

ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE - GERALDTON AND THE MID-WEST

Motion

MR G. SNOOK (Moore) [3.22 pm]: I move -

That this house condemns the Labor government for its failure to provide and maintain key road infrastructure around Geraldton and the mid-west.

I could probably circumvent this motion substantially by having a private audience with the star member for Geraldton. He could then rise to the occasion, from the point of view of members on this side of the house, and convince the Premier and others that this motion should be supported. The opposition and the people of Geraldton acknowledge that the member for Geraldton is doing all right. However, he has a way to go to compete with the member for Albany. I think the member for Albany would acknowledge that also.

Mr J.B. D’Orazio: I think it is the member for Collie-Wellington you’ve got to chase.

Mr G. SNOOK: The member for Collie-Wellington has special dispensation.

Although I have begun the debate on this motion in jest, it is a serious motion. I will refer to capital spending under the Labor government since it came to office in the 2000-01 state election. During that year, the Court coalition government spent a total of \$509.576 million on capital works. Government spending on capital works has declined substantially over the ensuing years since the Labor government came to power. In 2001-02, the Labor government spent \$354 million on capital works -

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan: We must have done more with less, big time!

Mr G. SNOOK: I am sure that the minister is aware of all these figures. In 2002-03, the amount the government spent on capital works decreased again to \$300 million; in 2003-04, the government increased spending on its capital works program to almost \$325 million; it was a good year in 2004-05, because the government increased spending on its capital works program to \$390 million; in 2005-06, spending on capital works increased again to \$397 million-odd dollars. It then went up again. There must be a reason for that. This year the government estimates it will spend \$475 million. The point is that in real terms it is spending less than it was in the last year of the Court government, which is a fact; the figures show it. In its first year, the Labor government slashed capital works spending in Western Australia by \$155 million.

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan: How did we produce all that infrastructure?

Mr G. SNOOK: The minister will recollect that the Western Australian Local Government Association asked the minister what she was doing to it. The minister took \$14 million out of rural road funding. These are WALGA’s figures. I was involved in local government at the time. WALGA estimated that \$14 million was taken out of road funding.

Mr A.J. Carpenter: What are the figures you are quoting?

Mr G. SNOOK: These figures are for capital works expenditure under the Labor government.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: Who extracted them and from where?

Mr G. SNOOK: I have extracted them. It was quite a simple task to take them out of the budget papers. It is not me or the opposition but WALGA that has provided the figures on road spending.

Mr A.J. Carpenter: Road spending?

Mr G. SNOOK: Yes, road spending. We are talking about road infrastructure. That is what this motion is about.

Mr A.J. Carpenter: There is more to capital works than roads.

Mr G. SNOOK: This is what the motion is about. It is very important. The Premier and the Treasurer have acknowledged that the lifeblood of Western Australia’s V8 booming economy comes from the regional and rural areas. There is no question about that; that is fantastic. I am pointing out that in real terms, capital works expenditure on road funding has decreased. WALGA was in despair in the first year of the Labor government because of the decrease in road funding of \$14 million.

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan: What is this absolute nonsense?

Mr G. SNOOK: WALGA approached the minister. Everyone in local government was aware that in that year, funding for rural roads decreased by \$14 million. That is a fact. In its second year, the Labor government spent \$208 million, or 41 per cent, less compared with the last year of the Court government. By adding inflation and

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all the increases that are applied, it is possible to come up with a percentage of slippage. That is the real problem that we are faced with. Calculated on that basis, if the Labor government had spent the same amount each year as the coalition government spent in its last year in government, Main Roads would have received an additional \$805 million over the past six years. The Gallop government, and now the Carpenter government, believes that the lifeblood of this economy is being driven by the regions and rural Western Australia. The figures for capital spending on our rural road infrastructure clearly underline the legacy that will be left for either a Labor government or a Liberal government in the future. Funding for roads in rural areas is declining rapidly.

Main Roads WA figures indicate that the local rural road network in Western Australia covers about 125 000 kilometres and comprises about 88 per cent of the total state road network. Main Roads, in its own right, manages a network of about 17 800 kilometres of national highways and state roads, which have a replacement value of about \$16 billion. We are looking at huge money. The point I am making is that we really have to get serious about reinvesting in the existing infrastructure and assets. I know that the government is trying to get traffic off the roads and back onto rail, and that is a great way to go, but if we do not speed up that process or do not maintain rural roads we will be confronted with a problem. I implore all members opposite not to fly home, but to hop in a car and drive down through the central midlands, through Carnamah and Moora, and have a look at the Mogumber-Bindoon road.

Ms J.A. Radisich: And call into the Swan Valley on the way home.

Mr G. SNOOK: That is an excellent idea. If members do as I suggest, they will recognise the problems we are faced with.

