

**LAMBERT-BUNBURY RAILWAY LINE**

*Motion*

**MR P.D. OMODEI (Warren-Blackwood - Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [5.13 pm]:** I move -

- (1) That this house condemns the Labor government for its failure to resolve problems with the Lambert to Bunbury railway line, which has resulted in the closure of the line and a dangerous increase in the number of heavy haulage trucks using the South Western Highway. In particular, the house condemns the government's failure to -
  - (a) act in a timely manner to prevent the closure of the railway line;
  - (b) upgrade the South Western Highway to protect motorists from the dangers associated with the increase in heavy haulage trucks on the road; and
  - (c) consult with the community on the impact of the rail closure.
- (2) This house calls upon the government to -
  - (a) clearly state its intention in regards to the future of the Lambert to North Greenbushes railway line and the North Greenbushes to Bunbury railway line;
  - (b) provide a clear time line for maintenance work on the Greenbushes to Bunbury portion of the railway, including the anticipated date that the line will be reopened;
  - (c) immediately identify how it intends to address safety issues arising from the dramatic increase in heavy haulage trucks on the South Western Highway, particularly in regard to the need for passing lanes in the areas of Hester Hill and Balingup Hill and a general upgrade of the South Western Highway; and
  - (d) urgently state its position on the proposal for the establishment of a new heavy haulage bypass route around Bridgetown.

This matter has been to the fore in the past couple of weeks following the death of a relatively young truck driver from Australind who had spent his lifetime in the forest industry. He was killed on the road not far from Kirup when the trailer on a fully loaded truck approaching him flipped over, swung around and collided with his truck, and another truck then collided into the back of his vehicle. Geoff Gunson will be sadly missed. I mentioned last week in this place that he had a tremendous send-off from a great group of people from all over the south west of Western Australia. His coffin was delivered on a yellow Mack truck that was identical to his vehicle. It was a very heart-rending experience for all who attended. Interestingly, Geoff Gunson had been warning for some time that a major accident would occur on the South Western Highway in relation to the movement of heavy trucks. In an interview with Liam Bartlett, Geoff Gunson's wife said that he feared that a school bus and his own children could be involved in an accident. Anyone could have been killed - in this case, it was Geoff Gunson. The fact that he warned the public of Western Australia and stated that the government should do something about the matter is testament to the fact that addressing the issue has been delayed for far too long.

Members are aware that I have presented a number of petitions in the first weeks of this Parliament relating to the railway line, the bypass and the safety issues; that is, three different sets of petitions were signed by many people. I have in my hand another petition that, unfortunately, did not conform to the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly, but I will read it into *Hansard* so that the people who signed the petition will know that something has been done about it. The petition reads -

To the Elected Representatives and Election Candidates representing the seats of Warren-Blackwood, Capel, Bunbury, Leschenault and the South West Region:

We, the undersigned constituents of Western Australia, respectfully request your support in opposing the closure of the South West Railway Line given that the closure will see in excess of 400,000 tonnes of woodchips redirected onto the South Western Highway between Manjimup and Bunbury, escalating the already dangerous mix of heavy-haulage vehicles with local and tourist traffic on a road that needs yet to be brought up to an acceptable standard. We also ask that you actively seek to identify other heavy freight which can be transferred to the South West Rail Line from the South West Highway.

This petition was initiated in Donnybrook by concerned people in the local chamber of commerce. It contains 670 signatures; therefore, a significant number of people took their time to put their names to the petition. Unfortunately, it did not comply with standing orders. At least people have had their say, as I have presented it to the chamber.

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I am concerned that this matter has been ongoing for a very long time. Undoubtedly, the design of the South Western Highway is not in tune with the amount of heavy traffic currently using it. The situation has arisen for two reasons, the first of which is the premature closure of the railway line from Bunbury to Lambert. I need to explain Lambert's location. Lambert is about 12 kilometres south of Manjimup, and the Diamond chip-mill is located at the Lambert siding. That mill was built in 1975, and the railway line was built, I believe, by the Burke government to service that area. At one stage, about 850 000 tonnes of woodchips were sent to the Bunbury port along that line.

This issue has not arisen only recently. I took time to gather some newspaper clippings on the matter. The headline on the front page of the *Donnybrook-Bridgetown Mail* last week read "Fatal bush crash". The article explained that the accident had occurred at eight o'clock in the morning on the road near Kirup. Mark Manea, the chamber president from Donnybrook, outlined that 300 trucks travel through the shire each day, which highlights the staggering nature of the problem. He said that it was of great concern that the Manjimup-Picton railway line could remain unused until the end of the year. The minister may well comment on that. The general manager of WA Plantation Resources, Ian Telfer, said that it would not be viable for woodchips to be transported by rail for only a few weeks. He said that although the preferred option was transporting the logs by rail, it was conditional on a mill being built at the Bunbury port.

Another headline on page 5 of a Manjimup paper is "Victim's brother calls for road action". One paragraph of that article states that Ken Gunson, who is well known in the south west, was surprised to find that people preferred to travel to Nannup. He also explained that he believed that the road was in a terrible condition. He has said to me that he will campaign for the road to be upgraded. The article goes on to quote the minister. She said that if the railway line were once again used by WA Plantation Resources, 72 road trains would be taken off the highway. There has been varying information on this issue. An article in the *Donnybrook-Bridgetown Mail* of 24 May states -

South West MLC Chrissy Sharp said while she welcomed the planned facility, . . .

That is the new facility to transfer the woodchip and log traffic. It continues -

"Winter is approaching and the roads are wet," she said.

"There are far too many multi-combination vehicles on South West Highway and it is just too dangerous.

"The Minister should reinstate the former use of the line to get at least some wood chips back off the highway.

"How many more deaths do we need to get some action?"

On 18 May, the Manjimup council called for an upgrade of the highway. An article headed "Council calls for highway upgrade" refers to Mr Gunson. It states -

Mr Gunson, who had worked in the timber industry for many years, shifted with his family from Manjimup to Australind more than 10 years ago.

"The shift of transport from the railway line to the highway between Bunbury and Manjimup has significantly increased the numbers of trucks on the road. If the Government does not plan to upgrade the rail line it must take urgent action to widen -

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** Can you read that again?

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** The article reports the new shire president, Wade De Campo, as saying -

"The shift of transport from the railway line to the highway between Bunbury and Manjimup has significantly increased the numbers of trucks on the road. If the Government does not plan to upgrade the rail line it must take urgent action to widen the highway, provide passing lanes and improve the road's safety in general, . . .

"Manjimup's community is at the southern end of the highway and many of our residents use this on a daily basis to travel through to Bunbury and beyond. They include families with young children who put their lives at risk every time they use the highway, . . .

