, and I will allow some of the other members of the opposition to make a contribution because I am sure that they all have examples in their areas that they would like to discuss.

MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Leader of the Liberal Party) [4.22 pm]: I rise to support this motion —

That this house calls upon the McGowan Labor government to use the upcoming 2023–24 state budget to address the many failures impacting Western Australian families and households.

It could be argued, and I would argue, that no area is more in need of focus or honesty when it comes to tomorrow’s budget than public health. For our health sector, business as usual just will not cut it with Western Australians in tomorrow’s budget. There has been too much deceit, too much obfuscation, too many broken promises and, unfortunately and quite distressingly, too many tragedies. While this government has been busy talking up what an amazing economic manager it is—never mind that economists tell us that our surplus is much more about good luck than good management—health outcomes in Western Australia have declined. We have seen health outcomes decline while the McGowan Labor government’s economic position continues to improve. This raises many questions from the public about how this is so. We see patients stuck in ambulances in hospital driveways; women in labour being shunted between overburdened maternity wards; and children waiting over a year to see specialists, with their wait times blowing out. Our emergency departments are some of the worst performing in the nation. Elective and critical surgery waitlists are blowing out and, tragically, people are dying waiting for surgery. We have multimillion-dollar facilities lying dormant. I asked a question about that in Parliament today and again received an unsatisfactory answer from the Minister for Health. Women with breast lumps are enduring agonising waits for diagnoses. Too many people are dying unnecessarily.

I give credit where credit is due though. Although I stand here today to chronicle some of the government's litany of failures in our health sector, I congratulate the Premier and his team on the rolled-gold state of their spin machine. Any government in the world would be envious of a government that can announce infrastructure and initiatives over and over but actually deliver nothing.

Let us look at the Karratha step-up, step-down mental health facility as an example. Since first being elected in 2017, the McGowan government has issued 13 media statements promising this centre. That has not been 13 mentions in interviews or at doorstops; it has been 13 promises in official media statements—on letterhead, complete with pictures of beaming and young-looking cabinet ministers, and distributed through authorised channels by the Premier's slick spin machine. Time is short, so I will chronicle just a couple of the announcements for a step-up, step-down facility in Karratha: on 7 September 2017, \$12.3 million; on 2 November 2018, a share of \$28 million; on 11 January 2019, a share of \$21 million. The last mention was on 2 May 2022, just about a year ago, when an additional \$1.6 million was pledged for a step-up, step-down facility in Karratha. I will cut to the chase: is there a step-up, step-down facility in Karratha? Has a sod even been turned on this mental health facility? The answer is no. Some might suggest this is an isolated incident, but it is not. We know that the government is very good at building car parks, but it seems that that is about it.

Let us look at the Broome step-up, step-down facility. It has had another 13 slick media statements, but there is still no facility. I do not have time to start on the 2017 election promise that was medi-hotels, but I have flagged this before in this place. In six years, only one of three medi-hotels has been delivered, and that is probably because it only has four beds.

I will now touch on the women's and babies' hospital and the farce around that.

Ms S.E. Winton: It was fully funded.

Ms L. METTAM: It is sitting in a special purpose account.

Ms S.E. Winton: But it is fully funded.

Ms L. METTAM: You are not delivering anything. You are great at announcements but so poor when it comes to —

Ms S.E. Winton: It is paid for. We are not having to borrow more money to pay for it.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr D.A.E. Scaife): Minister!

Ms L. METTAM: The government is so poor when it comes to delivery, particularly in the portfolio that the minister represents. Funding sitting in an account is a far stretch from actually delivering on an election commitment. We are a long way away from that. Over the last four years, we have seen slick media statement after slick media statement announcing King Edward Memorial Hospital will close and the new women's and babies' hospital will be built alongside the Queen Elizabeth II Medical Centre. As I have stated in this place, about six weeks ago the minister also commented on how the women's and babies' hospital would be alongside or at the QEII site. This is on the back of three decades of advice saying that QEII was the right site for the hospital. The government told us that planning was underway, consultation had happened and more than \$1 billion had been allocated to make it happen. It was only in February this year that the minister was telling us, as I have said, how proud she was that Queen Elizabeth II Medical Centre had been chosen as the site for the new women's and babies' hospital, because it would be in close proximity to Perth Children's Hospital, and that would enable easy access by women whose babies needed special care. We now fast-forward to 11 April this year, when the spin machine rolled out and the Premier, along with the Minister for Health, told us that the new women's and babies' hospital would be built in Murdoch, because that would be best for the women and children of Western Australia and for health workers, and apparently also for the budget bottom line. We could not make this up. There was no consultation, no review and no debate. The decision had been made.

The Australian Medical Association has stated that it has never seen health decisions made in this way. Health expert after health expert has come out and slammed this decision. However, clearly neither the Premier nor the Minister for Health has been listening, because apparently they know best. Helping Little Hands, a Perth-based parent-led charity that provides services and advocacy for families with premature and sick babies, has said, and I quote from my notes —

Services and facilities for premature and sick babies must be co-located—the new King Eddies must be built near PCH. Co-location is a global gold standard because you cannot transport tiny critically sick babies without risking bad health outcomes. Without co-location, death and life-long disability rates of our most vulnerable babies will increase.

Karen Simmer, the former head of the King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women neonatal unit, has also slammed the decision. She reluctantly came out and did some media on behalf of clinicians who are unable to speak out because they are currently working within WA Health. She has called the decision dangerous. She has also said much about the fact that we will be moving away from a gold standard in the delivery of care for mums and their newborn babies. There are fears that recovering mothers will be separated from their newborns if those babies require specialist care at Perth Children's Hospital. All the health organisations had been readying themselves for

the new women's and babies' hospital to be located at the site of Perth Children's Hospital. This decision has clearly changed the goalposts. The government is persisting with this decision in the face of criticism from leaders in clinical care who have raised serious potential outcomes for the care of our most vulnerable. The government has done nothing during the past six years. It is now in catch-up mode and is clearly making decisions on the hop.

The reason that the new women's and babies' hospital will be located at Murdoch is apparently related to congestion issues and disruption. It is clearly a decision that does not warrant proper consultation with the clinical experts in the field. I look forward to seeing the business case on this significant U-turn that has taken place in the last six weeks and what the new evidence is. When specialists in this field are raising grave concerns about the potential clinical outcomes of this decision, it raises a question about the worthiness of this decision and the need for this government to provide clarity about it.

There is a pattern here that explains why our health system is teetering on the brink of collapse and is failing not only patients, but also our dedicated health workers. Let us look at the failings. The first is ambulance ramping. It is almost impossible to count the number of times the now former shadow Minister for Health, Roger Cook, talked in the media about the health crisis that he believed existed under the Barnett government. The McGowan government finished last year with the highest ambulance ramping hours on record, over 66 000 hours, or almost seven times greater than the worst figures under the former Barnett government. I would love to know what the former health minister would call 66 000 hours of ambulance ramping when he called 1 030 hours, or the equivalent of almost 10 000 hours a year, a crisis.

The second failure is our underperforming, under-resourced and understaffed emergency departments. Last month, the Australian Medical Association's *Public hospital report card* found that even when Western Australia was relatively COVID free and hospitals in other states were groaning under the weight of COVID admissions, Western Australian hospitals were among the worst performing in the nation. I did enjoy that when I said that Western Australia had seven of the 10 worst performing emergency departments in Australia, the Minister for Health corrected me to say that seven of the eight worst performing EDs are here in Western Australia. This is despite the government being able to artificially lower the wait times in emergency departments by keeping people in ambulances and in hospital driveways, and once those patients finally get to the emergency department, only one in three of those who need urgent care are seen within the recommended 30 minutes. Who does the government blame when it comes to ambulance ramping and these challenges? The government first blamed St John Ambulance, although the pressure has eased off that organisation recently. The government has now turned its attention to our elderly. We are told that they are taking up too many hospital beds and clogging the system. Telling the elderly to refrain from calling an ambulance, and paying nursing homes to take them out of hospital regardless of whether they want to go, certainly raises a number of questions in the health sector. The McGowan government has been asleep at the wheel for the past six years. It has failed to address the core problems of capacity and resourcing in our hospital system.

No debate on the failures of our emergency departments during this term of government could be complete without paying tribute to the memory of Aishwarya Aswath, and to her parents, who had to fight with tooth and nail determination to highlight the understaffing, under-resourcing and inadequate protocols in our hospital system. That is why, very admirably, their campaign has expanded beyond Perth Children's Hospital and they are now seeking an investigation into the running of all our emergency departments.

When it comes to surgery waitlists, this is grist for the mill for the McGowan government's spin team. It is certainly quick to tell members that in March 2022, there were 30 558 cases on the elective surgery waitlist, and by March 2023 that had been reduced to 26 910 cases.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms L. METTAM: There had been a drop in the numbers on the waitlist, but what the government does not spruik about is that of the 30 000 cases on the waitlist, 83 per cent or 25 000 were seen within the recommended time, leaving 4 952 over boundary. Of the 26 910 cases on the waitlist for March 2023, 77.2 per cent were seen within the recommended time, leaving over 6 140 over boundary. We have seen a 25 per cent increase in the number of patients not being seen within the recommended time frame, while the waitlist is apparently getting smaller. Issues with the hidden waitlist are often talked about by the Australian Medical Association, which is the time it takes to actually get an appointment. We see that a greater number of people are not receiving their treatment within the clinically recommended time frame. The system is not performing as it was, even just a year ago.

Wait times at the ninetieth percentile have also increased for category 2 and 3 patients. For category 2 patients the wait time in March 2022 was 161 days; in March 2023, it was 224 days. For category 3 patients, the wait time in March 2022 was 381 days; in March 2023, it was 494 days. As of June last year, more than 1 000 children were waiting too long for their surgery at Perth Children's Hospital—300 more cases than in the previous year. The worst bottleneck was at the children's hospital for ear, nose and throat surgery, with a median wait time of 369 days. It is a similar story for patients needing ENT surgery at Fiona Stanley Hospital, with a wait time of 200 days; at Joondalup Health Campus, with a wait time of 207 days; at St John of God Midland Public Hospital, with a wait time of 235 days and at Peel Health Campus, with a wait of 237 days. Our children cannot wait a year to get their

appointment and hear properly. It will be a pile on of bad news for this government if children have speech problems as a result of not being able to hear properly. The current median wait time to access a paediatrician and a speech pathologist through the metropolitan Child Development Service is 17.8 months—nearly 18 months—up from just over a year in February 2022. Our children deserve better.

Let us look at mental health care in WA. I have already touched on and outlined the sad case of the step-up, step-down facilities in Broome and Karratha. Graylands Hospital is another example of the government knowing better than the health experts. Despite a decade of advice from mental health experts regarding the closure of Graylands, the government announced it would commit \$218 million to repurpose and extend the life of that facility. What happened between now and 2019 when the government committed \$3 million to fund comprehensive planning to decommission the hospital? I can tell the house—probably not that much. All this being said, I certainly hope that we actually start to see some things improve in the health sector going forward.