I know many of my colleagues want to speak to the motion, but I will refer to a couple of other aspects. I guess if we take out the capital expenditure of the big ticket items that have been allocated in the 2006-07 budget, there is not a lot of money left for the smaller, remote communities and interconnecting roads. That is where the problem lies. The heavy produce that comes out of the agricultural and mining sectors is carried on these smaller local roads. The lime sand routes are used by not only lime sand carters, but also school bus drivers and other people who use them as interconnecting roads between towns and shires. They provide a vital east-west linkage. It has been estimated that up to 2010 about 400 000 tonnes of lime sands will be used. I estimate from the information that I have that currently between 100 000 and 200 000 tonnes is being used. The heavy haulage trucks carting that sand are having a disastrous impact on the local gravel roads. They are causing a lot of pain for local shires, such as Dandaragan, Coorow and Gingin. A little bit of work was done to finish that connection through Gingin, but the problem remains that the deposits of lime sand are further north and the routes to the eastern wheatbelt go through a lot of the central midland shires. A substantial increase in funding for roads used by trucks to cart lime sand is needed. I know the minister has said that there is some capacity within the budget to look at that, and I acknowledge that. However, I am only talking about a few pennies, not millions of dollars.

I refer to some of the requirements for the Geraldton and mid-west region. Not long after the Premier's appointment to the position of Premier he visited Geraldton. One of the questions that was in the media - I am like the Premier because I do not believe everything I read in the media - was about Indian Ocean Drive. The Premier said that the proposal was in the pipeline; however, everything had to be fitted in, other issues had to be considered and the priorities had to be right.

Mr A.J. Carpenter: I had to take time to be briefed on all the projects.

Mr G. SNOOK: I understand that. I am sure that the Premier's first visit to Geraldton as a brand-new Premier highlighted one of the key issues on the minds of the people of Geraldton and the mid-west. I advise the Premier, the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure and all members opposite that this road is of utmost importance to Geraldton, the mid-west and central coast regions. Actually, it is a unique road. I have a strong belief that when we invest in something, we need to be able to get a return - a good return from development and growth and a return on investment for the government, plus some social values. Indian Ocean Drive will do lots of those things, as well as drive the tourism economy. That is the reason I raised the question with the Minister for Tourism. We need to be able to recognise and capitalise on the exceptional opportunities from Geraldton down to Yanchep, along the central coast area. A whole feast of proponents is waiting.

A study was done by an organisation called the Mid West Development Commission. It produced a report that was prepared a number of years ago by a consulting firm called Praxis Management Consultants. It carried out what was a conservative analysis. It cut back the estimates so that it would not be seen to be aiming too high and that its figures were not inflated. There are three areas from which a government gets its income from land development. For example, the conservative estimate for Indian Ocean Drive was that over a 10-year period the state government would receive \$3 273 000 from land tax. From mortgage duty, over a nine or 10-year period, there would be almost a \$2 million return from property development and those types of stamp duties - conveyance duty.

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Mr A.J. Carpenter: Over and above what would happen anyway.

Mr G. SNOOK: This is what its estimates were, based on conservative figures. Conveyance duty is a big winner for the government and one that obviously the government would like to hang on to. A number of people in the community would like to see this duty reduced. Conveyance duty totalled nearly \$29.8 million. This report was prepared in 2003, so it really is not current; however, the figures are relevant. Those figures were based on a construction cost for Indian Ocean Drive of \$32 million. Of course, now with inflation the cost has spiralled to \$60 million or more. The arguments for that road go beyond dollars and cents. For example, there are social and environmental gains. In terms of the taxpayers getting back something for this outlay, this road does exactly that. The government has to outlay money on many projects that are either social commitments or services to the community for which there is little return. It is accepted that that is the role that governments play. This road will pay for itself. It will create employment and other opportunities, which will be of great benefit to the Geraldton region. We have had many briefings from people and organisations in the community as well as the City of Geraldton, the Shire of Greenough, the Shire of Irwin and the Western Australian Chamber of Commerce. They have all placed completion of Indian Ocean Drive as one of their top priorities for solving that range of problems. I say to the Premier that it must be done. It cannot be left for the next six or seven years until 2011. Despite passing lanes being built on Brand Highway in that much needed area between the Cervantes turn-off and Gingin, heavy traffic has increased considerably as a result of all the resource developments in the mid-west. Although the member for Geraldton often travels by plane because it makes sense to do so, he will have driven that road many times. I do not know how many times I have driven along the road from Jurien Bay to Perth and back at all hours of the day and night. At times, the conditions on that road are absolutely atrocious. In wet conditions when road trains carrying minerals, and buses, caravans and trailers are using that road, the hazard is horrendous. Heaven forbid that we should be faced with the consequences of a horrific accident. I accept that that can happen on any road, so I will not go down the line of dramatising this issue; nonetheless, it is an exceptional case because of the great amount of heavy road-train traffic that mixes with a lot of tourism traffic. Almost every grey nomad travelling north uses that road. A number of years ago Main Roads estimated that of the 1 600 to 2 000 vehicles a day that travelled on the road at that time, about 800 to 1 000 vehicles a day would drive along the coast road if it were completed.