During the election campaign a number of articles quoted members of the Greens (WA) as saying that the railway line between Manjimup and Bunbury should be maintained irrespective of how many tonnes of woodchips are moved and that the line needs to be brought up to a level at which it can be used. Christine Sharp was again quoted. A rail promise was also made. One article, headed "Rail promise", has a nice photograph of

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South West MLC Adele Farina and the then Manjimup shire president, Peter McKenzie, who was the Labor Party candidate. It goes on to state -

Closure of the railway line between Manjimup and Greenbushes is not an option, according to the State Government.

Planning and Infrastructure Minister Alannah MacTiernan said she has no intention of signing off to close the line even if it is no longer used to transport woodchips.

It was said quite plainly in the meetings I had with the Bunbury Wellington Economic Alliance that the railway line between Greenbushes and Lambert would be mothballed. I expected that "mothballed" meant that there would be no traffic on that railway line at all. That issue has not been addressed. The road between Lambert and Greenbushes, which encompasses not only Bridgetown itself but also Hester Hill, is certainly dangerous.

The reason I have quoted these articles is that they are not my words; they are the words of other people who are concerned about this road. Members would have heard me refer to this issue at least eight or 10 times in speeches I have made in this Parliament over the past four or five years, and the South Western Highway and the railway line have always been mentioned in budget speeches and, more recently, in matters of public interest. Interestingly, today we have seen some action by the government. The minister made a ministerial statement indicating that there will be funding for a bypass around Bridgetown; it will cost between \$7 million and \$10 million and September 2006 is the earliest that construction can start. She said that those matters needed to be addressed. That has been welcomed. I commend the minister for finally biting the bullet on the issue of the bypass. It has been around since the time of the previous government. A referendum was held on which alignment the road should take. September 2006 is a year and a half away; it will be that time before that construction starts, and that is a matter of concern. There is no doubt that a dangerous situation exists in the middle of Bridgetown, where there is a corner in the middle of the main street, a hump and an intersection with a road that goes off towards Boyup Brook. Not only does heavy traffic come into the town from that side, but also a large volume of traffic goes through the town, including vehicles carrying woodchips, small chip logs, plantation logs and native forest timber from the northern part of the south west area - that is, Collie and Donnybrook - which are provedoring the mills in the south west corner.

I took some time to do some research to find out how long this matter had been going on. I know that the Premier was written a letter on 14 November last year. The letter refers to the concerns of the Shire of Donnybrook-Balingup about what was happening with the railway line and South Western Highway. The letter was sent to the Premier, so obviously the shire was not getting much joy from the minister. The letter stated that funds needed to be spent on the railway line and the road. I will read the resolution that was passed on 6 December 2004 at the joint councils' meeting, which comprised the Shires of Capel, Dardanup, Harvey and Donnybrook-Balingup and the City of Bunbury. The resolution states -

1. Request the Premier to take immediate action to ensure the Picton to Manjimup rail line is upgraded and maintained to a standard suitable for the transport of woodchips.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** What was the date of that meeting?

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** The meeting was on 6 December 2004.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** That was after we made the announcement, wasn't it?

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** I am not sure; I will get to the minister's announcement shortly. It continues -

2. Advise the Premier that the Joint Councils have a lack of confidence in the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure to carry out her duties in respect to the transport section of her portfolio.
3. Demand the Logs on Rail report be released immediately.

That resolution was included in a letter that was sent to the Premier. It also referred to the number of towns that would be impacted on. Of course, in the intervening period the election was held. The Premier wrote to the council on 1 April 2005. His letter states -

You would by now be aware of the Government's announcement (on 27 December 2004) of its initiative to double the amount of plantation timber carried by rail in the South West by engaging in a partnership with the WA Plantation Resources . . . and the Australian Railroad Group . . .

It goes on to state that this partnership would result in more than 750 000 tonnes per annum being transported by rail. It continues -

I am delighted that the Government has not only been able to deliver on the promise -

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No action has been taken -

but in doing so, doubled the amount of timber currently carried by rail. This outcome will ensure the railway will now have a guaranteed future over the medium term in serving the plantation timber industry.

The Premier went on in his letter to refuse to release the logs on rail report, which fell off the back of a truck about a year and a half ago. What concerns me is that the same letter goes on to state -

In mid 2004, DPI, WAPRES and ARG developed a joint proposal for a revitalised rail service to transport 350,000 tonnes per annum of woodchips (from the Diamond Mill at Manjimup) and 400,000 tonnes per annum of plantation logs from the central part of the region. The woodchips would be transported by road from the Diamond Mill instead of going by rail.

That is 350 000 tonnes of woodchips going through Manjimup and Bridgetown. The trains would operate from Greenbushes. The article goes on to state that this initiative will benefit people in Balingup, Mullalyup, Kirup, Donnybrook, Boyanup and Dardanup. I do not know how it will help Dardanup. What concerns me about this, and discussions that have taken place about the new loading facility at Greenbushes, is that Hansol PI Pty Ltd was not consulted on that issue at all. It is currently carting 250 000 tonnes of woodchips on the road, soon to be increased to over 400 000 tonnes. I do not think the government has had its heart in this issue.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** This is the privatiser of the rail talking. This is the most outrageous presentation I have ever heard.

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** I will deal with the issue of privatisation in a moment.

By its own admission, the government is saying that 750 000 tonnes of woodchips will need to be transported through Greenbushes. However, it does not talk about the Hansol woodchips, the amount of general traffic, the logs going south and the empty trucks that will have to come back north. It does not talk about the produce that is grown in the south west. It is the biggest apple growing area, the biggest potato growing area and the biggest vegetable growing area in the state. In the meantime, there is also general traffic coming across the Muir Highway that goes to Perth along the South Western Highway. I know that when the minister goes down south she flies to Manjimup and then jumps into her car. However, she should travel in a truck or a small car. When one reaches one of the few passing lanes between Bridgetown and Donnybrook, passing a large truck on one side with a big truck coming in the other direction, is like going down a tunnel. The movement and configurations of those large vehicles is something the government should have done something about a long time ago. Certainly an audit of the South Western Highway is needed to see whether it comes up to the proper standards of highway 1, including fog widths, passing lanes and curves. It is a dangerous road by any person's judgment.

While the minister is still in earshot, I will respond to the press statement that was released today about the government retiring debt from the sale of Westrail. If ever I have seen a political exercise, this was it. I expect the minister to raise this issue in this debate. The facts of the matter are that Westrail was sold by the previous government for \$585 million. All of the information is on the record. The employee transition costs were \$48 million; stamp duty was \$28 million; and sale costs were \$15 million to \$20 million. When all those amounts were taken into account, \$489 million was allocated to reducing Westrail's debt. The minister might say that the government is picking up the remainder of that debt. Regardless of whether Westrail was sold or not, there was a debt on the state books in relation to Westrail. It was accruing at the rate of \$100 million a year, and the railway line was running at a loss of \$100 million a year. The sale included an agreement. I do not think the agreement was in writing, but the minister can check. I intend to check every detail on the sale of Westrail. I understand that, under this agreement, ARG has spent in excess of \$700 million in upgrading the rail infrastructure.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** Where has that money been spent?