The Treasurer has already shown his hand on health spending in the upcoming budget. Again, the spin machine went into overdrive last week, announcing a \$1.2 billion investment in health infrastructure. If we dissect that, it turns out that it consisted largely of already announced projects together with normal asset replacement. If we take out last year's allocated budget funding of \$473 million for health capital works for 2023–24, the \$129 million already announced in the midyear review and the \$218 million for Graylands, we are left with \$400 million over four years.

We look forward to what the budget will reveal tomorrow across a range of areas. I have touched on the health portfolio, but there is plenty more to say about it. I know that others will speak on other portfolios as well. There is certainly a mismatch and gap between the strong surplus the government enjoys as a result of the great windfalls to the state from the \$40 billion-plus in royalties over the last five years and the GST fix, and what we are seeing on the ground when speaking to patients and health workers who are working every day whilst dealing with a hospital system under extraordinary pressure.

MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [4.45 pm]: I certainly appreciate the opportunity today to speak on this motion from the Leader of the Opposition that this house calls upon the McGowan Labor government to use the upcoming 2023–24 state budget to address the many failures impacting Western Australian families and households.

As the member for Vasse said, we are looking forward to the budget to see some of the solutions offered. As she said, we have got a government that is big on announcements but very small on delivery. This afternoon I would like to talk a little about housing. I know that we had a matter of public interest on housing yesterday, but from my perspective, it is a real issue in our regional areas. Every member of the opposition has been trying to shine a light on what is happening in housing and some of the issues that are affecting their constituents.

The other thing that I would like to mention is the fantastic job done by the Auditor General in Western Australia. This is the one person who is actually shining a light on the deficiencies of this government without fear or favour. She is going from one thing to another and shining a light on deficiencies, such as the way the Attorney General is handling the Public Trustee or the situation with the rapid antigen tests. Seriously, an enormous amount of money has been spent on RATs—\$580-odd million. As the member for Moore said yesterday, the Geraldton Health Campus and Bunbury Hospital at South West Health Campus could have been fixed five times over with what this government has spent on RATs. All we have got in Geraldton after six years of this government is the car park. It is not good enough. We saw two departments competing to try to purchase RATs. We ended up with a \$581 million bill. As the member for Moore said, most of the RATs will end up on the rubbish tip. From my perspective, I want to congratulate the Auditor General on the excellent job that she is doing in holding the government to account and highlighting some of these deficiencies.

Of course, anything to do with Metronet gets the green light. The Premier says, “Just get it done. Don't worry about how much it costs”. We have seen that blowout from \$3 billion up to \$10 billion and more. The ironic thing about this is that there are developers trying to develop land around the Metronet railway stations. We have heard the Minister for Transport talk about using these hubs time after time. At the same time, today we had the Minister for Energy apologising and explaining why it will take 12 or 15 months to hook up to Western Power. I can only imagine the frustration of the developers out there, trying to get people connected. They get on the home straight, and then Western Power cannot get the job done. The minister spoke today about some of these people being the same, they have not been able to get people to work for them, and so on. Someone in my electorate was trying to start a business dispensing agricultural products out to farmers. They had built the shed, got all the product in there, and what did they get from Western Power? A standard letter, time after time. It took intervention and, eventually, we actually have it connected or well on the way to being connected for this particular season, but it is nearly too late. This is an example of people building things and not being able to get connected to Western Power. That is a real breakdown, and the government needs to address that with the housing scenario in mind, as well.

Last year, the Minister for Housing announced a statewide builders panel to deliver more social housing, and 85 building companies were appointed to the panel. I am wondering whether that panel has delivered on the remit

that it was asked to achieve. In March, the Housing First Homelessness Advisory Group was appointed to support the implementation of *All paths lead to a home: Western Australia's 10-year strategy on homelessness 2020–2030*. I am concerned that that is another strategy by Labor to promise but not deliver. Do those two agencies work together or are they taking a silo approach to this issue? They need to think and act a lot quicker to ensure that Western Australians are given the best chance possible to live safely and prosper in one of the richest states in the world.

We have a scenario in which there is no stock. Certainly, in my electorate of Roe, we have very little stock left. A constituent rang my office in the last couple of days. She is in no-man's-land. She has a disabled son who is five years old and four other children under the age of six. She also cares for three more children who are at risk. She is seeking a house to cater for the children but is not able to find anywhere in social housing. The Housing Authority could not accommodate them as it has no houses that could cater for her disabled son, and the National Disability Insurance Scheme can offer only limited support as the disabled child is not yet six years of age. That is the sort of situation some of our constituents are in. I have written to the minister asking for assistance for this family, but this is a single mother who is caring for eight children with one in a wheelchair who is seeking emergency accommodation, and we have no options left. That is the situation in which I am questioning the government's ability to deliver.

I am also questioning the Bullsbrook facility, which was built during the COVID pandemic, of course, which appears to me to still be empty. I am curious and would like someone to enlighten me on how that is going. I know we have a massive bill each year—I think it is in the order of \$13 million—to maintain that facility. Is that an opportunity?

I refer to a recent Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre report that highlights the issues that we are all familiar with. Some of these were quoted yesterday. Obviously, the interest rate rises, cost of housing and rent increases have made housing less affordable. House rents have risen by 13 per cent over the last year, while unit rents have increased by 13.6 per cent. The report states that new supply will be well below the average for the next two to three years. It states that around 900 social housing dwellings per annum need to be provided just to maintain social housing at its current level as a proportion of total stock. The same report highlights rental affordability deterioration across WA. Over five years, rents have risen by 50 per cent in Broome, 82 per cent in Karratha and 93 per cent in Port Hedland, and greater Perth has seen rents rise by between 28 per cent and 43 per cent in places such as Melville. We have a real problem here. It is a combination of many things, but it is something I am looking forward to seeing the government address in this state budget.

On the radio yesterday morning, a commentator reported on the appearance of tents alongside the road on his morning commute to work. He said that for the richest state in the nation, and apparently the luckiest in the world, this is simply a disgrace. Minister Carey stated on the record earlier this year, in a media statement released on 1 May —

... the McGowan Government's record investment in social housing and homelessness measures, we've added more than 1,200 social homes, with nearly 1,000 social homes currently under contract or construction.

Census data shows that 24 per cent of homeless Western Australians are sleeping rough. That is by far the highest proportion of any state in Australia. At the end of February, the public housing waiting list was 18 963 applications representing 33 884 Western Australians. That is a real concern.

I want to talk about international students and international education, which is in my portfolio. We know that the Premier had his recent well-publicised trip to China, looking at generous incentives for international students to come to WA. We are seeing from the media reports that many of these international students are couch surfing. They are paying thousands in advance to secure a rental and offering much larger rents to secure accommodation. We hear stories of universities that are imploring their staff to take in international students, but it seems a contradictory scenario. We are over there, trying to attract those international students, and let us just hope for the best for somewhere to house them. We saw the story of the young lady from overseas. She was here a couple of years ago; she came back and could not believe the difference. She was caught out and had to go to a youth hostel for a couple of days and try to find somewhere else for another couple of days. She used to share with two or three students. There are many people like her in that same boat. Firstly, they cannot afford accommodation; secondly, there is nowhere to rent. Some of them are paying tuition fees of between \$6 000 and \$28 000 per semester. I think we need to be careful about trying to attract all these students here if they actually have nowhere to live.

I have spoken many a time about regional housing. As I said, in the electorate of Roe, we just do not have any available housing. In fact, we have 15 houses for rent in my whole electorate, which spans 105 000 square kilometres. It goes from Williams–Narrogin right through to Esperance, and we have a grand total of 15 houses. What is happening, of course, is a scenario whereby some of our companies are actually also taking up quite a bit of that stock. In my town of Katanning, we have WAMMCO International, Ausgold and Enel Green Power, which is building the wind farm. They have taken up all this stock. We need some thought about how we can improve the scenario.

The member for Central Wheatbelt has talked many a time about the headworks fund and making more land available to develop housing in our regional towns. Once again, the government announced something a while ago, but it certainly is not having any impact at this stage.

Government Regional Officers' Housing is probably the issue that really worries me above all. We cannot expect our young health professionals, teachers or police to turn up in regional areas if there is no suitable housing for them. That is quite a concern. At the minister's suggestion I have been noting each particular example, because the minister keeps saying to me, "If there's an issue or an example, come and talk to me." That is what I will be doing because we have scenarios with GROH housing and a situation in one of our towns in the great southern in which the shire actually wants to build housing for WA Country Health Service nurses. Land is being held by the Department of Communities and the Department of Housing; there is land available, but it is being withheld when there is a shire council that actually wants to build housing. That is not good enough. I have brought these examples up with the Minister for Housing. He is requesting this, so I will be bringing them up with him again, and I look forward to his responses.

I am looking forward to a couple of other things in the budget. As the Leader of the Opposition pointed out, the government has talked about building new schools. The government made an announcement last week about Rockingham Senior High School and Safety Bay Senior High School. Both were built in the 1970s and it is no doubt necessary to build new campuses, but Esperance Senior High School was built in the 1960s and people in our community have been advocating for upgrades for more than 20 years—and very strongly so over the last couple of years. I am involved with that community advocacy group. We saw the Premier and the Minister for Education turn up in Rockingham and Safety Bay last week, the week before the budget, to announce investment of \$100 million in those two schools. Members can imagine what the Esperance community is saying about that on social media. They are hopeful that there will be something for them in tomorrow's budget, but I am not going to hold my breath. There are approximately 1 000 students at Esperance Senior High School but the campus has several issues, including concrete cancer, issues with stairwells and issues with classrooms.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Kids actually do not want to go to the toilet there during the day because the facilities are not up to scratch. I certainly would not run down any investment in the high schools in Safety Bay or Rockingham—funny enough, the Premier's electorate—but it is time that the whole state was treated equally. We have a school in Esperance that was built nearly a decade before the schools in Rockingham and Safety Bay, so members will understand why the people of Esperance are asking, "Where do we come into this?" The infrastructure division of the Department of Education told us that it needed to do a statewide audit to see how these facilities fit in with the statewide situation, but then we saw the Premier and the Minister for Education in Rockingham and Safety Bay last week making that announcement. I look forward to hearing the Premier announce something for Esperance Senior High School in tomorrow's budget, but I will not hold my breath, that is for sure.

On the subject of education, we have some real issues. A lot of our teachers have said, "I've had enough." They have not been looked after by this government over the last six years. They have had to go to war every time they have asked for a pay rise, and that is happening throughout the public sector. A lot of teachers have now got to the point at which they are saying, "I've had enough. I'm out. It's not worth it." That is putting pressure on the whole sector and we had to bring education trainees in last year to supplement the teaching situation. I think there was something in the order of 672 trainees last year. That is putting pressure on the system.