Mr M.J. Cowper: There have been three fatalities in the mid-west so far this year.

Mr G. SNOOK: I have experienced a number of near misses as I am sure have the member for Geraldton and other people in the Geraldton community who travel that road regularly. We can never engineer roads or legislate for the idiot factor. The fact remains that, out of sheer frustration, that percentage of people put at risk the lives of other motorists. I have seen people crossing over double white lines to pass two or three road trains that are head to tail on that 100 kilometre stretch between Bibby Road and the Gingin minesite. It is extremely dangerous. We are debating a situation in which safety should be the prime concern.

We need to consider also the environmental benefits of Indian Ocean Drive. As you will well know, Mr Acting Speaker (Mr G. Woodhams), at present there is a 68-kilometre gap that contains the Nambung National Park and the Walyengarra Nature Reserve to the south near Wedge Island and a number of - I would not try to guess how many - motorists illegally access that section of road through the national park, the nature reserve and the naval and army training grounds. That impact on the environment could be avoided if a road was built to designate where people can travel and on which they can gain access to the beach areas.

People have often said to me that construction of a road would ruin the environment. In my experience in local government, I have found that if people are directed to where they can travel and good signage is used to indicate where they should not go, they generally adhere to it. The construction of Indian Ocean Drive will regulate where people can and cannot go. The environment will benefit. Most importantly, it will add to the economic driver of the resource industry from which Geraldton is benefiting. There is no question that it will spur on the central coast and mid-west area. The amount of approximately \$700 million worth of projects were estimated in this report. The future of most of them hangs on the construction of that road, which is the trigger that will prompt people to invest their dollars in the resort and subdivisional developments.

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan: They will do it anyhow.

Mr G. SNOOK: Some of them are to a degree, but in all honesty -

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan: Have you seen Jurien?

Mr G. SNOOK: I happen to live there. It was good to see the minister in Jurien the other day. I think her eyes were opened when she saw the amount of growth there; she could see what was happening. The minister is not being reasonable. If she were being reasonable she would acknowledge that two major projects in Jurien worth

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hundreds of millions of dollars are waiting to be developed, but they will not start until the road is built. That is true.

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan interjected.

Mr G. SNOOK: I can tell the minister that it is true. We can argue all day on that point. I live in Jurien and I do not know how many times the minister has been there. That was probably her first visit.

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan: No, of course it wasn't.

Mr G. SNOOK: How many times has the minister visited Jurien Bay?

Several members interjected.

Mr G. SNOOK: The minister knows that the key to triggering developments that will enable benefits to flow along the coast is Indian Ocean Drive. However, she has told me a thousand times in response to requests and letters that we must hang on and wait awhile because there are other priorities. That is not good enough. If the minister expects development to proceed anyway, why not acknowledge the safety hazard that is increasing daily on Brand Highway? In 1995, Main Roads identified nine passing lanes as being necessary between Eneabba and Gingin. They have not all been built.

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan: You spent \$2.7 million in four years you were so concerned about it.

Mr G. SNOOK: I will tell the minister what the coalition did towards Brand Highway. It built the Green Head to Jurien section - 22 to 23 kilometres of road - worth \$6 million. After that, it built the Jurien to Cervantes section of road, and it is all part of Indian Ocean Drive. Those two sections have played a key role in reducing the traffic flow in that area. I have spoken to people in Geraldton who tell me - perhaps the member for Geraldton can verify this - that the travel time between Geraldton and the metropolitan area has increased substantially over the past three years. It now takes five hours.

Mr S.R. Hill: It used to be four and a half.

Mr G. SNOOK: Yes, but they get stuck behind road trains.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr G. Woodhams): Order! I am sure that members on both sides of the house, as well as the people in the gallery, are particularly interested in this debate. We would all be far better informed if members enabled the member to continue his speech.

Mr G. SNOOK: Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker, for your protection. I think the Premier visited the ROC Oil Company Ltd facility that is coming on stream at Dongara on his journey back from the north of the state.

Mr A.J. Carpenter: I opened it.

Mr G. SNOOK: Perhaps the Premier could verify this for me: I am told that every hour a truck will leave the loading facility. If a truck leaves every hour and another truck is coming back in the other direction, 48 more road trains will be travelling up and down the state from that Brand Highway turn-off to the refinery at Kwinana and back.