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** It certainly has not been spent on the south west railway. The minister should tell me. She is the minister responsible.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** I can tell you that they have not spent that money.

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** We will establish whether that is the case, and if necessary I will come into this place and apologise if I am wrong. However, I am given to understand that significant funds have been spent not only on rolling stock, sleepers and rail, but also on the replacement of engines. If I am wrong, I will admit it. I am big enough and ugly enough to do that. The minister cannot keep using the excuse that the lease of that railway line for 49 years to ARG is the cause of all of these problems. If that is the problem, why does the government not buy it back?

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**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** I am doing that.

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** I think that is a great idea; now maybe we will see some significant work being done on the railway line.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** Sorry, I thought you said “fight back”.

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** The truth of the matter is that the railway line was in such a state that in places the speed of rail traffic was reduced to as little as 10 kilometres an hour. That is how much the railway line had deteriorated over many years. It must be borne in mind that this railway line was built under Labor’s watch, and deterioration that is taking place at the moment is happening on the minister’s watch. As the responsible minister she should have done something about this issue when the councils and people of the south west raised it with her over a number of years. The five councils writing to the Premier telling him that the minister of the day is not capable of handling her portfolio do not do that lightly. In the end, they know they must deal with the government of the day. They need funding for roads and infrastructure in the municipalities. It takes a fair bit of courage for a local government to use the kind of words I read out in this Parliament about the minister’s efforts. I acknowledge that the minister came down and talked to Bridgetown-Greenbushes shire president Rob Walster just before Christmas. I remember hearing stories that she was in town, and discussing the issue of the bypass, and now she has moved on that.

I am giving the minister credit for that, but now she should take a drive down the South Western Highway. I am hoping against hope that we will not merely receive more lip service about a few more passing lanes on South Western Highway because the information I have is that Main Roads is talking about five more passing lanes. That is not enough. People will be killed on this road. The Bridgetown-Greenbushes shire president said as much in the double-page story by Suellen Jerrard, which was very accurate. It was on page 15 of *The West Australian* and was headed “Traffic nightmare looms in south west as rail line closes”. It is not as if the minister’s office is unaware of the concerns of people in the south west. The Bridgetown-Greenbushes shire president was saying that people could be killed, and the Greens (WA) member for the South West Region was saying the same thing. Shire presidents and chambers of commerce have expressed concern, and people have signed petitions. People dread the trip to Bunbury for medical treatment for themselves or their loved ones. I have now been using the road for most of my life, and on a more regular basis over the past 20 years or so. I am not saying that I am any rally driver or whatever, but I consider the road to be dangerous, even to me. We see near misses all the time. The truck accident last week was not the first. There were three more before that. A truck heading south nearly cleaned up some shops in Balingup. It just cleaned up the wall of one of the buildings, but if it had gone any further it would have completely demolished those shops. If Geoff Gunson had not been a victim, it may have been the local school bus. The highway is also a school bus route. If the truck had hit a school bus, it would have killed 20 or 30 children. I am not just using these emotive issues to get this road upgraded. The messages, the warnings and the signs are there. The accidents are happening; it is not just all hypothetical. This is a very serious matter.

Tomorrow’s budget must provide many millions of dollars for the upgrade of the South Western Highway. If that is not done, we will be collectively responsible. It is a disaster waiting to happen. Regardless of whether 750 000 tonnes - I hope the minister is listening - is shifted onto rail or the extra Hansol Australia Pty Ltd timber is put onto rail, the road will still be dangerous. Semitrailers will continue to mix with passenger traffic, including holiday-makers towing caravans. The road is beyond its use-by date. The passing lanes are just passing lanes, and that is all. Some of them cut out halfway down the hill. Near Kirup in particular, people travel at 90 or 100 kilometres an hour, depending on the weather conditions and the double passing lanes suddenly cut out. Imagine it on a wet night. The passing lanes cut out before bridges also. It is obvious why: bridges cost more. There are very bad pincers and corners where problems are caused by merging traffic and trucks travelling alongside cars. It is very difficult to pass a big chip truck when it is raining even when passing lanes are provided. When it rains, those trucks create a huge billowing spray of water and it is hard to see past them, even with an extra lane. Under those conditions traffic builds up behind the trucks. Somebody who is running late or is in a hurry will try to pass the trucks and cause a serious accident.

Another issue I will refer to regards the hills. The former government fixed the problems at troths hill going down into Bridgetown on the northern slope. On the other side is Hester Hill where some minor works have occurred. However, there is not one passing lane on Hester Hill, which is very long. It is probably three or four kilometres. When two or three big trucks travel up or down that hill in low gear, it is a disaster waiting to happen. The Balingup hill is past North Greenbushes. If the \$10.9 million loading facility goes ahead, hopefully fewer trucks will travel beyond that point. The Balingup hill has a couple of skinny passing lanes that could not really be called passing lanes. Every time I travel along that road, I see very courteous truck drivers pull over to the side of the road in low gear to allow traffic to pass. One after another people cross the double white line. Even though they cross it by only a metre, they are breaking the law. Is it four demerit points for crossing the

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double white line, Mr Acting Speaker (Mr M.J. Cowper)? Obviously the member was not in the traffic division! That happens all the time, day in and day out.

The truck drivers are usually cautious. The truck companies are being used by the chip companies and they are driving the price per tonne down. Some trucks do three trips a day. To do that they must move at the maximum speed limit. They are big trucks with a lot of horsepower. Some of those drivers are not very experienced. A dozen truck companies are vying for that truck freight. The long B-double trucks with sloping and vibrating floors are very stable but the super lifts, which are very high trucks, move around a lot depending on the experience of the driver. The old contractors who have been using the South Western Highway for a long time seem to know the road better than the others. This issue cannot be denied.

I foresee a tragedy. The minister has taken some action. However, September 2006 is a long way off. Even if work were started on that road tomorrow and \$50 million were spent on it, it would cause significant disruption. Motorists would have to travel according to the changed conditions of the road at all times of the day. I do not want to hear from the minister any excuses about the sale of the railway line. That is an absolute furphy. We will always prove the minister wrong about that every time. If the railway line had not been sold, the \$1.1 billion debt would still exist.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** No wonder the former government had five budget deficits out of eight budgets with that type of economic nonsense.