I also want to mention the revolving door of leadership in some of our schools. I have spoken about this many times. There are situations in which there have been six or seven different principals at a school over a three or four-year period, while there is a substantive principal who held the role six years ago but has gone off to perhaps another couple of schools, but they still hold that substantive role. I have spoken to the Minister for Education and the director general about this. It is something that needs to be addressed. It is probably not necessarily a budget issue, but there is a revolving door of leadership in our metropolitan and country schools, and that is a real issue.

We have a shortage of police, nurses and teachers. I look forward to further measures in the state budget to deal with some of those issues. As I said, I very much look forward to an announcement on Esperance Senior High School, which is of the same vintage as the high schools in Rockingham and Safety Bay, but I will not hold my breath. I will be watching very closely tomorrow. I am pleased to see the Minister for Education wandering in as I talk about looking forward to Esperance Senior High School receiving some funding in tomorrow's budget, similar to that of the Rockingham and Safety Bay Senior High Schools. I will be sitting here at two o'clock tomorrow watching closely to see the results in the state budget for my regional constituents and Esperance constituents.

MS S.F. McGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Training) [5.07 pm]: I want to address some of the issues raised by the opposition. I first of all point out to the house how broad this motion is. It states —

That this house calls upon the McGowan Labor government to use the upcoming 2023–24 state budget to address the many failures impacting Western Australian families and households.

Now members opposite make absolutely no bones about keeping their resolutions very, very broad, because that has been the nature of their contributions across the board, whether in private members' business, suspensions of standing orders or matters of public interest. They have ranged far and wide in their contributions, and there is absolutely no discipline or focus. I have made the point before that, to my mind, that speaks to what members

opposite are like as an opposition and what they would be like in government—ill-focused and ranging far and wide over a number of different topics but offering no solutions to the issues confronting Western Australia as a modern community and economy. Members opposite have made no bones about that this time; they have made their resolution incredibly broad.

Despite that, I was a bit surprised when the Leader of the Opposition sat down after a contribution of about 22 minutes. It was a very, very light touch from the Leader of the Opposition. Notwithstanding the broad scope of what the opposition has described as the many government failures impacting upon WA families and households, the Leader of the Opposition spoke for only about 22 or 23 minutes. It was a very woeful contribution from the Leader of the Opposition and one that he should be ashamed of. I had to smile when his deputy, Peter Rundle, talked about one person shining a light on the government—that being the Auditor General. I am not sure what that says about members of the opposition. That was a little embarrassing. It seems to me that the member for Roe walked into it.

I will talk about the achievements of the McGowan government, because there is a lot to talk about. That is not to say that we are insensitive to or unaware of the challenges that face Western Australians who might be struggling. We live in a modern economy that does well at times, but at other times there are downturns. There are times when the economy is going well, but the other side of the coin is that there can be inflationary pressures and pressures to have enough labour to do the work that is available. There are inflationary pressures that affect housing and the cost of food and services. Other jurisdictions in Australia and modern economies across the world are facing these challenges and trying to get the balance right.

On balance, under the leadership of the Premier, we have a state government that is managing all those challenges as well as could possibly be expected, and, in fact, better than that. We are performing well in the face of a number of global challenges, global headwinds and, at times, national challenges. I want to talk about some of the achievements, because I think our government should be pleased about them. As I said, that is not because we are insensitive to the challenges that are facing Western Australians, but we are doing our best to come up with and implement practical solutions to address those challenges. That is in sharp contrast to the opposition, which is quick to point out failures, but is not especially focused or systematic in pointing out those failures, and very short on solutions. The practical policies and initiatives that members opposite would put in place to resolve the pressures that are facing the state are very thin on the ground.

Let us look at what the McGowan government has achieved since coming to office. I want to focus particularly on the number of Western Australians in work. This is not a cliché. It is absolutely true that the best we can do for Western Australians is to provide work for them—to provide them with well-paid and secure jobs around the state. We need to get people who are facing hardship, those who have struggled to participate in the labour market, young people who are struggling at school and are having difficulty getting into the workforce, the long-term unemployed, older workers, women who are trying to re-enter the workforce and people with disabilities into training or into the workforce. The best thing the government can do is facilitate those people getting into work to give them their own income and to give them a relationship with an employer that they can hopefully keep to give them experience in the workforce. At the moment, we have a record 1.53 million Western Australians in work, the highest ever number of people in full-time work in this state, with over 218 000 jobs being created since Labor came to office in 2017. I am incredibly proud to be part of a government that has achieved that. That is no mean feat. We are not only making sure that people are in jobs, but also focusing our programs and effort on those people who need some extra assistance, and I will talk about that a bit more in a moment.

We have reduced debt by one-third to \$29.2 billion. That is absolutely remarkable. These are not theoretical figures; these are practical figures, which means that our credit rating stays high and any interest that we pay on debt is low, and it gives us the capacity to invest further in our state. In 2021–22 alone, debt reduced by \$4.3 billion, the largest decline in debt on record. We just have to compare that with what is happening in other states. In New South Wales alone, debt will more than triple to \$133.7 billion by 2024–25. The last coalition government left that state in debt. This sort of economic performance by our state is a remarkable achievement, and I know that the Premier and Treasurer is proud to be paying down debt at the same time, as he should be.

I talked about the savings in debt. By paying down the debt that was accrued under the coalition government, Western Australians have been saved more than \$2.5 billion in interest costs in our first four years alone. That is a massive saving. It means that we have been able to put money aside to pay for the women's and children's hospital. We have put \$2 billion aside to pay for the next desalination plant. We are able to invest in a number of infrastructure projects and also targeted programs that members will hear more about in tomorrow's budget.

Finally on our achievements, I was looking at some of the commentary. In February this year, S&P Global Ratings released its half-yearly report and said that Western Australia's budgetary performance is superior to that of most domestic and global peers and that Western Australia's debt-to-revenue ratio should decline over the next few years in stark contrast to the rising debt of many peers. In March this year, the chief economist with our friends at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia, Aaron Morey, is reported to have said —

“The world economy teeters on a knife edge ...

“Western Australia is one of the most trade-exposed economies in the world—its businesses cannot hide from these global factors.

“Against this backdrop, Western Australia’s economic fundamentals remain as solid as ever.

“Our domestic economy is now 12 per cent bigger than it was pre-COVID and the number of West Australians in full-time work continues to grow.

I think members would agree that they are very solid bouquets from organisations that are not usually inclined to give Labor governments bouquets.

On the broad economic metrics, they are some fantastic outcomes and that means that we are able to deliver in targeted areas, whether it is in infrastructure spend, education, health, community services or supporting vulnerable Western Australians. We will hear more about that in government members’ contributions today, but also in the state budget tomorrow.

Yesterday in the debate, the Leader of the Liberal Party made the comment that there had been a 17 per cent reduction in vocational training over the first three years of the McGowan government. It was a bit of a throwaway line, but it piqued my interest because I was not aware that that was the case. She was making reference to changes in the skilled migration program that took place when we first came to office. I want to repeat her claim: there had been a 17 per cent reduction in training over the first three years of the McGowan government. In the last week of sitting, we had a debate about challenging these lofty claims by the opposition. We said that there needs to be a bit of stress testing of some of its claims because they do not always stack up. If the Leader of the Liberal Party is listening somewhere—she is not in the chamber right now—I am interested in exactly where she got that figure from.

Ms M.J. Davies: Shall we mention how many of your members aren’t in the chamber?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am just making the point that she is not here, but I am putting it out there.

Ms M.J. Davies: It is unparliamentary and it is not convention, minister, and you know it.

Ms S.F. McGURK: There is a reasonable number of our members in the chamber. The Leader of the Liberal Party made a claim, but I do not know where she got that figure from. I cannot see it in any published data from the Department of Training and Workforce Development. In fact, my information is that despite woeful vocational training figures under the previous government, largely driven by massive increases in the fees for vocational training, VET student numbers actually increased by two per cent, from 90 500 in 2017 to 92 500 in 2020. Under the previous Liberal government, the number of publicly funded VET students decreased by a staggering 22 per cent from 2013 to 2017. As I said before, 22 per cent is a massive decline, and it was largely driven by huge fee increases implemented under the previous government. In sharp contrast, we have had a massive program of, first of all, freezing TAFE fees and, then, subsidising or reducing TAFE or vocational training fees. The best example of that is the fee-free courses. In 2023, there are 130 free courses. They are either full courses or skill sets. It is a fantastic outcome. In fact, student numbers have continued to grow, with the number of publicly funded VET students increasing by almost 14 per cent from 2017 to the end of last year. We are very proud of that record.

I want to give some examples of what a constructive and targeted approach to fee relief means to people taking up training. We have slashed TAFE fees by up to 72 per cent for 210 courses in priority industries. I know that these headline figures do not mean that much, but their impact was recently brought home to me when I looked at the course fees for building surveyors. The Western Australian Local Government Association came to see me and said, “We have a dearth of building surveyors and we need people to undertake that training and then come and work for us, because the knock-on effect is that it is holding up approvals, and we really need to address that.” I was interested to know how much it would cost for a person to get an advanced diploma of building surveying. It costs \$2 400 under our Lower Fees, Local Skills program. Do members know how much that advanced diploma was under the coalition government? It was \$12 449. That is incredible. Let us look at the advanced diploma of engineering technology—electrical. Under our government, it is \$3 149. Under the previous government, it was \$11 256. How can we expect people to be motivated to do an advanced diploma of engineering technology to get the advanced skills that we need when it costs over \$11 000? Another good example is the diploma of building construction at TAFE. Under our government, that costs \$1 976. Under the previous government, it was over \$7 000 for the same course. For the three of examples I have given, the fees people will pay in 2023 are lower than they were 10 years ago, in 2013. We are incentivising people to undertake those important strategic courses by making them available with heavily discounted fees.

The state government is very proud of the fee-free courses in particular. They came about as a result of a partnership with the federal government. The federal budget delivered last night contains a commitment to more fee-free courses over the next two years, and we look forward to partnering with the federal government. It is really exciting that two-thirds of the fee-free courses for 2023 have been taken up by women, and the number one course is early childhood education and care, which is a key area of skills demand and enables women with families to get into work in not only the metro area, but also regional areas. Again, that is the sort of targeted work we are doing to address some of the concerns we are hearing from people in the regions.

My portfolio has also announced an \$11 million subsidy program for the next two years to support WA construction businesses to employ overseas skilled workers. It is not something we did lightly; we would very much prefer to train locals. We are doing that. We are undertaking training of the building and construction workforce but we need people to complete existing builds and build houses now. We are confident the program will deliver about 1 100 workers over the next couple of years so that we can get those buildings finished. We also have incentives of \$2 000 and another \$500 for equipment for construction work apprentices to finish their apprenticeship over the next financial year. There is a \$5.9 million incentive package for regional students who might need to leave their town to do off-the-job training, or classroom training, if you like, and for diploma of nursing students—that is, enrolled nurses—to do placements outside of their town when there are no placements for them in their town. I was in Port Hedland with the Minister for Health and the member for Pilbara to make that announcement, and it was fantastic to see the diploma of nursing students at Port Hedland TAFE. Some of them are on Teams and doing remote learning.