Mr A.J. Carpenter: That is full production.

Mr G. SNOOK: That is right, but the traffic is building.

Mr A.J. Carpenter: Yes, that is 20 per cent.

Mr G. SNOOK: Yes, but it is coming.

Mr A.J. Carpenter: I know.

Mr G. SNOOK: The Mitchell Corporation tankers travel up and down that highway. From Iluka Resources at Gingin, mineral sands are being carted to Eneabba. In addition, wind farm turbine blades are being transported from Geraldton to Jurien Bay.

Dr S.C. Thomas: They are stuck at the wharf at the moment.

Mr G. SNOOK: They will be transported soon. The resources boom has meant a massive increase in haulage traffic. The state desperately needs all four, and possibly six, passing lanes between the Cervantes turn-off and Gingin. Main Roads has indicated that is it. I think the minister will get about two passing lanes for the \$2.4 million. I think each passing lane costs about \$1 million or so.

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Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan: We are doing two immediately in addition to the \$2.4 million that we have already spent this year.

Mr G. SNOOK: That is being done in this neck of the woods, and that is fine, but the \$2.4 million will pay for only two, whereas the area needs another four. I believe this motion should be supported because the minister is not responding enough to the demands that are being placed on people's safety and the capacity of this road to add to the state's V8 economy and match what could be better still for the mid-west and Geraldton region. I would ask every single person in Geraldton what they think about driving on the Brand Highway. People are now cutting in at the Cliff Head turn-off, going to the Jurien or Cervantes turn-off, and then going back out again, just to get a bit of relief on that section. That section is where all the passing lanes are. I will leave it at that, but I implore the house to give serious consideration to investing more in road infrastructure in the mid-west and central coast regions, and particularly in investing in the Brand Highway.

Question without Notice - Paper Tabled

The ACTING SPEAKER: Earlier today in question time, the Premier indicated that he would table a document which he was sent by Mr Ron Dullard from the Catholic Education Office. I present the document for tabling.

[See paper 1547.]

Debate Resumed

MS K. HODSON-THOMAS (Carine) [3.53 pm]: I also support the motion moved by the member for Moore. It is an interesting motion that relates to road structure, which I have taken an interest in over a long period. I say that because Western Australia has an ageing road network. The coalition invested a lot of money; in fact, it made a \$1.3 billion investment in road infrastructure. Members on the other side can say that we spent absolutely nothing.

Mr J.N. Hyde: I will. Don't take the whole 30 minutes.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: The member for Perth should get up and make his own speech. I will correct some history today. We invested soundly and wisely in road infrastructure. When the Labor government came into power in 2001, it made a determination that the funding would go into the Perth to Mandurah railway. That is what we have seen. It was a different direction, and we accept that, but government members should not come into this place and suddenly say today in question time that this government has built six passing lanes. Yes, it did, but just prior to this regional Parliament. It was a bit of pork-barrelling for the local community.

Mr P.B. Watson: You said you did not get anything, and now you are saying we are pork-barrelling. It cannot be both.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: What about Indian Ocean Drive? The Labor Party made a commitment prior to the 2001 election to build Indian Ocean Drive. It has never happened. The policy changed all of a sudden. Government members can interject -

Mr M.P. Whitely: Okay, then.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: I am not taking any interjections.

Mr J. McGrath: Say what you really think.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: Say what I really think! Do not get me started. What I do not like in the nine years that I have been in politics is how people rewrite history. It is extraordinary. At least members should come into this place and give some semblance of the truth.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: Do you say that to your own members? I hope you do.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: I am saying it to all members. At least come in here and give the facts. Give credit where it is due. Even the Leader of the Opposition said it in a speech in this place. I am not sure whether it was today or yesterday. The member for Cottesloe did a lot for this region. We know it and government members should also recognise it.

I want to get back to the motion and talk about Indian Ocean Drive, because it is imperative for this region and a vital link for getting tourists to the area. I spoke to a lady during afternoon tea today. She said that not enough tourists were attracted into the area. This is a great place. Who would not want to come here? I have heard from all members today and yesterday how much they love the place. I will refer to the member as Shane, because everybody else has in the time we have been here -

Mr P.B. Watson: The soft bit is coming out!

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Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: That is something about me; the two shades of the member for Carine - highly passionate and also very compassionate. The member for Geraldton and the member for Greenough live in a great region. They want to look after their local communities. Road safety is an important issue. We heard the member for Moore speaking about the issue of getting people to and from this region on the Brand Highway. The Brand Highway needs some investment. The minister talked today about the six passing lanes, and I commend her for that. At least that is being done. However, this area needs more. The member for Geraldton knows it. Indian Ocean Drive needs to happen. The government needs to be building that infrastructure sooner rather than later.