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** The minister wants to divert attention away from this very important issue to budget deficits. It is easy to generate a budget surplus. All the government must do is debt-finance some of the capital works to provide a budget surplus. It is very simple. Do not give me that rubbish. Debt-finance the works, and the government will achieve a budget surplus. The minister's arguments are nonsense. Nobody believes what she says when she talks about the budget deficit.

**Mr M.P. Whitely:** I will look at *Hansard* tomorrow.

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** The member can read *Hansard* as many times as he likes. I am telling him that all the people in the south west are concerned about this issue. They are concerned about the rail and the type of rail. They want that railway upgraded and the heavy traffic to be put back onto that rail. They are saying also that regardless of what is done with the railway line, the road must be upgraded. I implore the minister to not play politics with this issue.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** Unlike your good self!

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** What does the minister expect me to do as the member for Warren-Blackwood?

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** Mea culpa! Mea culpa!

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** Mea culpa. During the time we were in government, the heavy freight was transported by rail. When I was the responsible minister in the previous government, that railway line continued to be used. We built the troatts hill lanes and we fixed the road between Bridgetown and Manjimup. I remind the minister that the President of the Shire of Donnybrook-Balingup, Bruce Hearman, who has been involved in local government for 20 years, plainly said last week that \$82 million allocated by the previous government had been removed by this government and that the \$8 million for the southern and northern approach to Donnybrook had also been removed by this government. It is not there any more. Do not talk to me about mea culpa. The facts are that this Labor government has removed huge amounts of funding for the South Western Highway and has failed to carry out the work required to make the road safe. That is the current situation. The minister can make all the noise she likes, but if people die on that road - I pray to God it does not happen - it will be on the head of this government.

**DR S.C. THOMAS (Capel) [5.47 pm]:** I rise to support the motion on behalf of the people of Capel who live along the South Western Highway, particularly at the Donnybrook and Balingup end. I have the potential advantage of not having been in the previous government; I do not have to take responsibility for its actions. This issue is specifically about adequately planning for the future. It is not about transport per se but about what will happen and who is responsible for the long-term planning in this state.

We know that the blue gum plantations were planted some time ago. For more than 10 or 15 years we have known that there will be a massive increase in the amount of road and rail transport because of the number of blue gum plantations. I do not want to get into the rights and wrongs of blue gum plantations, but shires around my electorate in particular are inundated with them. For example, blue gums comprise the greatest amount of land use in the Shire of Boyup Brook. There are some enormous plantations in the south west. Subsequent governments have not adequately planned the transportation and processing of the timber. This matter is about making sure that somebody plans for the future. Some thought should be given to the possibility of timber from

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blue gum plantations being processed and transported offshore in 10 years. Obviously in the long term we would like the timber to be processed onshore, which will raise other transport issues.

I will address road and rail separately. Obviously something has gone wrong in the planning process over the past 10 or 15 years if people did not recognise that this would be a problem. I will commence with the South Western Highway per se. I want to refer to the projections by the Main Roads board that occurred during the last term of the Court-led government and the current government. The previous Liberal-led government was spending a minimum of \$60 million a year in its final term.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** On what?

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** On roads throughout the south west. I just have a figure of \$60 million.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** I do not think that is correct.

**Mr M.P. Whitely:** Capital or maintenance?

**Mr J.H.D. Day:** It was about \$50 million less a year for Main Roads across the state.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** I have a document showing the funding for everything that has been spent on the South Western Highway during your term of government and during our term of government -

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I am sorry to interrupt, minister, but I am referring to the south west, not just the South Western Highway. My figures include, for example, the Old Coast Road, the Busselton deviation and a number of major road projects that were occurring around the south west in the period from 1996 to 2001. I apologise if I misled the minister. I was talking about the entire south west. I could see those roads being constructed. I could see the dual lanes being built on the Old Coast Road between Mandurah and Bunbury, which eased road traffic in that area. I could see the Busselton bypass making a huge difference to traffic in that area. At that stage there were some upgrades to the South Western Highway, and during the current minister's first term of government some upgrades occurred on the South Western Highway which were planned through Main Roads. The Main Roads' 2003-04 annual report states -

*"\$1.52 million has been spent during 2003-04 for the construction of three overtaking lanes in the vicinity of Kirup. These works effectively complete the overtaking lane strategy for South Western Highway between Donnybrook and Balingup."*

I have some problem if that is the end of the program, because again it is short-sighted when combined with the issue of rail. The report continues -

*A single north-bound overtaking lane was constructed up a lengthy incline between Kirup and Mullalyup and north and southbound overtaking lanes were constructed on the northern approach to Kirup.*

*Public response to these treatments has been very positive . . .*

It has been very positive; they have certainly made a difference. That is \$1.52 million-worth of expenditure. We were spending \$60 million a year over the entire road network in the south west. Main Roads' forward projection for the entire South West Region - the projections and actual expenditure - for that four-year period was a bit over \$16 million, or approximately \$4 million a year. That is a massive reduction in expenditure on road funding across the south west, as evidenced by Main Roads' own figures. If that money were put back into the South West Region it would just about pay for the Peel deviation in one hit. The South Western Highway was just one part of that overall structure. This is what I am talking about: an overall planning strategy needs to be put in place and someone needs to say that across the entire south west we need to be able to move product from farm or forest into processing, and do it in a way that makes the community safe and does not have environmental and traffic impacts. That is not being done. There has been a massive reduction in funding for the south west.

I now want to look at what is planned for the South West Region and I will refer to the Main Roads web site. This article taken from the web site deals with the south west projects and states -

*A 10-year program for South Western Highway calls for the reconstruction, widening, addition of new overtaking lanes, improvement of intersections and resurfacing of sections of this important road link.*

The article then refers briefly to Pinjarra and Waroona, but it says very little. It continues -

*Funding for this major upgrade is not allocated in the Governments current four year forward estimates . . .*

That is taken specifically from the Main Roads web site.

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**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** What was that?