There is some really great equipment. The member for Pilbara and I were able to see some of the work on the \$43 million upgrade we are making to Port Hedland TAFE. There are massive upgrades in TAFE infrastructure around the state. Again, that is something I am very proud of. It began under the former Minister for Education and Training and it is going to be a game changer for so many regional TAFEs that provide vocational training opportunities. There is \$11 million for Albany, \$10 million for Kalgoorlie and, as I said, \$43 million for Port Hedland. When I was in Geraldton recently, the TAFE took delivery of three huge pieces of earthworking equipment—a bulldozer and two other big pieces of equipment—as part of a \$1 million investment in infrastructure. The three pieces of equipment will make a huge difference to civil construction training at that TAFE. We are investing in the ability for regional Western Australians to train in these very accessible and important jobs. We are also listening to what communities need and undertaking really detailed communications in regional areas. As the relatively new Minister for Training, it has been fantastic to see.

I want to speak briefly about hardship, particularly utilities. The Minister for Community Services is in the chamber, and I am sure she will address this issue as well. When I was Minister for Community Services, one of my favourite events every year was the financial counsellors dinner. I had to leave early because they really start to move it on the dance floor, and if you are not careful, you get pulled into it. It is great to see people who work around the state to not only address people's immediate need for assistance, but also give them the tools to get their head above water when it comes to their finances. I think the reform we have seen in the Water Corporation and our power utilities is another example of the government not only providing assistance, but also driving reform to change the capacity of the utilities, in this case, to properly understand what hardship means for customers and to try to address that hardship in a more constructive way. In fact, I was at the Water Authority's customer service centre in Balcatta this morning to learn about the sort of work the authority has been doing to really understand why customers are not able to pay their bills. A co-payment has been incentivised. An example is that customers will get a discount on their bill if they are able to make some contribution over one year, and if they are able to make a contribution over two years, all past debt will be cancelled.

We are not only keeping our utility increases modest and in line with inflation, but also driving reform within our utilities to get some really good outcomes. I have pointed out before the increases we saw under the previous coalition government. In the first six years of the Barnett government, water charges went up 52.8 per cent. In the first six years of the McGowan government, they have gone up 18 per cent. It is a massive difference. In terms of a mean-spirited approach to families doing it tough, the previous government restricted the water of more than 200 families a month because they were not able to pay their bills. In this financial year, just 338 restrictions have applied over the whole year. We are taking the time to get utilities to understand why people are in hardship and to have a relationship with them to try to address those issues. I am really proud of the work this government is doing.

There are many more things I could talk about. As I said at the beginning, members of the opposition have ranged far and wide in addressing this issue. Leader of the Opposition, I am not quite sure what the Landgate land sale in Midland had to do with families experiencing hardship; I could not make that connection. I noted the member for Roe's comments about the distribution of rapid antigen tests. Despite his complaints about free RATs, he was not afraid to promote them on his social media. I had a quick look and found that he was very happy to give them out, as he should be; they were publicly available and we wanted to get them out to people. The member for Roe was very happy to promote that program and did not make a peep about how the McGowan government should not have purchased those RATs. He was very happy to put his name and face to the free distribution of RATs.

DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe) [5.32 pm]: I rise to support this excellent motion from the Leader of the Opposition —

That this house calls upon the McGowan Labor government to use the upcoming 2023–24 state budget to address the many failures impacting Western Australian families and households.

Of course, what the government does covers many areas. I was interested to hear the Minister for Water complain that we were ranging far and wide, but the trouble is that the failings of this government range far and wide. The government is determined to increase union membership by bringing enormous cost-saving contracts in-house,

such as in the Water Corporation—two per cent year-on-year cost savings over the previous contract. I will be fascinated to find out during estimates just how much that has cost the state of Western Australia. The government buys union membership by using public money.

Ms S.F. McGurk: We are giving people secure jobs.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am glad government members have become animated! The Premier of the state of Western Australia claims a degree of omnipotence. He is an expert on foreign affairs, he gives guidance to the Prime Minister and others, and he loves to lecture the other state Premiers about what they should be doing. We saw a lot of that during COVID, when he used his considerable wealth —

Mr P. Lilburne interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am even-handed here. During the last federal election, both leaders of the major parties were pretty keen to be seen with the Western Australian Premier and to get photos with him, but it appears that he is not able to influence his federal colleagues very much at all now. Once they had used his star power to get elected, they are quite happy to ignore —

Mr P.J. Rundle: Certainly not on live export!

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes. There a few areas, member. Live exports are certainly very high on that list. Almost 98 per cent of the trade out of Western Australia will get hammered by the Premier's federal colleagues, despite him saying that he thinks it should be okay. The power credit being given to the rest of Australia is \$500 a household but Western Australian households will get only \$350. I will talk a little about the resource rent tax increase. We are told that some money from the \$2 billion hydrogen fund may come to Western Australia, but there will be nothing for Western Australia from the other renewables fund; that will come in the future. But the federal government is happy to apply the resource rent tax. Members might not think that it is a great deal of money, but the problem with the Premier's inability to influence his federal colleagues in these matters is that this will affect households in Western Australia as it will affect the perception of Western Australia and Australia as an increased sovereign risk. This is something that did not get too many headlines but there was a good article in *The West Australian* of 6 May that outlined that Western Australia had lost its top ranking as the world's top-rated mining investment jurisdiction, having been displaced by Nevada. I am not sure how many members have had anything to do with getting mining up in the United States, but it has not typically been the best place in the world to do it. However, the US has taken the bit between its teeth because it wants to encourage mining for the renewables revolution that is going on. WA has been displaced by Nevada due to that sovereign risk. The head of Mitsui came out and expressed severe warnings about what is happening in Australia, particularly at the federal level. The head of Chevron also expressed those difficulties. That will ultimately impact all Western Australians; that is the reality.

The reason Western Australia has been able to bankroll the rest of Australia and the reason the government has enjoyed record surpluses on top of the GST fix has been the dividend from mining. That is all it is. I will not go through this now because I will have a chance to go through it in my budget reply speech, but the arithmetic is pretty straightforward. I am fascinated to hear the boasting on the other side about the great job the government has done managing the economy. What a joke! It is due only to windfall profits that had nothing to do with the government's actions whatsoever. This government has reneged on its promise to pay down debt; that was the promise of previous Treasurer Ben Wyatt before he came into office. He promised to pay down debt but the government has reneged on that. It should have paid down debt by over \$20 billion under that promise.

Several members interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: That is true. We will go through this.

Ms S.E. Winton: Whose debt is it?

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am glad members opposite are all getting engaged.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms A.E. Kent): Thank you, minister. Member for Cottesloe, I am assuming that you are taking interjections.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am glad to see members on the other side enlivened and participating.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I am just asking, because if you are giving it out, you have to take it.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am glad to see that they are enlivened —

Several members interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I might say that the Minister for Water did not mind dishing it out, and uncharacteristically so I thought. Nevertheless, she was clearly invigorated to do that.

The budget covers many areas. There are straight cost-of-living areas over which the government has direct control, such as many of our critical utilities. Is the government creating a future for the state? It is all right enjoying the wealth that we have now, but is there something meaningful for the future? If we look at the future of the state—

I will not go into this in great depth—we see that the government has simply failed in the area of housing. As I pointed out yesterday, one of the reasons Western Australians are suffering such hardship is that they cannot afford housing, whether a rental or their own home. The government's solution is to shove everyone in high-rise apartments; it thinks that is a solution to the housing problem in Perth. The problem is that the government wants to do that in my electorate so that all the millionaires' kids can have somewhere to live. Millionaires' kids have got to live somewhere, but I can tell members that that is not helping the housing crisis in their areas. Do government members remember their Metronet housing policy? What a complete and abject failure! They were going to have appropriate high-rise affordable apartments at all Metronet stations. Do they have one? No. Paul Blackburne is building some apartments in my area. In case the new Minister for Community Services is thinking that she will be able to pick up one of those apartments, I am told that a one-bedroom ground-floor apartment will cost \$800 000. The apartments at the top of each of the two towers will cost \$20 million apiece. Perhaps the government should look at that if it is seeking to provide social housing diversity. Perhaps members who are on the old parliamentary superannuation scheme could get into one of those, but I do not think many other people will be able to do that. What a farce that that will be a solution to the housing problem in Perth.

I now want to get onto the substantive debate. I first want to talk about energy. Yes, one factor is the cost of energy, but another critical factor is the reliability of energy. We are going through an energy transition. I think the public debate is well past about whether there is a driving force to do that. I am not entering that debate. However, meaningful plans need to be put in place for that. In relation to the level of investment that this state and this government will need to make, the Minister for Energy said today that most of this burden will have to be carried by the private sector. Indeed, the minister is correct. People talk about decarbonising our state electricity network—at least as it is. That network provides only 12 per cent of the total energy consumed in this state. That is not a simple task but it is relatively straightforward compared with the other 88 per cent that will have to be done by the private sector. Net Zero Australia released some information lately that said that the cost of the energy transition in Australia to go to net zero by 2060 would be between \$7 trillion and \$9 trillion. Net Zero Australia is a collaboration between the University of Melbourne, the University of Queensland and Princeton University, and Nous Group, which I understand is a well-regarded consultancy. Let us say the cost is \$8 trillion. That will mean that around \$3 trillion will need to be spent in Australia to achieve the federal government's 43 per cent carbon reduction target with renewables. The cost for Western Australia will be about a \$360 billion spend to 2030. This is a separate debate, but the level of investment that will be required is breathtaking.

The minister said today that the private sector and government will have to pick that up. None of the numbers that will be required in this state have been reported. In particular, no-one has talked about the magnitude of that task for the state. The minister has said blithely that we will need all these new power connections. For example, we will desperately need a 33-kilovolt line from Three Springs to Geraldton if the Oakajee hydrogen project is ever to take off. The minister has said that the private sector is going to pick that up. I think that is a fantasy. The state government will have to pick up the tab for a lot of that core infrastructure and perhaps try to recover that later through tariffs and other things. I will be fascinated to see what allowance will be made in the budget to allow for that future.

I will go back to one of the problems that we have seen. The report of the independent review into the Christmas outages in 2020 said that the data over a four-year period shows a materially worsening customer outage experience trend in the CBD and rural areas. There was supposed to be a plan. We still have not seen the detail of that plan. The minister has said that things are being done. I will be interested to know what future investment the government intends to make to deal with that issue. It is an enormous challenge. In this case, we are not talking about expanding the network. We are simply talking about returning the network to the condition that it was in. It is worrying, as I have mentioned before, that there has been a material deterioration in the ageing of equipment in the zero-to-five-year category. That means that during the five-year period that is mentioned in the report, which occurred almost exclusively under this government, new investment was not coming in. Therefore, the equipment was getting older, and, when equipment gets older, it is less reliable. I hope to see in the budget coming up that there are plans around that.