Mr P.B. Watson: Are you going to give the government credit for what it has done here?

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: Sure. I spoke yesterday in the debate on the Railway Discontinuance Bill. I stood and congratulated the minister for her foresight. We supported the legislation. It is great to see the railway tracks removed from the foreshore. A few members and I walked along the foreshore this morning. The government has done great things in the region, but Indian Ocean Drive is clearly critical. The funding needs to be put into the budget sooner rather than later. The minister has talked about commencing the road in 2007-08, but that is much too long a time.

Mr A.D. McRae: How do you think it will change people's destination choices?

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: I think people will make choices because they want to take a coastal route. If the member for Riverton, the new Minister for Disability Services and Citizenship and Multicultural Interests, wanted to travel to Geraldton from Perth, what would he do? Would he travel on the Brand Highway or take the beautiful coastal route?

Mr A.D. McRae: Of course I would take the Brand Highway now.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: If there were a choice, what would he do?

Mr A.D. McRae: It would depend on my destination; whether I wanted to go to Geraldton.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: Then the member might ask the Minister for Tourism to spend more money on destination marketing. I do not want to talk at great length here. I plead with the Premier to invest wisely in this area. I know he is doing that, but he should put money into this road infrastructure. I wanted to keep my comments brief.

MS A.J.G. MacTIERNAN (Armadale - Minister for Planning and Infrastructure) [4.00 pm]: I thank the house for the opportunity to speak and once again to tell the story. We do not ever pretend that in five years we can solve every problem that the mid-west has had, but to suggest that we should be condemned for our investment in infrastructure in this region is just laughable. We have heard the member for Moore talk about previous coalition government's spending big on roads. The people of the mid-west would be asking, "Where are those roads?" I can tell those people that members opposite did spend big: their big projects were the Graham Farmer freeway, the duplication of the Narrows Bridge and the extension of the Kwinana Freeway. Mr Speaker, members opposite spent eight years building city roads. A couple of scraps came through to the country. Their excuse today for having spent only \$2.7 million in four years on the Brand Highway was that nothing was happening up here. We rest our case! We have turned that situation around. This government has invested in the roads and the transport infrastructure in this region. We have invested, as we have said time and again, on a whole suite of projects that, when brought together, produce magnificent results for this region. We invested in the Mt Magnet-Leinster road to connect this area to the highly prospective greenstone belt. We invested in the southern transport corridor with the \$92 million rail-road connector to the port. The government then invested \$9 million in the Brand Highway. We have been upgrading roads like the Geraldton-Mullewa road over the past four to five years. We have brought together a whole suite of projects. The port enhancement involved an allocation of \$103 million in the first instance, to which we have now added in excess of \$48 million, to ensure that this region absolutely rocks.

We have not solved all the problems; we do not claim to have done so, but we have made commitments. We have made a commitment to the southern transport corridor stage 2. All the money for that project is in this set of forward estimates. That road will be completed by 2009; that is a guarantee. We have also committed to the Lancelin-Cervantes road.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs J. Hughes): Order, members!

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: We have set a starting date -

Several members interjected.

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The ACTING SPEAKER: Order! The minister is on her feet.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: We have put \$48 million in the forward estimates to get that road under way. We understand its importance. We know that we will be revising our budget each year, and if it is possible to bring that project forward and to complete it at an earlier time, we are committed to endeavouring to do so.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order! Members, the minister is not taking interjections.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: People can look at what was promised. Let us look at what happened during the last election campaign. We promised that we would do exactly what we are now doing with the southern transport corridor. We promised to invest in Indian Ocean Drive, and we gave time frames. We were absolutely honest with the people. We gave those time frames before the last election, but what did we find with members opposite? They said that they would build the Lancelin-Cervantes road in one year, but they put half the required funding into their forward estimates. They also said that they would build the Geraldton southern transport corridor stage 2, but did not put one cent in the estimates they had to present for independent assessment prior to the last election. They promised that road, but did not put a single cent into it. What is the difference between our government and a government of members opposite? We make realistic commitments.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order! I am having trouble listening to the minister with the noise from members to my left.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: We made commitments that we will deliver. Members opposite were in government for eight years and they had their foot on the hose.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order! Minister, please! I am having great difficulty in hearing what you are saying, and I am sure that everybody in the gallery would like to hear as well. Members to my left should try to restrain themselves a little bit. I thank members.

Mr D.F. Barron-Sullivan: We're trying!

The ACTING SPEAKER: Then members should restrain themselves a lot.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: This is the most ludicrous motion that I have ever seen from the opposition. As part of our strategic investment in infrastructure to turn Geraldton around, we have committed to a new stage of development, and the opposition condemns us for it! I am very pleased and proud to submit the government for judgment to the people of Geraldton.