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I will give the minister the direct quote. I paraphrased there and perhaps I should not have. It states -

*An upgrade of the highway between Pinjarra and Waroona was completed in 2001. Future improvements will focus on reconstruction, widening, addition of new overtaking lanes and improvement of intersections.*

*Funding for this major upgrade is not allocated in the Governments current four year forward estimates, however minor improvements are proposed with a new passing lane near Balingup completed in May 2003 and another proposed in 2003/2004.*

As far as I know, that has been completed. These are just examples of the fact that this matter does not appear to have been taken very seriously. Unfortunately, a number of other projects around the state have been given priority. I accept that every government prioritises where infrastructure spending will occur, but this is a planning problem. This is changing because of the woodchips and the amount of freight travelling on this road. Successive governments have not planned for this process, and I do not lay all the blame for that at the feet of the current government, but nobody recognised that the rail line would at least be temporarily shut down. During her address will the minister give us a briefing on the latest proposal for the railway line from Greenbushes to Picton, because it is my understanding that it will be extremely difficult to get trains and woodchips moving from Greenbushes to Donnybrook. That piece of railway line is particularly run down; with hills and turns on it it will require major investment. People talk about guesstimates of \$1 million a kilometre to get railway lines rebuilt and up to scratch, and the line from Greenbushes to Donnybrook would be in the vicinity of 30 kilometres -

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** More than that.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Perhaps a little more. We would then be looking at expenditure of some \$30 million to have that piece of railway line infrastructure brought up to a safe and usable level. That being the case, the \$11 million that is included in the budget for that project will be somewhat short, which might be a little problematic. Will the minister give us an update and some assurance that the line is at a sufficient level of maintenance that it can be repaired for some \$11 million? That amount also covers upgrades for the Donnybrook to Bunbury section and the join from Picton to the port where some infrastructure is required. We need to know exactly what will happen to this railway. We also need to know whether the government will build a woodchip mill within the Port of Bunbury. Again, this comes back to the issue of planning. At some stage in the past 20 years somebody should have sat down and said that we needed a strategic plan to make this happen. How did we get to the stage 15 or 20 years down the track of trying to force the establishment of a woodchip mill in a port, when the local government has rejected the idea -

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** We almost had a woodchip mill at Donnybrook.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I thank the member for Warren-Blackwood. Although we almost had a woodchip mill in Donnybrook, we did not have the energy to power it at that stage, which is an interesting debate in itself. That comes back to the question of planning and infrastructure. I would like the minister to also comment on that option: the woodchip mill in Donnybrook and the rail from Donnybrook to Bunbury. Is that completely off the radar, or can we expect to see, perchance, given the funding that is available in the budget, the rail line stop at Donnybrook and trucks coming through the towns of Balingup and Kirup? Unfortunately the figures don't add up. I do not think \$11 million will be sufficient to enable that railway line to become operational. I wonder whether there is a fall-back position. Perhaps the minister will also address that. The good people in the towns of Balingup, Kirup and Mullalyup would dearly like some form of guarantee that the rail line from Greenbushes will be a certainty. There are a whole lot of reasons why that may not occur. The minister has the power to ensure that the WA Plantation Resources chip-mill operation runs into the Bunbury port. She has the power to override the local government in that area.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** Can you tell me what that head of power is? You are asserting I have the power to override the local government. Can you assist me by advising me of the mechanism by which I can do that? I would be very interested to know.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I presume the company will go directly to the minister with an appeal.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** We have here another example of reckless ignorance. The government abolished ministerial appeals three years ago.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** If that is the case, obviously the chip-mill operation will not run into the port of Bunbury.



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**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** That's not right. You are an intelligent man; you do not have the excuse some members have of not being very smart. You have the capacity so I suggest that if you are going to make allegations against government you do a bit of work. You've done no work on this whatsoever.

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr M.J. Cowper):** Order! The member for Capel has the floor. Members wishing to comment have ample opportunity to do so when it is their turn.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I thank the minister. We will be looking for assurances that the current proposal will not be altered or shortened, and that adequate funding for it will be allocated in the budget. We look forward to examining the budget more closely tomorrow to see whether funding will be sufficient to ensure that the rail goes ahead.

We have said that this is a planning issue. Nobody seems to take into account the number of road trains now on South Western Highway travelling from Bridgetown through Donnybrook. At this stage it is estimated that 350 road trains a day travel through Donnybrook and approximately 220 cart woodchips and other timber products. It seems that, for a decade, planning has fallen short in providing a well-designed transport system for the carriage of these products. We must address the inadequacies in the process to enable all these products to be carted by rail. Unfortunately, the process involves only one company. I appreciate that it is the largest company and will be responsible for the majority of transport on that railway line. However, it is only a short-term fix. Most single-customer railway lines end up in great difficulty.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** What has it ever been? When was that line ever any different?

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I am not laying the blame at the minister's feet.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** It has always been like that; that is the nature of the line.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Absolutely. It has fallen in a hole because it has been a one-person operation.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** For example BHP and Hamersley Iron Ore lines are one-operator lines.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Absolutely, but there is a vast difference between the mining industry -

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** It shows that the member for Capel's analysis is incorrect. He is pointing to the wrong problem.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** No; the analysis is not incorrect in this case because the products moved along this line are vastly different from those at a mining operation. The south west is not a mining -

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** The fact that it is a single operator -

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Not one business in the south west can put an enormous amount of freight on one railway line. It will never survive if there is one small customer versus one large customer.

**Mr J.J.M. Bowler:** Why did you sell it?

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I did not sell it. Have that argument with someone who did.

**Mr J.J.M. Bowler:** We have the information on the sale.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Let somebody else have that debate. If the large number of trucks on the South Western Highway comprise not just chip-mill trucks or timber trucks, a planning process at some point must allow lots and lots of other products onto the rail system, and it must be a railway system that is economic and viable. If it is decided that it cannot be done - this is the point I was getting to, for the benefit of the minister - and that it is impossible to make rail in the south west economic, let us get on with business. Let us move it all onto the roads and let us make the roads efficient so that the extra traffic does not matter. In the end it is about planning. Let us plan to make it an economic service one way or another. Doing half by rail and half by road, and having two uneconomic services, will not service the south west into the future.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** Do you want us to close the rail down?

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** If the rail cannot be made effective -

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** We can. We are a Labor government.

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** Have you spoken to Hansol?

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** We are doing it.

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**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** The minister will have the opportunity to stand and tell us exactly how she is about to do it. Our opportunity over the next four years will be, if that does not happen, to respond appropriately. The minister would have to admit that the process so far has not performed particularly well.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** Ask the City of Bunbury. Ask your colleague sitting alongside you why he took the position he did on the Bunbury chip-mill, and you might find the answer. Hopefully, we will now make progress.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I am sure that the member for Bunbury will have time to speak in a minute. Ultimately, this process has not worked so far. I am glad that I was here to hear the minister say that it will work from here on in. I expect that we will have the time and opportunity to hold her to that promise, because it is important to have an efficient service one way or the other. Either the rail system will work effectively, which will mean that the produce is off the road, or the road system will be adequate to handle the additional truck movements. At the moment we have neither.

**MS A.J.G. MacTIERNAN (Armadale - Minister for Planning and Infrastructure) [6.07 pm]:** We have a real issue here, but I cannot believe the level of hypocrisy from the opposition. When they were in government they did nothing to address this issue. They did no planning and they did no long-term forecasting. They have now come into this chamber and complained that we have not accepted that there is an issue; that we have not invested in road and rail.

