

WEST BUSSELTON PRIMARY SCHOOL — PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

Grievance

MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Leader of the Liberal Party) [9.50 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Transport. I thank the minister for taking my grievance on the serious and growing concerns from parents and school administrators about the daily safety of schoolchildren attending West Busselton Primary School. The community's anxiety is focused on the dangers to schoolchildren crossing Bussell Highway between Fairway Drive and Bower Road. It is a busy intersection where students, staff and parents, some pushing prams, need to cross the highway at the beginning and end of school each day. The problem of student and pedestrian safety is wider than the primary school. The current A-type warden crossing currently manages the high volume of students from four local schools crossing this busy four-lane road with traffic travelling at 60 kilometres an hour. Students travel to and from the primary school, Busselton Senior High School, St Mary MacKillop College and Cornerstone Christian College, the latter two of which have both primary and senior school campuses.

The danger to children became a reality last year when a 10-year-old grade 5 student from West Busselton Primary School was seriously injured when hit by a car crossing Bussell Highway as she was on her way to school. Her injuries were so significant that she was flown by the Royal Flying Doctor Service to Perth Children's Hospital for extensive emergency treatment. Soon after, in term 4 last year, a high school student and former West Busselton Primary School student was also run down by a car that failed to stop at a warden-controlled crosswalk. Only one warden was present at the time trying to control four lanes of traffic within a 60-kilometre-an-hour zone. These serious accidents are so concerning to the school community that it believes if something is not done to improve safety, there may be another serious accident.

The school communities are calling for a speed reduction that can accommodate a flashing 40-kilometre-an-hour school zone. There is currently a 40-kilometre-an-hour speed zone on Bower Road, but that road is rarely used as a crossing point. Students and staff travel on either Geographe Bay Road on the dual-use path or Bussell Highway, which requires crossing before they reach Bower Road. At that point, they are on the same side as the school. I have been advised that the wardens are totally supportive of reducing the speed limit and have safety concerns themselves. They also support incorporating the 40-kilometre-an-hour flashing zone. It is important that we consider the safety of our wardens as well. This call is also in response to the ongoing difficulty local schools in West Busselton and throughout the state are having recruiting wardens for long-term and short-term positions and filling vacancies due to illness and short-term absences. WA police, through the children's crossing unit, has supported the requirement for two school wardens to safely operate the four-lane highway. As the minister would be aware, WA police was at one time responsible for filling the gaps when warden crossings were unmanned. However, because of other operational priorities, police are no longer able to provide this support. I have been advised by West Busselton Primary School that it now receives notification from WA police when the warden crossing will be unmanned so that the school can advise the school community.

The primary school's call for a drop in the speed limit is also supported by the City of Busselton, which has taken up the issue with Main Roads but which, disappointingly, has been rejected. The local community believes that that decision lacks common sense and is not based on the merits of the issue or the lived experience at a local level. Main Roads rejected the request on the basis that the location did not meet the primary school requirements fronting a school. I understand that Main Roads reviewed the section of Bussell Highway near the primary school to determine its eligibility for a general 40-kilometre-an-hour speed zone. However, given that it is a primary school distributor road with a carriageway that is more than 10 metres wide, it was not deemed a suitable option. Additionally, I understand that Main Roads argued that it was not viable to have a 40-kilometre-an-hour electronic speed zone located so close to a signalised intersection—Bussell Highway and Fairway Drive—and that motorists travelling south would have to negotiate the 70-kilometre-an-hour signalised intersection before being expected to reduce the speed limit to 40 kilometres an hour almost immediately, which would lead to reduced compliance and safety at the crossing. The reasoning was that Bussell Highway is a primary distributor road that is more than 10 metres wide and therefore is unsuitable and is inconsistent with a 40-kilometre-an-hour school zone further west along Bussell Highway, which is adjacent to Busselton Senior High School. Main Roads' proposition that having a 40-kilometre-an-hour zone so close to the lights at the intersection fails to acknowledge there is a 40-kilometre-an-hour zone outside Busselton Senior High School. Also, disappointingly, Main Roads' assessment that because the approach to the intersection along Bussell Highway is 70 kilometres an hour, it would lead to reduced compliance and safety as motorists would have to slow to 40 kilometres an hour fails to recognise that the current speed limit in both directions along Bussell Highway is 60 kilometres an hour, not 70 kilometres an hour.

The City of Busselton and the school community do not believe their concerns for the safety of the schoolchildren and pedestrians are being taken seriously, and they want to be heard. Given that two school-age children have been hit by cars at this site, one being airlifted to Perth for emergency treatment, I would hope that would give the minister reason to reconsider this decision. I know that the minister acknowledges that children are some of our most

vulnerable road users and I hope she will take on board the concerns of both the city and the local community in ensuring the safety of the students, pedestrians and the wardens manning those difficult and dangerous crossings.

The request for the 40-kilometre-an-hour school zone might not seem to meet the black-letter interpretation of the current policy, but there are other examples of this being the case and I believe that this is a very compelling argument and deserves to be re-examined. I therefore appeal to the minister to review this decision and commit to further consultation with the school community and the City of Busselton that will result in the immediate outcome being the safety of our schoolchildren and pedestrians. I thank her for taking the grievance.

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan — Minister for Transport) [9.57 am]: I thank the member for Vasse for the grievance. I have been reviewing this issue. As the member outlined, the policy would suggest that it should not be a 40-kilometre-an-hour zone because of the nature of Bussell Highway and the fact that the school is not facing Bussell Highway. We get a lot of calls from a lot of members of the community to put a 40-kilometre-an-hour speed limit in place. Main Roads has a set of guidelines and rules that it puts in place to try to make sure there is fairness across the entire state, but not a week goes by when I am not approached about this issue because people are very concerned about the speed and the nature of people's driving near schools. I think that this circumstance is compounded because there are not two traffic wardens at the site. As I understand it, that is still the case.

Ms L. Mettam: Yes. It varies, but that is an ongoing issue.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I was speaking to my team this morning. These roads have four lanes of traffic, so there is significant activity, and having looked at the site, I did not see a strong refuge in the middle, which is another factor. The ability to stop in the middle of the way through is a big safety factor on all roads; a safe place in the middle of the road contributes to safety.

The member for Vasse outlined that there is a shortage of traffic wardens. I was just talking to the member for Fremantle. Traffic wardens are not in my portfolio; they are in that of the Minister for Police. There is now a massive campaign to try to get traffic wardens. Schools in my electorate do not have any traffic wardens and their lack is an issue for many people in this chamber. This situation and some of the incidents that occurred last year are compounded by the fact that there are not two traffic wardens; it is very hard for one person to manage four lanes of traffic.

The member has raised the concern with me. While we have a shortage of traffic wardens in areas like this, I have asked my team to look at whether it would be possible to get some electronic variable message signs out there to slow down people. I have asked my team, and Main Roads directly, to reconsider that. They will liaise with the school and will see what else can be done to try to improve safety in that area. As I said, there are rules about where the speed limit is dropped, but currently the shortage of traffic wardens on a road of this nature exacerbates some of the concerns or potential issues, so I am happy to ask my agency to look at putting some electronic variable message signs in this area while there is no guarantee of having two sets of traffic wardens.