MR J.J.M. BOWLER (Murchison-Eyre - Minister for Resources and Assisting the Minister for State Development) [4.06 pm]: I will not speak about the entire process of the development of all the roads in the mid-west. I want to speak about one road that the member for Moore conveniently, I assume - maybe it was absent-mindedly - forgot to mention; that is, the Wiluna-Meekatharra road. Although it may not specifically be in the mid-west, that road comes right through the region and ends up at the port of Geraldton. Maybe the member for Moore forgot to mention this point: this year's budget contains an allocation of \$8.54 million for this road.

I will quickly refer to the history of the road. Over 40 years ago, the then Liberal government pulled up the rail tracks that went into Wiluna from Meekatharra, but said to the people of Wiluna at the time, "Don't worry; we're taking away your railway but we will build you a new road." That was 40 years ago. This government will start building that road. In fact, on Friday week, the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure - I hope to go with her - will be going to Wiluna to turn over the first sod on the construction of the seal of that road. It will cover only the first 15 kilometres between Wiluna and the Magellan lead mine, but it shows that once the government starts building a road and starts sealing a road, the government will complete the work. This is a very important road, and not just for the mid-west; it is also important for my electorate of Murchison-Eyre, for the Magellan mine, and for the people of Meekatharra and Wiluna.

Mr B.J. Grylls: And important for the state.

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER: And it is important for the state, Leader of the National Party. This is a very important road, member for Moore, and one that I am proud of. The member conveniently forgot to mention it in his budget figures.

Finally, when talking about figures, members can pluck out any figures they want. However, there is a basic figure that must be looked at in this debate. When we came to government, 51 per cent of the state's money being spent on roads in Western Australia was being spent in the metropolitan area. This year, of the state money being spent on roads, 67 per cent will be spent in the country.

MR S.R. HILL (Geraldton) [4.08 pm]: Madam Acting Speaker -

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Mr G. Snook: Go on - announce it.

Mr S.R. HILL: I announce the Indian Ocean Drive!

Mr G. Snook: Yes!

Mr S.R. HILL: I wish to speak briefly on the Indian Ocean Drive. The members for Greenough and Moore and I have been working on this issue for many months. The minister has indicated that 2007 is the commencement date.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order! Members, there is a limited amount of time for debate, and there is still another motion on the table. Please, can we get on with it.

Mr S.R. HILL: The commencement date for Indian Ocean Drive is 2007, and I am imploring and encouraging the minister to bring the completion date forward. As the member for Moore said, there are dangerous traffic movements on the Brand Highway. I have driven the Brand Highway many times over many years, and I agree with the member for Moore that it is totally dangerous now. When behind a couple of road trains with a bit of water on the road, one cannot see to overtake those road trains. This is an important infrastructure project for the entire mid-west.

As the minister said, 2007 is the commencement date. I will be pushing hard in my own party room to have that completion date brought forward. I know the residents of the mid-west, particularly in my electorate of Geraldton, are keen to see the completion date for that road come forward. We have completed stage 1 of the southern transport corridor. We are working on stage 2 in my own electorate, but one of the key road infrastructures, as the member for Moore has mentioned, is Indian Ocean Drive. I cannot agree with the motion to condemn the Labor government. Before being elected member for Geraldton in 2001, I was with the Ministry for Planning and Infrastructure for nearly 10 years. I remember working with Jamie Edwards and Phil Cooper. I think the previous mayor is in the gallery this afternoon. We worked on the Geraldton region plan. I remember that the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure of the day, Graham Kierath - for whom I have a lot of time - brought up the update of the Geraldton region plan, and the southern transport corridor was in that plan, but it was never funded. It was never built until we came into government and we built stage 2 -

Mr B.J. Grylls: Nothing to do with that railway to Mandurah, is it?

Mr S.R. HILL: No, it is nothing to do with that at all. To condemn the Labor government for the lack of infrastructure in the mid-west is just unbelievable. If the road networks into the Geraldton port -

Mr G. Snook: Doesn't Indian Ocean Drive count?

Mr S.R. HILL: Indian Ocean Drive does count. The minister has said that 2007 will be the commencement date. If we can bring that completion date forward, we will bring it forward. I will keep lobbying the minister in my own party room to try to bring that completion date forward, but I cannot agree with the motion presented to the house today.