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** Every local government and everybody in the south west is criticising you, minister; they are not criticising me.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN:** The member should be ashamed of himself, because his total contribution to the long-term welfare of that rail was to send it off for privatisation. We said very clearly at the time that it was a grave error to privatise the rail. It was a grave error -

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** The government has -

**Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN:** It was a grave error -

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** The government -

**Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN:** Mr Acting Speaker!

**Mr J.H.D. Day:** How much interjecting did you do?

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr M.J. Cowper):** The minister has the floor.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN:** It was a grave error to hand the lines over to a private operator. We said that we were not confident that the privatisation of the freight business would generate the results that were being claimed by the government of the day. We have been proved to be absolutely right.

**Mr P.D. Omodei** interjected.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN:** Not only have we got here a refusal to accept that the previous government lied to the public time after time in press release after press release by Hon Murray Criddle, when it claimed that, in addition to the purchase price, the operator was committed to spending \$400 million to upgrade -

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** They told us they had spent \$700 million. Ring Australian Railroad Group, minister. They will tell you themselves. That is what we did.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN:** Mr Acting Speaker -

**Mr J.H.D. Day:** How much interjecting did you do?

**Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN:** Certainly nowhere near as much as that.

I am quite happy to finish the debate now. Mr Acting Speaker, I do not mind taking interjections, but you have not even allowed me the opportunity to start my case.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr M.P. Murray):** I listened to the interjections that were coming from the minister's side of the house when members on my left were speaking. I did not think that the minister could not handle the interjections coming from the left-hand side of the chamber. I afford the minister the courtesy of speaking and stating her case. I ask members on my left to afford the minister the respect that she deserves when standing in her place.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN:** Mr Acting Speaker, I do not mind taking interjections, but I want an opportunity - similar to the one that I gave members on the other side of the house - to outline my case, after which time I will be more than happy to take interjections. I must be allowed to outline my case.

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A number of promises were made. The first was the explicit promise - it was nothing but a lie - that there was an obligation on the part of the private operator to spend \$400 million upgrading the system. When we came to government we did not think that the level of dishonesty would be so great. We discovered that the company was obligated to spend something in the order of \$90 million. Not only has the opposition failed to accept that this was indeed a lie, but also it has made the even more extravagant claim that the private operator spent \$700 million. Can members opposite tell me where that \$700 million has been spent?

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** I told you - on new trains and sleepers.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN:** Do members know what happened during the last grain boom? Trains were taken from the Bassendean Rail Transport Museum and put on the rail lines to move grain. That is the level of investment that has been made.

**Mr J.H.D. Day:** How much money has it spent in your view?

**Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN:** It has certainly spent nothing like \$400 million. The only expenditure that has been made - other than on maintenance, which, of course, is not capital expenditure - has been on the current upgrade between Picton and Mundijong, which this government has supported. However, before that expenditure was made we were required to give the operator certain concessions under its contract. It may well be that the company cannot make it work. I am not saying that it can afford to spend \$400 million on the rail operation. It may well be that it cannot justify that. This government and the people were lied to by the previous government. We are cleaning up the mess it left behind. Today, the Treasurer announced that we are paying off the freight debt left by the previous government. This has been the most failed privatisation because not only did we not get enough money and the promised entrepreneurial drive and injection of private funds, but also the debt has not been paid. The member for Warren-Blackwood displayed the most extraordinary economic illiteracy when he said that the debt used to be bigger. That is true, the debt was bigger. However, we had a business that generated enough income to service that entire debt. The business was sold and a very large chunk of that debt - around \$320 million - has been kept. That has been costing us \$20 million from the consolidated fund, which has been paid for by the taxpayer, not Westrail. The privatisation was a complete failure. Since coming to office this government accepted that it had to do something to make it work.

Over the past three years we have been working with the private operator, the woodchip companies and the log companies to try to turn around the decline in the use of rail. For example, I asked them why they did not move logs by rail, and they said it was because they had never moved logs by rail and they did not have any wagons. I then asked why they did not get some wagons made, and I even went to United Goninan Ltd and found that such wagons could be made. For the past three years we, through the DPI, have been working very closely with the Australian Railroad Group to come up with a package that will work. It has been complicated by the great deal of uncertainty about where WAPRES will operate.

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** The mill at Greenbushes.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN:** I will help the member for Warren-Blackwood, because Donnybrook is now in his electorate. He obviously has not -

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** It is not.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN:** In whose electorate is Donnybrook?

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** The member for Capel's.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN:** That perhaps excuses the member for Warren-Blackwood for not understanding -

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** The previous member was the bloke behind you, the member for Collie-Wellington, who has handballed it.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN:** I knew it was in his electorate previously and that it is not now. There was a proposal to build the chip-mill at Donnybrook. However, there was a great deal of hostility and opposition to that from people in communities within the Preston River valley. The council was proposing to consider the development application without going through a rezoning. A very well resourced action group made it clear that if that took place, it would take the issue to the Supreme Court. The advice was that, on balance, the case would probably succeed.

**Dr S.C. Thomas:** You are actually not quite right. A survey in Donnybrook and that region showed 80 per cent support for the project.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN:** I am not arguing the relative merits. There was certainly a strong and well-resourced group within that community that opposed it.

**Dr S.C. Thomas:** It was definitely well resourced.

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**Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN:** The threat of that legal action led the company to move away. We were very keen for the company to use the rail line. The member for Collie-Wellington - or the member for Collie as he was that stage - worked very closely with us. We were trying to work out the allocation -

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** He sat on the fence.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN:** Not at all. He very strongly supported the local authority. We then moved to see if we could get the facility at Kirup. We put in an enormous amount of effort. We promised to introduce legislation into the Parliament to enable us to excise an area from the state forest, to extend the Grimwade Road through the forest and to build a spur from the rail line to the site at which we proposed to put the chip-mill. We were certainly prepared to offer the financial assistance. We were close to getting WA Plantation Resources to locate there when the deal was compromised by Hansol Australia Pty Ltd getting environmental approval to operate at the Bunbury port. That put the cat amongst the pigeons.

**Dr S.C. Thomas:** You would have had trouble getting power, would you not?

**Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN:** It was all part of the assistance. It was the same as with Donnybrook. We put together a package that we would deliver, and we had almost got there when Hansol received its environmental approval. That changed the whole ball game. At that point WAPRES said it would not do our project; it wanted to go to the Bunbury port.

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** Did you consult with Hansol over the loading facility? At the Bunbury-Wellington economic alliance meeting about three or four weeks ago, the manager of Hansol said neither DPI nor Main Roads had approached him about the loading facility.

**Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN:** I cannot speak about that, but I can tell the member that we have put together a project that will improve the levels of rail use for the first time in many decades. This project has been very much driven by this government as we have made it very clear to industry that we will not cop all this material being moved from rail onto road. The government has driven this program from the very beginning. If it had not been for our government, it would not be happening.