When we talk about the move to a renewables future in this state, the minister is talking about his own network and his plans. The minister has said that the government has detailed plans. However, we still have not seen those detailed plans. One of the things that surprised me a bit is that we have been told no worries; it is all going to go ahead; the government is on track to achieve the goals that it has set for this state and will shut down the Collie coal-fired power stations by 2029 and it will all be managed. However, the working group that is carrying out the detailed review on future energy needs has only just reported. I cannot see how the minister can have a detailed plan to deal with these problems when he has only just received the report that details the needs into the future. I think the minister was trying to imply that the government has the state side under its belt, and it is now looking at industry, which provides, let us face it, the wealth that pays our bills and supports the wellbeing and livelihood of the people of this state, to play its part. That really disturbs me.

As I have said, this is another separate debate. Members know that I am a technical person by trade. I am a farmer by birth, so I am also a practical person. I love to get involved in the debate about the sexy bits of this transition

and all the technology, because it is fascinating and interesting. However, if we do the arithmetic about the amount of money that will need to be spent and look at the capacity of the economy to fund that expense, and also to provide the engineers and procure the equipment and so on, we realise that it is an impossible task. It might be a desirable goal, but the target that has been set is impossible to achieve. I appreciate that this is coming from the government's federal colleagues, but the penalty for not achieving this goal will be a massive carbon tax, and that is going to hurt us.

Dr A.D. Buti: You talk about being a technical person. Did you do that technical research when you released your energy policy before the last election?

Dr D.J. HONEY: I did look at that. I will explain that, member. As the member knows, it is a matter of history. There were parts of that policy that I did not support.

Several members interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I know that there are members in this chamber who do not agree with the government on this. We all talk privately. I will not repeat any private conversations in this chamber, but I can say honestly that there are policies on the other side that I know some government members opposite have severe doubts about, but they are not going to say that publicly, and the member knows that. The member has made his point.

I think that would be achievable for the electricity network on the technical side, but only with gas backup. Gas backup is critical. The challenge for the Minister for Energy in closing the coal-fired power stations is that we will need to make a major investment in the gas pipeline. That pipeline is now private, but if the government does not work with the private sector to increase the capacity of that pipeline, we will not be able to make up the energy difference. Batteries are good fun and are important in providing some control of the network, but they cannot provide standard backup. I also do not believe that pumped hydro will ever be viable, particularly in the proposal that was made for Collie.

Ms S.E. Winton: Are you working on a new energy policy for 2025?

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am sure that the new shadow Minister for Energy will have a brand spanking new shiny policy that will delight the member.

Ms S.E. Winton: Will you have input?

Dr D.J. HONEY: I will be working diligently with him to achieve that.

This is a ridiculous situation. The minister made an announcement on Tuesday about the \$7.3 million fund put aside to help the coalmines in Collie. I will be fascinated to see how much more money is put aside to support Griffin Coal in the coming budget.

[Member's time extended.]

Dr D.J. HONEY: That funding is going to be critical. What a ridiculous situation, as I said, with the government talking about budgets. It will not help people in Western Australia if the government fails to realise that the coalmine is falling over.

Ms J.L. Hanns: You were in the shire last week.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I was down there two weeks ago, member. I am impressed by the optimism in the community about what is being done. I am very impressed by what is being done on the main street.

Ms J.L. Hanns: Yes, because the McGowan government has done it.

Dr D.J. HONEY: No, I do not say that the government does nothing. The facelift of the main street of Collie is great. There is a lot of optimism. I am happy to talk to the member for Collie–Preston privately, but the optimism around the magnesium smelter is interesting. It is a really interesting project.

Ms J.L. Hanns: We worked hard for that.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I will talk to the member privately about that.

The probability that that will deliver on the schedule that has been promised to the community is impossible. I say that as someone who has had 24 years' experience in heavy industry and the manufacturing industry. This process manufactures a metal at a one-kilogram scale. To say that by 2029 it will deliver that as a 100 000 tonnes per annum operating refinery is fanciful. I am happy to look into that more. If the member for Collie–Preston can disabuse me of that fact, I would be delighted, but I have considerable experience in this area. We heard the Minister for Mines and Petroleum talk about his political experience today. In the heavy manufacturing industry and in developing processes into a manufacturing process, I have a lot of experience.

Ms S.E. Winton: Will you go back to it soon?

Dr D.J. HONEY: I will! I am happy to go back. I like Collie. I like Professor Li's new waste-to-energy plant. I think that is good technology. Again, I am concerned about the commissioning of that. I am concerned about the support that he will get for commissioning for that process. It is a real challenge for the government.

As I said, I will be looking in the budget, because the numbers count for what the Premier, or at least the government, is going to do. If the reliance for Collie is on the smelter and it picks up those skilled manufacturing jobs in the time frame that the government has announced, I think that would be extraordinary. I will be honest: I think it is unachievable. I am happy to be disabused of that fact. No-one would be more delighted than me if that was correct. I love manufacturing and I think it is a wonderful way to give people high-quality jobs. If I am wrong, I will not be disappointed; I will be pleased. But I am genuinely concerned for the township of Collie that the time line for that project is way too optimistic. It does not reflect the reality of developing new projects. This government has enjoyed great bounties, and it is important that the money is invested in the community in the best way.

As I said, I will be interested in the energy portfolio to see what amount of money will be put into subsidising households. I do not have time to go through this, because I want other members to have a chance to make their contribution, but under this government we have seen the average debt owed to Synergy double. It has gone up by 93 per cent under this government. Despite the one-off payments that have been made, those underlying charges have been going up and up, and we have seen an almost doubling of the average debt, without any significant change in the number of disconnections. What I dislike about untargeted relief, Minister for Community Services, is that it appears that the broader part of the community is getting by, but that section who cannot pay their bills are getting further and further behind. We have the prospect and hear the Premier saying he is going to give a rebate. I assume that the state government will give everyone \$150 on top of the \$350 federal rebate. Nigel Satterley will get that state government rebate, meanwhile people who are doing it tough are not getting the support that they need. I will be looking at this budget with interest. I think the optimism around the energy transition is overly optimistic and it needs substantial government support, particularly with relief to households that need it. I will be looking to see whether there is targeted relief in the budget.

MS M. BEARD (North West Central) [5.54 pm]: I rise to support the motion and, clearly, I will talk from a regional perspective about many of the challenges faced by people across the state. From the outset, I would like to say something that has been flagged in this house during this debate. It is not always criticism; it is observation. We live a long way from the city and sometimes it is difficult for people to understand what might be happening on the ground. Some of what this side of the house says is actually lived experience and maybe something can be taken out of that. When I raised the issues in the north west and across my towns early on, the Minister for Police was happy to tell me there were no problems. I am glad to see that they have actually been recognised. Bear with me.

Right now, the retention of population in the regions is critical. Some of the deficits and shortfalls impact that significantly. We have been raising these issues for a long time. If we look across the region and at the retention of people in towns, we see that it is the small things that make people say, “I’ve had enough and I’m out”, and some of those things are what people in the metropolitan area take for granted. I have lived in the metro area; it is very different. People whom we expect to attract to the regions will definitely need these incentives to travel to the regions. It is important, given that many regional areas provide a lot of income to the state. Mining, agriculture, the tourism industry and the promotion of these areas are very critical to our state and are what we need to nurture, particularly for very small businesses in regions. It is tough. As I have said before, people do not expect the world in the regions, but they expect a level of services and facilities along the way.

One thing that is really important across the state is law and order. I worked in Perth 18 months ago, on a contract. I caught the bus every day from the city. What dawned on me was that it is no different from where I come from. It is exactly the same. People are sleeping and drinking in the street, the same things are happening in the street, and children are in the street as well. I understand that this is a statewide issue. I am acutely aware of that. In the regions it is exacerbated because populations are smaller. In the city we do not see it. In the country we see it. Despite that, it is often a very small portion of the population.

It is well known that the issues associated with crime are complex. It is becoming increasingly more prevalent. When I speak to people in my family who are a lot older than me, what is going on now would never have happened in their generation, and what happened in their generation would never have happened in the generation before. We have had a significant shift or change in behaviour. Whether it is our lifestyles, expectations or education, I am unsure what that might be, but that tells me that we need to change the way we are doing things and we need to look from a different view at what is happening. Significant drugs obviously contribute. I hope that there will be something in the budget that will beef up the drug and alcohol services that we already have. Restrictions across the regions will clearly need more resources, and we will need to beef those up. I hope that will be addressed as a priority, along with mental health services, because as everyone knows, they go hand in hand.

With the changes in law and order that have occurred in our communities and across our regions and cities, we cannot keep doing what we have done in the past. Everyone knows that it is just not working. I understand that the police are responsible for dealing with a lot of what goes on, particularly with young people, and they do an amazing, wonderful job, but it is a 24/7 job and they are not social workers. I speak to police officers on the ground all the time when they are walking the beat late at night. They are trying to be all things to all people. They do an amazing job. I think that resourcing for departments like the Department of Communities is really important and programs are really important, and I hope that more funding will come that way as well.

The previous minister advised me that the 24/7 crisis helpline is something that we need to use in the regions. I recently had to call the 24/7 crisis line, and there was no answer in our local office. I rang Geraldton and was lucky enough to get hold of someone there with whom I had a previous connection who gave me the 24/7 number. I reported the incident and asked, “Can you give me a number? If something happens over the weekend, I’d like to be able to refer to it.” That did not happen and I never heard back. That concerns me. It may be resourcing—I do not know—but I think these sorts of issues need to be looked at, because that is the only life line for someone who is outside the metro area if things go pear-shaped.

Mr P. Papalia: Are you talking about police?

Ms M. BEARD: I am talking about child protection. I have had people come in and see me, and that has been my only avenue, and the police have advised me to call them as well. We can improve on that. I understand that there is always room for improvement.

There is definitely a heightened need for these services. With the justice system the way it is, there is a complete lack of accountability and consequences for some of these offenders. People who have offended dozens of times are still offending. We saw what happened recently at the detention centre, which I think is indicative of the behaviour at the moment.

I have an article here that shows that back in October, there was a \$63 million pledge by the government, of which \$39.9 million was to deliver infrastructure upgrades to Banksia Hill Detention Centre; \$10 million was to expand mental health services, which were discussed; and \$22 million was to go towards staffing for Banksia Hill. I agree that this cannot come fast enough. We have a massive problem here. The Premier himself has advised that we have to deal with people who are behaving in an antisocial way. It is impacting everyone. It is impacting communities, towns and cities. Dr Fiona Stanley called for a whole-of-government youth strategy with cabinet oversight—I think there is merit in that—to convene a task force of Aboriginal leaders to help develop changes in the youth justice system. That is probably needed holistically across the board. I hope that there is some progress in that as well.