MR T. BUSWELL (Vasse - Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [4.11 pm]: I have a couple of small points to contribute to this debate this afternoon. The member for Moore has cemented the date in my mind: June 2000. It was in June 2000 that the last significant work on Indian Ocean Drive was completed. That was the section that runs from Cervantes to Jurien. Since June 2000, which is only six years ago - almost one-and-a-half terms of Labor in government - there has not been a cent spent on Indian Ocean Drive. On the subject of coastal drives along what I still refer to as the Batavia Coast, but is now called, I believe, the Turquoise or Coral Coast, it was the coalition government that, when last in power, constructed the Kalbarri coastal access road. In my previous life, I quite often had reason to drive tour coaches along this stretch of Western Australian roads, and I can tell members that the roads are dangerous and that this type of road infrastructure is much needed.

A couple of interesting studies confirm what I am saying. It is interesting to note that in late 2003-04, the state government's own Tourism Commission - Tourism Western Australia - produced a report. One of its pages is headed "Iconic Gaps in Australia's Coral Coast". The report reads -

As the key gateway for metropolitan Perth the completion of the Indian Ocean Drive between Lancelin and Cervantes is pivotal in unleashing the shorter trip potential of the southern parts of the region whilst significantly adding value for all self drive tourists.

Those words are echoed in the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia's own submission to the State Infrastructure Strategy. This is a very impressive document, and there is a lot to be learnt by government and by both sides of politics about how this state should go about long-term sustainable infrastructure development. It lists a range of significant infrastructure projects that need to be considered in a

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framework, including south west regional linkages, the port, Burrup infrastructure, the goldfields freight hub, high-load corridors etc. It talks about tourism infrastructure, and the number one piece of significant tourism infrastructure that it identifies -

Mr G. Snook: Guess what?

Mr T. BUSWELL: Tell us, member for Moore.

Mr G. Snook: Indian Ocean Drive.

Mr T. BUSWELL: Indian Ocean Drive. That is right. There it is. Time after time over the past six years, organisations in this state, including Tourism Western Australia, have identified the significance and importance of Indian Ocean Drive. Yet over six years and six budgets, all the government can tell us, the people of the mid-west, the tourism operators and the other people who will benefit from having 34 per cent less traffic on Brand Highway, is that the year after this will be the year in which the first sod will be turned on stage - what? - of Indian Ocean Drive. There is no date given for completion. It is all well and good to start one end of a road without a commitment to complete the road.

Mr J.J.M. Bowler: It would obviously be stage 1, wouldn't it?

Mr T. BUSWELL: I tell the member that I think it is occasionally interesting to listen in this chamber when some of the government backbenchers have an opportunity to expose themselves to the public here in Geraldton. Yesterday we had the member for Joondalup - I think it was the member for Joondalup; we rarely hear him - striding forward and saying, "I am from Joondalup, the gateway to Geraldton." The problem is, he is at the gate but there is no road going anywhere from the gate. There is no road. Indian Ocean Drive is a critical road for the benefit of local residents and local industry. It is very interesting to note the tourism statistics for Geraldton and the broader Coral Coast region. Geraldton as a tourist destination is not performing as well as other areas on the Coral Coast, like Kalbarri, Coral Bay etc. Geraldton and the area between here and Perth are, by and large, missing out on the benefits of booming tourism in this area. There is absolutely no doubt that the construction of Indian Ocean Drive, six years in the waiting, would add to that boom.

I want to conclude with a couple of quick remarks about the use of the government surplus. I note a motion on the book on which I am sure we will be talking very soon about the use of the government surplus; this \$1.98 billion surplus the government has. People are right to criticise the Treasurer and the government for the cheap political stunt that is the attempt to apportion about \$1.25 billion of that surplus to debt repayment on the Perth-Mandurah rail project. They are right to criticise it, because it is a stunt. It is a stunt because two years ago when the government repaid \$800 million of public debt, it did not tie it to anything. The government has \$2 billion of consolidated debt that it could have paid off, other than on that project. It did not pay it off. The reason it paid it off was this: when the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure next says she is having a budget adjustment or contingency rather than a budget blow-out on the Perth-Mandurah rail project, and we say it is an outrage, the government will say not to worry; it is paid off. There are political purposes behind the tying of those funds. That is why it happened. We know it, the public of Western Australia knows it, and I suspect that even the government knows it.

Mr E.S. Ripper: We did identify that debt repayment. It was your failed Westrail freight privatisation. We had to pay off the debt left over from that.

Mr T. BUSWELL: That is one component of three payments made.

Mr E.S. Ripper: We have identified debt before.

Mr T. BUSWELL: Here is the point: the repayment of debt with surplus funds is, in itself, not a bad thing. One point to consider is that it does not preclude further expenditure on regional Western Australia. However, there is an issue here, and the issue is that in the context -

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members! Can we not have conversations across the floor, please. We have a member on his feet.