The package is around \$22 million. I want to go into this aspect because the member for Capel expressed concerned about whether the upgrade could be done for \$10.9 million. He is correct - all the things necessary could not be done for that price. This is a collaborative arrangement between ARG and the state government. ARG is putting in an equivalent sum for the rescue package - more than \$10 million from ARG and \$10.9 million from the government.

An enormous amount of detailed work has been done to ensure the project is viable. It was a hard decision to make to move the facilities to North Greenbushes. There are two reasons for doing it. The member talked about the problems of the track north of North Greenbushes, but the quality of the track between North Greenbushes and Lambert is infinitely worse and far more problematic than the alternative. That is point number one. That would be a much more costly option.

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** What would the cost be?

**Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN:** I do not have the costs with me. It would be more costly in capital and operationally. The second and equally important point is that now that we have an industry based much more on plantation than hardwood timber, the natural epicentre is North Greenbushes rather than Lambert. If the centre were kept at Manjimup, it would have led to the spectacle of trucks going back through Bridgetown creating a traffic hazard in the other direction. After a great deal of exhaustive planning, we made the decision to ensure that at least part of the rail could be kept operational. Rather than losing the whole lot, we decided to ensure that we protect the bit we can make work, and make it work well. It is true that only WAPRES has committed to using it. The number of truck movements a day to be taken off road onto rail is 144. I am confident once we have that operational, we can get Hansol to use that line. Obviously, it will be much more economic.

I have just received a note from Department for Planning and Infrastructure indicating that on a number of occasions DPI discussed the use of rail with Hansol, and Hansol has told DPI that it would consider using the Greenbushes facility when it is up and running.

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** They have pimples on their tongue, minister.

**Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN:** The Deputy Leader of the Opposition has been making a lot of phone calls today.

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** I have talked to Hansol, and they said that DPI did not attend the meeting.

**Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN:** Was it the same fairy at the bottom of the garden who told the member that ARG spent \$700 million on the upgrade of the rail link? If ARG had spent \$700 million on the upgrade of rail, we would all know about it - it would be very visible. ARG has not spent anywhere near that sum, or anywhere near

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the mythical and misleading figure of \$400 million that Hon Murray Criddle and his lackey, the member for Warren-Blackwood, would have us believe was committed to when they were in government. We have taken the steps and done the planning. It has taken longer than anticipated. We wanted to have it up -

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** The six shires wrote to the Premier wanting you sacked.

**Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN:** I find that quite extraordinary given that this government seized the initiative and has driven this project from day one.

Our record speaks for itself. The government has an agreement in place to undertake the first substantial upgrade works that will have occurred on this line for many decades. For the first time in many decades, logs will be moved by rail. There is one hurdle to get past; that is, to get the approval of the chip-mill at the Bunbury port. I urge the member for Bunbury to provide whatever assistance he can to make sure that the government can deliver that.

I will talk a bit about road funding. It is true that even with the rail, the South Western Highway, as with roads all over the state, is experiencing an increase in traffic. That is not unique to the South Western Highway. This phenomenon is being experienced all over the metropolitan area. I will contrast the expenditure on the roads by this government with that of the previous coalition government. In the first four years of the previous coalition government, it spent about \$9.7 million on the South Western Highway, and it spent a further \$9.7 million in its second term. In our first four years in government, we spent \$13.2 million on the South Western Highway. If we want to talk about which government has spent money on the South Western Highway, it has certainly been our government. An additional allocation has been made for the construction of additional passing lanes over the next four years. I note that the member for Warren-Blackwood made much of his concern about the Hester Hill to Bridgetown area. That is one of the first cabs off the rank. The government will spend \$2.45 million this coming year. There will be a very substantial upgrade of the difficult section at Hester Hill and of course, the government has given a commitment to provide \$10 million for the Bridgetown bypass. For all the pontificating that went on today, we should just look at the history of the Bridgetown bypass. Money was allocated for that project in the 1995 budget. The coalition government allocated \$2 million to be spent in 1998 on the Bridgetown bypass, but then in 1998 that amount was removed from the budget. It appears that the coalition government never had any funding in the road program for that project over time. In any event, the sum total that was originally provided was \$2.9 million. Our government has been able to work with the local shire to resolve the conflict. Agreement has been reached on the alignment of the road, which the local member, the member for Warren-Blackwood, was not able to get. The government will proceed with that work. The government has managed to get agreement on what the alignment should be and to get funding for the works. The performance of our government on the South Western Highway and the Bridgetown bypass has exceeded the performance of the previous government. We have done more with rail and roads.

An accreditation program has also been put in place to lift the performance standards of heavy haulage. We recognise the tragic death that occurred. Like every death that occurs on our roads, it very much concerns us. In this instance we have immediately reduced the speed limit on that section of road for heavy haulage vehicles. I have made it clear to Main Roads Western Australia that we will further reduce the speed limit for heavy haulage vehicles if its audit finds that to be necessary. We are investigating a number of concerns that have been expressed by the deceased driver's brother about the possible problems, as he sees them, with the operation of the vehicles. We are doing an audit of the accreditation standards of the companies that are involved. We will certainly have a Main Roads WA heavy-haulage compliance blitz in that region, particularly over the next six months while we are waiting for that rail upgrade to get under way. What has occurred on that road is a tragedy. When we consider the evidence and the effort we have made to turn around the decline of rail and come up with a creative program that deals with the rail issues, and the government's expenditure on road projects and the commitments that it made in the election campaign and that it will make in the budget to take those road projects even further, I am confident that we have done all that we reasonably could have done.

**MR J.H.D. DAY (Darling Range)** [6.30 pm]: There has been a fair degree of debate on the rail system, and it is certainly worthy of a great deal of debate. We also should not lose sight of the fact that the South Western Highway in the vicinity of Bridgetown and Donnybrook is simply dangerous. I visited the area about four or six weeks ago to see the road for myself. I have driven along that road in previous years, but I had an opportunity to visit the area in more recent times on a fine and sunny day. As the member for Warren-Blackwood pointed out earlier, if it is raining heavily, and given the mix of traffic, particularly between large trucks and cars, it can become a very dangerous road indeed. It is probably fair to say that it would have to be one of the most dangerous roads in the state. Unfortunately, it is narrow, winding and hilly. There is absolutely no doubt that a much greater degree of attention must be given to upgrading the South Western Highway in the vicinity of Donnybrook and Bridgetown and through to Manjimup.