I refer to education for these kids and young people. Some of these kids have not been to school for a long time. We need to be creative about that. I sometimes speak with teachers on the ground in the north and they continually tell me that they are unsure; they sometimes do not feel safe; they are being held to ransom and are being threatened. There are lockdowns in schools. One teacher’s husband told me that he sometimes expects that he will have to pick his wife up from the hospital. Clearly, I spoke to him on a bad day. We really need to turn this upside down. Kalbarri lost its police and community youth centre building in the cyclone. It is desperate to get that back. Exmouth and Meekatharra do not have PCYC venues anymore. These services are really important, even for towns that are not in crisis. Meekatharra, in particular, definitely needs this service. If we have these things there all along, we will mitigate the issue rather than trying to deal with it once it has cropped up.

This growing issue that I am referring to compounds into a lot of other areas. Housing is another issue that we come up against all the time. We can attract workers, but then we do not have housing for them. I hope there will also be something in the budget to address that and to lessen that load. The workers’ accommodation in Kalbarri and Exmouth has not progressed. That is a desperate need for those communities. If they are going to grow, develop and move forward, the infrastructure is critical. Maybe we will get a nice surprise on Thursday on that as well.

I refer to crime. I make no apologies: I will continue to raise this matter for not just the regions but also the city. Many people are impacted by crime. There are lots of instances across the state of crime and antisocial behaviour that is impacting people in a negative way. I think there is a dire need for intervention and a collaborative approach across agencies and with community leaders. An example is the banned drinkers register that has been implemented. That is fabulous, but there has been a call from our side for legislative changes for many, many months to make that more flexible, more targeted and more proportionate. It is good to see that that has arrived. In many towns, these issues are caused by a minority of the population. This is going to be a step in the right direction to try to deal with the small cohort of people that cause a lot of these issues.

There are dysfunctional and disengaged people who wander the streets—as I said, even in Perth—and we need to work out how we can manage that. Safe houses are something that I have bleated on about in here for a long time. A safe house where kids can sleep and have a meal will be an essential way to turn the dial and at least get those kids to school, so I hope that funding will be made available for safe houses. I know that there are places in Perth; I think we need more across the regions. I do not think there are many. There is one underway in the north west. The situation is dire and we need to have safe houses as soon as we possibly can. Let us hope that pops up in the budget as well.

Today I touched on street lights. I link this to crime, as well, because street lighting is really important. I would hate to see shires start to turn their lights off if they do not have LED lighting and the cost kicks in. Lighting makes an enormous difference. I have experienced it firsthand with the lighting where I live. I know it makes a difference. It is really important for the government to pursue that aspect.

Other programs have been slow to come on. Target 120 is coming into play and has been for quite a long time. We need to also work on other strategies, as I say, like getting PCYC programs up across those towns, working together

with other groups and getting safe houses into place so that we can work together. I know that some of the Aboriginal ladies whom I talk to regularly who walk the streets in different towns are saying that we need somewhere to take these kids. I have had that echoed to me from some of the police officers that I speak with as well.

Obviously, we would like to see other things. We live in the wealthiest state in Australia. We do not expect underground railways in the regions, but the hospital services and aged-care facilities are really limited. I know there are three beds in Exmouth for aged care. I spoke to a man who has three generations of his family in Exmouth. He was fortunate enough to get his wife into the hospital when she needed care. However, for most people who live in that region, there is nowhere for them to go. Their whole family might live in that region. It becomes very stressful for the families. Often what happens is those three generations leave town, and we know that creates all sorts of issues with the schools and has a knock-on effect with jobs. We need to deal with those issues.

Tom Price and Paraburdoo Hospitals are in desperate need of help. I regularly get calls from people there. I would like to see something in the budget this time for Paraburdoo Hospital.

I refer to nursing. The incentives to get nurses out into the regions are a very positive step forward. They are desperately needed. Again, on the flip side, there is a shortage of housing, so how can we encourage them to come without housing? We need to address that very quickly, and I hope that the government has some plans in place to make that change as quickly as it can.

I expect to see in the budget an increase in funding for the patient assisted travel scheme. This is really important because the cost of regional travel is now enormous. Fuel prices have increased significantly and people particularly struggle to get to metropolitan areas and are having to travel further and further for specialist appointments. There are elderly people who fly to Perth, but if the plane is delayed or cancelled, they will lose an appointment that they may have been waiting six months for. When they get to the other end, they often do not have a carer and have to get off the plane with their bags and then get to wherever they are going. The government needs to consider providing more help for these elderly people who cannot go to their own hospitals because services have been reduced. We need to find a way to get them some help when they travel, because it is becoming extremely stressful for them.

Dental health is also becoming a massive issue in the regions; there are no dentists anywhere. We have a breast cancer bus that comes through, but there are no facilities for people who are not on a card, so that becomes problematic. There is a visiting dentist in some of the hospitals, but it is a really big exercise for elderly people when they are isolated. Hopefully, mental health issues will be addressed and bundled up with drug and alcohol services. That will definitely need to be bolstered. It is critical. There are a lot of people who are currently struggling in that space, and that will only increase.

In summary, I want to acknowledge that there is a lot to do and it will not be addressed overnight. These may seem to be small issues, and the government is sometimes critical of the fact that the opposition keeps raising them in Parliament, but they are issues, they are problematic and they are causing grief in the regions. They may appear to be small issues to people who are able to go to the next suburb for their services if they cannot get the services they need, no matter what they might be. It is a struggle sometimes to even travel from the regions if the services are not available or have been cancelled.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms M. BEARD: We also need to look at some of the issues that are impacting on small businesses. The cost of doing business in the regions is significant and bringing some equity back to the relative costs of doing business in the regions and in the metropolitan area for basic services would help significantly with job creation and allowing businesses to expand in the regions. The costs are now sometimes prohibitive for people to run small businesses in the regions. I look forward to Thursday's budget and I hope it will cover off some of the issues I have raised.

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt) [6.12 pm]: I rise to support the motion that was moved by the Leader of the Opposition and I thank my colleagues for their contributions. The member for North West Central is quietly dying beside me! I would like to make a contribution about the cost of living and the challenges that many people in our communities are facing. I would like to offer some solutions to those government ministers who are sitting opposite. The opposition is often criticised for highlighting the challenges we see in our portfolios, our constituencies and the community more broadly, without offering solutions. Because it suits them, members opposite often make the comment that we do not offer our ideas on what we would like to see happen, so I will be specific about some of the things that I think should be in tomorrow's budget that will assist in reducing the pressures many of our Western Australian households are facing. I will rely very heavily on a very succinct document, a submission from the Western Australian Council of Social Service to the Senate Select Committee on the Cost of Living.

This has been canvassed in this place many times, so I do not think it will surprise anyone to find out what the pinch points are for families and individuals in terms of financial pressure. Whether we talk to WACOSS, St Vincent de Paul, Foodbank or any of the other support and community service industries, they will say that housing presents the most significant challenge. Although the government has made some significant announcements around that challenge, it is yet to break the back of the issue. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the member for Roe, earlier referred to a research document from the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre. One of the first

statements in that document is that the rental market is in crisis, that vacancy rates in Western Australia have been below one per cent since 2020 and that rents have risen from around \$350 per week to about \$550 per week for a house.

I listened to the member for Roe because I had read the same document. We are starting to see some houses come online, but we need to see even more activity to keep up with people exiting the rental market. The Real Estate Institute of Western Australia estimates that around 19 000 dwellings have left the rental sector in the last two years. We need to add a significantly greater number of houses to the rental market to keep up with people leaving it. Supply in the rental sector will remain constrained. Everyone in this house understands the principles of supply and demand and knows that we will see significant increases in rents for some time yet.

Rents have risen in Perth at a slightly higher rate than in the regions. The regions are not unified in that regard; there are pockets of regional Western Australia where rental prices are not as elevated as others, but rental rates in Perth have risen by 13 per cent over the last year alone. That is the greatest rise of any capital city in Australia, so we do have a real problem. This is not just the opposition standing and saying something needs to be done; it is not just WACOSS. The numbers actually demonstrate that we have a significant challenge. WACOSS in its submission identifies housing, transport, food, energy and water, mortgage repayments and rental payments as the greatest financial pressures for the community. This is where we see families trying to play one decision off against another.

Before I move off the issue of housing, and wearing my shadow Aboriginal Affairs portfolio hat, I want to very briefly talk about a presentation I went to hosted by Shelter WA. The Minister for Housing was there and it was in support of Aboriginal community housing organisations. This is an issue for which I have a solution, although not for the entire housing market—I am not going to try to solve that issue in 20 minutes on a Wednesday afternoon! There were four key Aboriginal community housing organisations, and I will go through who was there on the day. There was Shelter WA and all the key players. This was the launch of a prospectus that was developed by the sector with support from Shelter WA. It had received a COVID grant through Lotterywest to do some capacity building in these four organisations and to develop a prospectus designed to put forward to the private sector and philanthropic organisations the benefits of these Aboriginal community housing organisations, in the hope that they might partner with them to assist in delivering more of what they do.

The COVID grant allowed the development of this prospectus, and this was an event to launch the prospectus. I think it was the first official event that I went to as the shadow Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. I had had dealings with Shelter WA. It is a very sensible peak body and it is doing a lot of work to try to support these organisations. I have since been back and had a further discussion with its staff about how it is doing more work beyond what the COVID funding allowed it to do to try to develop and support the capacity of the community housing organisations that we know exist right across the state. For this project, it was the four major housing organisations. The Goldfields Indigenous Housing Organisation covers Kalgoorlie, Leonora and Coolgardie. It has 48 properties and provides support services for around 280 tenants and household members. The member for North West Central and the member for Moore will be familiar with the Murchison Region Aboriginal Corporation. It covers Geraldton, Northampton, Denham, Carnarvon, North Midlands, Mullewa, Yalgoo and Meekatharra and it has 120 houses. Noongar Mia Mia is based in Perth. It houses up to 368 people and has 91 tenancies. In my former role as the Leader of the Nationals, I had the pleasure of meeting representatives from the Southern Aboriginal Corporation on various different occasions. It does a raft of things in Albany, as the Acting Speaker (Ms R.S. Stephens) will be very well aware. It has 75 properties and supports over 100 families.

All these organisations talk about the importance of providing people with the safety and dignity of having a roof over their heads and supporting them to be on a pathway to economic independence. It is not just about having a rental, but about transitioning into home ownership. These Aboriginal community housing organisations are best placed to shift the dial on what we see as some of the most unacceptably high numbers. It will be familiar to everyone who spends any time in the housing or community sectors that although four per cent of our population are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, well over 50 per cent of them are in our community housing and funding streams. I commend the government for providing the COVID grant through Lotterywest to give Shelter WA the opportunity to capacity build these four organisations, and hopefully there will be more for them to continue down this pathway through Shelter WA.