Mr T. BUSWELL: The issue is that in the context of infrastructure investment decisions made in this state, there is a range of criteria that should apply. I consider two criteria to be the most important. Firstly, to make sure that any project stands alone from a cost-benefit point of view. Whether that benefit is economic or social, it is imperative that a proper, thorough and rigorous cost-benefit analysis be conducted. Secondly, it is important to conduct an opportunity cost analysis. What does an opportunity cost analysis do? It recognises that if a dollar is spent on project A and project B, there will be a project that does not happen. It is important that all of these things are continually made a priority and attended to. I think the Treasurer is making a genuine endeavour to

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plan properly for the provision of infrastructure in this state. I honestly feel that. I think that when we sit down and look at it for the better long-term interests of Western Australia, we will all agree on a vast percentage of those projects, because most people elected to Parliament have the best long-term interests of this state at heart. There are sections that we will not agree on, because there are components of the government's infrastructure expenditure to which the opposition feels the government does not attach the correct level of significance in this opportunity cost analysis.

Mr E.S. Ripper: Can I ask you, since you believe in doing less with less: are there any pieces of infrastructure that you would not build?

Mr T. BUSWELL: Unfortunately, I have just been given an instruction from my leader, so I shall move on. However, why is it that we differ in our assessment of what is important in Western Australia? It is because the opposition values regional Western Australia. When we put up the bumper board about where we intend to spend money, we would have a number of significant infrastructure projects in Western Australia ranked above where the government places them, because we value and view regional Western Australia in a different way from the government. They are the facts, and in due course that argument will be borne out.

MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie-Wellington) [4.21 pm]: This is the first opportunity I have had to speak since the Parliament has been sitting in Geraldton. I thank the people of Geraldton for their hospitality. It has been great, and I expect to enjoy a bit more of it tonight after Parliament is over. People, especially those in the gallery, must realise that if this parliamentary sitting were being held in Bunbury we would have the same story coming from the opposition about the roads in Bunbury, or the roads in Collie. It would be exactly the same story. That is why I take my hat off to the minister for her fairness in allocation of the budget.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs J. Hughes): Order! I understand that we have had a very big two days. We have also had a very big five weeks, and everybody is getting tired, but can we please try to behave ourselves while we are here.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: That is why I think this is one of the fairest allocations of road funding I have seen for quite some time. The amount of money that has been allocated, with commonwealth funding, amounts to nearly \$1 billion, a remarkable sum. Of that sum, \$376 million will go to new road construction and \$194 million will go towards maintenance of the assets, which is just great. I do not have a great deal of time and I have quite a line-up of speakers behind me, but I will run through some of the figures. In the Gascoyne, \$3.39 million has been allocated for ongoing construction and sealing of the Carnarvon to Mullewa road. That is in this region. It is not just the highway that members might use on a daily basis, it is bigger than that. We must look further. The sum of \$225 million has been allocated for flood repairs on the North West Coastal Highway. In the goldfields-Esperance region, \$2.9 million has been allocated to complete construction and sealing of the Magellan section of the Goldfields Highway between Wiluna and Meekatharra. In the great southern, about which the opposition has also been complaining, \$4.5 million has been allocated for construction of the Mt Barker northern bypass on the Muirs Highway. Members of the opposition, including the member for Vasse, have been really thumping the government about the South Western Highway. A huge amount of money is being spent on that road, including \$10 million for a bypass around Bridgetown. Further up the South Western Highway, we see the reconstruction of the stretch near Donnybrook, in the electorate of the member for Capel. This is something that has been wanted for a long time, and now it is being done. I am sure that people in the gallery have read about some of the problems we have had down there with a number of people being killed and injured. There has been reconstruction and sealing of the shoulders of the road between Donnybrook and Balingup. This had to be done.

We cannot just single out one coastal road and say that that is the one we want built, because we are now in Geraldton, and we can become popular politicians for drawing attention to those things. I noticed on the way into Geraldton that roadworks are being done right now on the road from Dongara. I am sure Bunbury would love to have bypasses the same as those in Geraldton. Another group has been asking for \$75 million to build a bypass in that area. We cannot do it all at once. The package that has been put out in this year's budget is one of the best for many years, because it is fair. It deals with some of the problems on the Brand Highway, with an allocation of \$2.4 million for that road. It does not go the whole way. We cannot spend \$1 billion in just one area. We are talking about the whole of Western Australia. I must keep coming back to that, because I know the National Party is putting up another motion along those lines. I thank the minister for sharing the road funding around and for being fair and equitable across the state.

Question to be Put

On motion by **Mr G. Woodhams**, resolved -

Extract from *Hansard*
[ASSEMBLY - Wednesday, 31 May 2006]
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Mr Gary Snook; Acting Speaker; Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Ms Alannah MacTiernan; Mr John Bowler; Mr Shane Hill; Mr Troy Buswell; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Grant Woodhams

That the question be now put.

Motion Resumed

Question put and negatived.