We had this lovely glossy brochure on the day, and all the organisations and people who had helped to consult and bring this together were there. But what was missing was a commitment from this very wealthy state government to kickstart that partnership and to indicate to the private sector and the philanthropic organisations that it will be engaging with that it not only saw value in creating the brochure and empowering Shelter WA to go down this path, but also will put some money on the table to assist in expanding and supporting those services to grow. I truly believe—I have heard members opposite talk about this on a regular basis—that if we want to shift the dial on the challenges that some of our Aboriginal communities and individuals face, Aboriginal community-controlled and owned organisations are the answer to that. Whether someone is Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, housing is one of the real challenges with the cost of living. We can empower and support ACHOs to deliver more housing by providing them with funds to purchase and build houses. My understanding from interaction with these community

organisations is that they can do it much cheaper than the state government can, and they generally get a better tenancy outcome for their tenants because they have a better relationship with their tenants; they support them one on one. I have nothing against the people who work at the department of housing; that is a tough job. My office deals with people who are the interface in my community and across the state on a regular basis. It is hard. Maybe I am naive, and I am not reflecting on this government or the previous one, but as I have come closer to this issue, I have not understood why we do not provide more funding to these community-run organisations, particularly community housing organisations. There is a huge opportunity now that we have a Minister for Housing saying that he is doing everything he can to put on the list a further increase in the funds to those community organisations. I have one in my electorate, but it is not one of the big four. There are multiple little community-run organisations that could use some capacity building and support to allow them to deliver local solutions on the ground, particularly to make sure that we shift the number of people in public housing onto a sustainable pathway. For those cabinet ministers sitting opposite, there is one solution. I would fully support more funding going to those big four organisations. They are not big; they are small organisations that do an enormous amount on the smell of an oily rag. Then perhaps down the track, as Shelter WA does more of that work to engage with the sector, more organisations will start to come online. There should be a funding stream to support that as well.

That was the first thing on my list. The second thing on my list is transport. This was the second issue that the Western Australian Council of Social Service identified in its submission. This will come as no surprise, as we have raised this on a regular basis. The price of fuel is high. Inflation is high. Car loan repayments are going up. More of the household budget is going towards having a car. Although I acknowledge that the government has made some changes to public transport access in the Perth metropolitan area, it is more challenging for those who live in regional Western Australia. Regional airfare caps are great for those communities that need interconnection between Perth and their region, but the predominant form of transport in the regions would have to be the car, particularly in my electorate, unless someone jumps on the *Prospector* to go to Kalgoorlie. They might even get the *AvonLink* if they get out of bed at sparrow's and maybe they will get back to Northam if they are lucky—that schedule is a bit challenging! Public transport is pretty limited, so we rely very much on a car. That is linked to getting to employment, doctors' appointments and family—just staying connected. It is just a fact of life in regional Western Australia. We are heavily reliant. I heard members talk about transport links earlier in the debate on the bill that is before the house at the moment. That is a whole other issue. There are challenges for families in maintaining their car loan repayments and with the price of fuel. Here is where the government could provide some relief. It has control of car registration and driver's licence charges. There could be an additional subsidy or a reduction in those charges, even if it was temporary, just to take the pressure off so that people do not have to decide whether they will pay their car rego or put food on the table.

The next thing I want to talk about is food. That is what people do: they trade off whether they are going to pay their utility bills or put food on the table. We all know that Foodbank Australia, Vinnies and everyone providing food relief is saying that they are seeing more and more people walk through their doors. That means that we have to pull the pressure off. The government has a lever—that is, drivers' licences, car regos and, particularly in regional Western Australia, the Country Age Pension Fuel Card and the Emergency Services Volunteer Fuel Card. The Emergency Services Volunteer Fuel Card was worth \$2 000 when we left government. In the first year that this government came to power, it was slashed to \$1 000, which will do almost nothing for a brigade. It might fill one car up twice. That is something the government could do to support our emergency services volunteers, whom we rely on in regional Western Australia. The Country Age Pension Fuel Card has not been indexed for the entire time that this government has been in power. The government could deal with the unreasonable surcharges being applied by, I would say, unthoughtful vendors. These people are vulnerable; age pensioners, disability pensioners and carers are eligible for the Country Age Pension Fuel Card. When there are charges of between 1.5 and 1.75 per cent, surely there is something the government could do to try to make sure that the full value of the card is in the hands of those pensioners. A number of people have contacted my office and there has been some media about this over the last 12 months. I am not just raising it on the eve of budget day. This is something that the government surely should be aware of. It would be disappointing if regional MPs from the Labor Party had not raised it as something that could deliver real support for members in their communities, as well as in other regional communities across the state. The Country Age Pension and Emergency Services Volunteer Fuel Cards could be increased immediately. It is not a big amount, but it would make an enormous difference to eligible individuals in those communities. It would not surprise anyone that food, energy and water were also on the Western Australian Council of Social Service's list.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: WACOSS and the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre have done some work on how people make decisions when they are under financial pressure. Essentially, they found that the strategy families under financial pressure are most likely to use to cope with being unable to pay utility bills and other bills that come through the door is to reduce spending on food and groceries, and leisure activities. Leisure activities can mean anything. People probably need to tighten their belt if they go out to have a meal every night. I understand that. It is not ideal. But I would also include things like kids sport under leisure activities. I have heard the members for

North West Central and Roe raise in this house that more and more families are having to choose which sport their kids can engage in. As a former Minister for Sport and Recreation, I know the KidSport program that we put in place and was carried through to this government is really important. But even with that support, families are having to choose whether their kids do summer sport, winter sport or any sport at all, and that really devastates me. As a person who comes from a family who made me try everything under the sun, against my will on most occasions—I am not a particularly sporty person—I understand the benefits of being involved in team sport in particular, and as a kid, I learnt how to win, to lose, to volunteer and to stay healthy and connected to my community. I think it is devastating when a family, particularly a big family, is unable to offer that opportunity to their kids. That is another opportunity for the state government; it could provide additional support through KidSport or other mechanisms to make sure that families do not have to make that choice, because we grow little citizens by allowing them to participate in sport. We too often talk about antisocial behaviour and kids who are not engaged in their community, but I see in my electorate, and many members would see in their electorates, wonderful opportunities for people to be part of a club and to be part of something bigger than themselves. They can aspire to run onto Optus Stadium and be the next Buddy Franklin or whoever the biggest football star is at the moment.

Mr P.J. Rundle: You should talk about the Dockers.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I cannot talk about the Dockers. Member for Roe, I am quietly cheering them on, but I have to tell you that I have joined the East Fremantle Football Club, at its urging, as the daughter of a former player, and have gone to the WAFL to seek joy in the football world at the moment. But that is the point. People need to be able to take part in things, and that is another thing the state government could look at. All these things could be wrapped together to make it more affordable for Western Australian families when the state government hands down a significant budget surplus for the third year.

The Minister for Water touched on the importance of regional child care. We talk about women in particular returning to the workforce to participate fully in the economy so that they are able to put food on the table and keep a roof over their head, and child care is an important part of that. I know there is an intersection of federal regulations and funding and the state government. In regional Western Australia, both sides of government have supported the development of innovative models, such as the Regional Early Education and Development Inc model, which was home grown in the wheatbelt and has the potential to be expanded across regional Western Australia. It is suffering like every other organisation from workforce shortages. That is why the minister was talking about it—training. I was listening. This is me on a Wednesday afternoon. The Minister for Training was talking about how it is important to provide training for that particular workforce, and I could not agree more. I do not want to hear from anyone that opposition members stand up and whinge. I have given credit where credit is due this afternoon on things that I think are important. I think the government can do more. There are opportunities to support innovative models like REED to make sure that the government is growing that workforce to come in, and the model can be tweaked for whatever part of the regions it is trying to service. Whether or not it is partnering with private sector operators, there is an opportunity there. I give that freely as a person who has been on that childcare journey with the group of people who started the model from a little acorn back when we were trying to deal with the complete failure of childcare services in regional Western Australia, particularly in the wheatbelt. If something can be made to work in the wheatbelt, it can be made to work almost anywhere, because we are a big area with small population centres. Innovative service models that think outside the box are the sorts of things that would have received, and did receive, funding from royalties for regions and Lotterywest under the former government to make sure that services were available. All those things knitted together make it easier for families and households to make their budgets work.

I want to finish by saying how important it is that this government recognises the privileged position it is in with the surplus sitting in its coffers and that too many people in Western Australia are under financial pressure at the moment. I talked about housing and the input costs that people juggle. There are state government levers in all those areas that can be pulled to try to relieve that pressure. Like the member for North West Central, I am hopeful, not optimistic, that we will see some of that revealed tomorrow so that I can go back to my electorate and tell the organisations I have been dealing with through my portfolios that there is a pathway and a glimmer of hope that their services will not be under such significant pressure and that they will be able to contribute to their community to their fullest potential instead of worrying every night about whether they will be able to put food on the table for their family. To me, that is completely unacceptable in a state like Western Australia.

MS S.E. WINTON (Wanneroo — Minister for Early Childhood Education) [6.37 pm]: I will make a brief contribution because I know that the member for Mirrabooka would also like to make a brief contribution. I will start by saying how refreshing it was to hear the member for Central Wheatbelt's contribution to the debate tonight. It was more of a contest of ideas, and if we have more of that, I think it will be great for this place. I think about the contribution from the Leader of the Liberal Party, who suggested our financial position is due to good luck, not management. I suggest she is the one who has had good luck in becoming the leader, given there are only two Liberal members; it was not through good management. The member for Central Wheatbelt will be missed in 2025, and perhaps she should reconsider her decision because she has a lot to contribute to not only her electorate, but also the state.

I was particularly interested in the member's reference to housing solutions led by Aboriginal people. I cannot speak for the Minister for Housing—I do not intend to—but it made me reflect on my experience since December in these important portfolios. Certainly, many families and children are facing complex issues that fall under my portfolios, and the solutions offered and delivered by Aboriginal organisations throughout the regions give the best results. I have travelled throughout the state. Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa Aboriginal Corporation is rolling out the Target 120 program in Newman. It is doing it really well because it has a commitment to and a relationship and trust with the local community. Likewise, MG Corporation is rolling out the program in Kununurra.

Although the government supports Aboriginal community-controlled organisations certainly in my portfolios and is looking wherever, we need to continually build their capacity to do that important work. It will not happen just because we all want it to happen; these organisations need support and resources to be able to do the important work they do. They face similar challenges to all organisations around the state, whether they are not-for-profits, government agencies, local governments or local businesses. One of the most challenging aspects is in getting people to work in these organisations. After travelling throughout the state, I can honestly say that what I heard most was not "Give me more money, minister"; it was "We cannot spend the money we have because we do not have people to help us deliver the services." That is not an excuse; workforce capacity is a really challenging aspect that underlies many of the issues the state faces right now, and it will continue to be an issue. That is not an excuse; it is an indisputable challenge for everyone who is working in the Department of Communities in particular.

I want to quickly mention the cost-of-living issue. The state government gets some criticism—I note that the member for Cottesloe criticised the government for this again tonight—that the electricity relief previously offered to all Western Australians amounted to \$1 000. I think what many of us realise when we go back to our electorates is that cost-of-living stresses are being faced by many Western Australians right now. Many of the impacts on the cost of living are caused by world economic levers not of our making. Interest rates are affecting cost-of-living pressures, as is inflation. Although they are not of our making, it is important that we not only talk about the vulnerable and most needy people, which is a particular area of focus of my portfolios, but also acknowledge that cost-of-living pressures are spreading far and wide. It is important that when we talk about cost-of-living relief, we provide relief for all Western Australians, whether through electricity credits or by providing transport relief through the two-zone cap on fares. I know that has provided massive relief for many families in the northern suburbs, who are saving thousands of dollars by not having to pay for more than two zones. Cost-of-living impacts are being felt broadly in the community; it is a challenging time for everyone.

I will briefly touch on my portfolio, and will carry on from the comments of the member for Central Wheatbelt. The member for North West Central also spoke about some of the issues faced by communities and towns around the state. From all the work I have seen in my portfolios, I strongly believe that the solutions lie in early intervention. Early intervention does not come easily or quickly, and it costs a lot of money. I am very proud that since 2017, our focus has been on early intervention in all its forms, whether with youth through Target 120 or in the child protection space by working intensively to prevent children being removed from families. We want kids to stay with families. We have invested over \$136 million in that important work to support families to be able to better support their children. That work will continue. It is paying dividends. It is making a difference in young people's lives so that they can be productive and contribute to our society. I want to particularly highlight what the Minister for Education was saying, which fits into the ethos that we are developing at the Department of Communities. It is about providing not only monetary support for people but also support for skills so that people can take charge of their own lives and be able to make a contribution. I think that is a really important element of it.

I also just want to quickly finish on this notion. I think the member for North West Central was much more constructive, but I would not give that same recognition to other opposition members. We are sitting on this mountain of gold. We have this massive surplus and this money in the coffers. I am always a bit confused when I hear that from the opposition, because it is what allows good governments to respond to the social challenges and to support families and children. Without having a good economic set of books, we cannot go out and support people. We can but we will end up going into debt, and we can see that right around Australia. Massive debts have been incurred by states all over the place and invariably they will have less capacity to support communities or to put in place particular measures or programs to support people.

I am proud of our government's record of being responsible managers of the state's finances. I am proud not to say it has a surplus but to say it gives us that opportunity to be responsible in delivering programs and initiatives that make a real difference. We need to think back not too far. We just faced a pandemic. Despite a pandemic, during which the government invested over \$11 billion, this state was the only state that was able to stay in a strong financial situation, which now gives us the capacity to support people who are doing it tough and people who are struggling with the cost of living. When we talk about electricity charges and other charges, we acknowledge that Western Australia by comparison is doing very well. That is not good luck. It is not good fortune. It is through six years of discipline around the cabinet table.

All ministers want to spend more money because there are always more wonderful things to do and more people to support, but it is called being disciplined so that we stay in a strong economic position and can keep supporting Western Australians. I am very proud of that. I know when the Premier delivers the budget tomorrow, the majority

of Western Australians will also respond by saying we have got the state in a good position. People are out there working. We have created 120 000 jobs since 2021 alone. We have the capacity in the Western Australian community for people to participate in the workplace to try to build a better life. I am really proud of that.

MS M.J. HAMMAT (Mirrabooka — Parliamentary Secretary) [6.48 pm]: I am very happy to have the opportunity to speak against this motion. I have been listening to the debate this afternoon and contemplating the motion that has been put. It is important that we reflect on it. The motion states —

That this house calls on the McGowan Labor government to use the upcoming 2023–24 state budget to address the many failures impacting Western Australian families and households.

What we heard from the opposition members who spoke on this motion was just a shopping list. It was almost like a parade of their favourite issues. It is interesting that as each of those members made their contribution to this motion, which is so broad and meaningless that it enabled them to talk about anything they wanted, we could see who the performers are.

Mr P.J. Rundle interjected.

Ms M.J. HAMMAT: I have to say that there are not many performers on the opposition bench. It really has been a dismal affair today. I acknowledge that there were a couple of considered contributions. This motion is about anything that opposition members want it to be. We have been hearing from opposition members all afternoon, and at the end of that we still do not have a clear picture of who they are, what they believe and what they stand for, and, indeed, what they would do if they were in government. I accept that the member for Central Wheatbelt outlined a few policy initiatives, and that was really heartening and good to see, but from the other members of the opposition we did not hear much of substance.

It is hard to go past the member for Cottesloe's contribution. Someone should do the member for Cottesloe a service by telling him that sarcasm does not work in *Hansard*. His contribution about building houses for millionaires' children underlines the problem with this opposition. That is a silly comment about a serious and substantial issue. We know that housing is an important issue. It is on the minds of many people. That kind of glib commentary not only does him no service, but also does not do the debate any service. We can say a great deal about the things that are happening, but that was a very poor contribution.

I thank the member for Cottesloe for his contribution about how well we are doing in Collie. I am sure the member for Collie–Preston was heartened to hear the member's support for the incredible work that the McGowan government is doing in that region and in managing a very difficult economic transition. I also want to commend the member for Collie–Preston for her work in this area. This motion really could be about anything, but given that it has been moved on the eve of the state budget, and given the comments made by many members about how they are looking forward to the state budget tomorrow, as am I, I think opposition members were trying to craft a motion that would enable them to talk about budget initiatives and issues that are facing families and households. That is an important issue. It is a significant and worthwhile issue that we should be debating in this house.

I want to record that the people of Western Australia deserve better than what we got from the opposition today. I spend a lot of time in my electorate of Mirrabooka doorknocking and talking to everyday people to understand the issues that are on their minds and what I need to do as a good local member to advocate for them. The cost of living is a significant issue on people's minds. People deserve to get a much better contribution from the opposition parties than what we had today. The McGowan Labor government takes that commitment seriously. We understand that our job is to deliver better outcomes for everyday people in this state. That is what Labor governments do. One of the fundamental differences between a Labor government and the opposition parties is that we are serious about our responsibility to help everyday Western Australians. People only need to look at the record of our government on economic portfolios and social policies to see our absolute commitment to do everything we can to deliver on that responsibility.

There is so much that we could talk about today. There are so many things that the opposition has hung out there. What we need to drill down on a bit in the first instance is the cost of living. There can be no doubt that the McGowan Labor government has taken the issue of cost of living for everyday families incredibly seriously. We have been able to do that, as the Minister for Community Services said earlier, because we have taken budget repair seriously. In the early years of the first term of this government, we did significant work on budget repair. We are now also exercising ongoing discipline in budget management to ensure that families and households, everyday people, will get the support that they need to meet some of the economic challenges that they are experiencing at this time.

The \$400 energy credit was a feature of last year's budget, and it came on top of the \$600 that, from memory, was paid to people in 2020. As I have gone around and talked to my community in the electorate of Mirrabooka, I have learnt that this energy credit was incredibly well received. It was of significant benefit to everyday families. It went straight to the households that needed it, so this was a very good initiative. It was effective, and it was delivered at a time when people could access it. It was a very good policy initiative. I take this opportunity to commend the Premier; Treasurer for that policy, because it was incredibly well received.

In the same vein, I also want to talk about the policy of rolling out free rapid antigen tests. I think the member for Roe spoke about that and raised some concerns with that program. I want to be really clear that that policy was incredibly well received by the people in my electorate. Access to those tests made a fundamental difference to how people were able to manage through the pandemic. They have managed their health and their household finances because they did not have to buy RATs. One thing that we know about those tests is that when people have to buy them, they can be incredibly expensive. It is hard to remember now, because things have changed so quickly, but I can remember the lockdowns in Sydney and people in western Sydney were told that they could not travel out of their area or go to work unless they took a test every day, but people could not get their hands on a test. That had enormous ramifications for those people and their ability to go to work. But in this state, along with the good health management of the pandemic, we made sure that people had access to rapid antigen tests.

Last week I had the good pleasure of visiting the Balga Autumn Club, and a number of its members were not there because they had COVID. The one thing that the club wanted was access to rapid antigen tests. For our senior citizens, many of whom are on low incomes, this policy initiative made a real difference to them in not only their economic management, but also how they managed their health and wellbeing through the peak of the COVID pandemic and today. I think that is very important.

I also want to include in that list of issues the two-section fare cap for public transport. It is an incredible initiative. It is fantastic. Public transport is available at a cost that is reasonable for families. It ensures that they can travel on the excellent and outstanding public transport that we have in this state. Again, I get a lot of positive feedback about that initiative. For many people, the recent announcement of being able to travel free on Sundays is a fantastic way for them to access public transport.

One of the things that is most galling about the debate tonight is having to listen to members opposite talk about the cost of living. If we look at the track record of this government compared with their performance when they were in government, there is no question we have managed the economy better and have redistributed the benefits of that good economic management to everyone. We have done a far better job than members opposite did to ensure that household fees and charges remain affordable for everyday people. It is instructive to look at the opposition's performance when it was in government. Never mind what members opposite say in the debate about what they believe, think or feel. Let us look at what they did when they had their hands on the levers of power. I thought the Minister for Training did a very good job of outlining what members opposite did to the training system when they had the opportunity. I thought she did a very good job of explaining that when members opposite had the levers of power, they jacked up the prices of TAFE courses, making them unaffordable for everyday people.

But members opposite did not just do it to TAFE; they did the same thing to the important things like electricity prices. Do members opposite remember what they did to electricity prices when they had the opportunity? Under the Liberal–National government, electricity prices rose by 90 per cent, which was 8.4 per cent for every year. Water rates went up by 66 per cent. On top of all that, when members opposite left office, we had predicated in the forward estimates of the budget seven per cent rises in electricity prices and six per cent rises in water rates—all that on a path to a deficit of \$44 billion. Opposition parties come in here wanting to talk about what we are doing about the cost of living, but when they were in government, they put up prices by extremely high amounts, created enormous burdens for everyday people and did not do a single thing to alleviate that burden for everyday families. They did it with electricity, water and training and in a whole range of different areas. The track record of this government has been to keep those fees and charges low. When we look at the combined impact of the last budget on household fees and charges, including the \$400 electricity credit, we see that the total increase to families was less than inflation. That is not something that the opposition parties can say they did when they had the opportunity. They did not do it. It is, I think, extremely rich.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

House adjourned at 7.00 pm