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We saw the tragedy a couple of weeks ago of the death of Geoff Gunson only a few days before he was due to retire. I am sure that all of us extend our sympathies to his family. That tragedy demonstrates that this debate is not simply about matters of convenience or comfort for people travelling on roads; it is literally a matter of life and death, and no more so than on the South Western Highway in the vicinity of those towns. More can always be done by whichever party is in government. However, there is a clear view in the local communities in those areas that the funds that the previous government earmarked during the 2001 election campaign for the further upgrading of that road were removed by the current government for other purposes. Most likely, those funds were directed to offset the extra costs associated with the Perth to Mandurah railway. Wherever those funds went, it appears clear that there was a reduction in funding available for the further upgrading of the South Western Highway sometime during 2001. Combined with that, there has been a substantial reduction in funding available to Main Roads Western Australia for the construction of new roads, the upgrading of roads and the maintenance of roads. I understand that the reduction has been about \$50 million a year since this government came to office. Unfortunately, it has not given the road network in Western Australia the priority that is needed, and the funds have been directed elsewhere. The government has the right to make those sorts of judgments of course, but it needs to be held accountable for the decisions that are made. As I have said, these are not issues simply of convenience or even of economic efficiency; they are matters of life and death on the roads in Western Australia.

I understand the cessation of the rail service between Lambert and Bunbury has resulted in an increase of about 80 truck movements a day along the South Western Highway. I am talking about large trucks of not necessarily road train size, but with large trailers and so on behind them. An increase of 80 movements a day is a very substantial increase indeed. I do not think we have heard a clear explanation from the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure at this stage as to whether it is definite that the line will not be reopened between Lambert and North Greenbushes. That appears to be implied, but at least an explanation is owed to the community about exactly what the intentions are.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** By way of interjection, I will just clarify it. As I explained, the cost of upgrading that section of the rail will be between \$25 million and \$30 million. There is no product on the rail that will justify that expenditure. At this point we will keep the rail in situ and it may have some tourist use, but it is unlikely that there will be any freight use for that line between North Greenbushes and Lambert.

**Mr J.H.D. DAY:** At least that is a clearer explanation than I think we have heard previously. I also ask the minister what her expectation is as far as timing is concerned with the intermodal terminal at North Greenbushes, and when the line between North Greenbushes and Bunbury might be re-opened.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** Our aim is to have this all completed by the end of the year, but it depends on how quickly we can get this thing through SAT.

**Mr J.H.D. DAY:** The SAT being?

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** The State Administrative Tribunal. Alternatively, the Bunbury Port Authority may have a change of heart.

**Mr J.H.D. DAY:** Obviously it needs active engagement to work through those issues and try to get a successful outcome.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** That is what we are doing.

**Mr J.H.D. DAY:** I very much encourage the minister to keep that up, if indeed she is currently engaged in that process.

The member for Warren-Blackwood referred to a number of comments from people in the south west community. However, he did not have the opportunity of referring to one letter that he has been made aware of and that he has passed to me. The letter is from the President of the Shire of Manjimup to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, which was dated only two days ago on 23 May. It sums up a lot of concerns not only obviously of the people in the Shire of Manjimup but also of the wider south west community. Among other comments made, the letter states -

The Council of the Shire of Manjimup expresses in the strongest possible terms its concerns at the unsafe condition of the South Western Highway between Manjimup and Bunbury and the token attempts over recent years to include just a few passing lanes in sections north of Kirup without any attempt to improve the safety of the road south of Kirup for the thousands of vehicle drivers and passengers that use this on a daily basis.

Further on in the letter the Shire President, Councillor Wade De Campo, made this comment -

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Mr Mick Murray

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The tragic death of a former member of our community on the highway last week should not have occurred and the many other serious accidents over the last 6 months may have been avoided if the State Government had taken action to improve the safety of the highway to a reasonable standard.

Nothing good comes out of a tragedy such as that which occurred a couple of weeks ago, but, hopefully, it has drawn to the attention of the government the very urgent need for substantial increased funding to be made available for the South Western Highway in the vicinity of Donnybrook and Bridgetown to be upgraded and for additional passing lanes in particular to be constructed. It is a matter of urgency, as I have said; I have seen that for myself. However, it is even more a matter of urgency for people who live in the area and use it on a daily or regular basis and who have to share the road with very large trucks in poor weather. As we are coming into the winter season now, the need for this road to be substantially upgraded and to be made safer above all else will be much clearer. The opposition very much implores the government to allocate the funds to do the planning that is necessary and to construct the additional passing lanes and upgrade the road in other ways as a matter of urgency. We acknowledge and commend the government for the allocation of funds, which the minister announced today to construct the bypass road around Bridgetown. That will be very much welcomed by the local community. I was made aware of it by the chief executive officer of the Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes a few weeks ago. I was hoping that the government would make a positive decision on funding for the bypass. The minister has now announced that, and we acknowledge and commend her for that decision. However, a lot more needs to be done on the South Western Highway, and a lot more action and allocation of funds are needed to give this road an adequate level of safety, which it does not have at the moment. For all those reasons, and the reasons mentioned by other speakers, the opposition believes that this motion is worthy of support. It raises very important issues about the road transport system, particularly in the south west of the state. I know some other south west members would like to make some comments.

**MR G.M. CASTRILLI (Bunbury)** [6.40 pm]: I support the motion moved by the member for Warren-Blackwood. Nobody wants a tragedy like the one that happened on 13 May, when a man was killed in the crash involving three trucks. The closure of the Lambert to Bunbury line due to a safety audit has resulted in a dramatic increase in heavy-haulage trucks on the road. There is an urgent need for passing lanes, as has been mentioned before, on Hester Hill and the Balingup hill, and the general upgrade of the South Western Highway. On 16 February this year, the Premier announced that five passing lanes would be constructed on the South Western Highway, and even the minister herself said that the number of trucks on this road due to the closure of the railway was more than the government wanted. An extra 15 trucks were put on the road, and it was a major concern.

I will concentrate a little on the greater Bunbury area, and the immediate surrounding south west area. We need to concentrate on improving the levels and state of our road and rail infrastructure. By way of background, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the greater Bunbury area, which includes Bunbury, Australind and Gelorup, is the fourth fastest growing urban centre in Australia. The equal fastest are Gold Coast-Tweed and Mandurah, which are growing at a rate of about 3.7 per cent. Third was the Sunshine Coast, which was growing at about 3.5 per cent, if I remember rightly, and the greater Bunbury area is growing at about 3.4 per cent. The south west region, as many members know, is one of the fastest growing areas in Australia. The population is estimated at roughly 130 000, but some estimates put it at about 300 000 by 2030. Both domestic and international tourism will increase.

**Mr M.P. Murray:** I remember having a meeting with you and several shire presidents at which you said you would work very hard to keep it out of the port, and you did not honour your position.

**Mr G.M. CASTRILLI:** To keep what out of the port?

**Mr M.P. Murray:** To keep the chip-mill out of the port so that the trucks would not come down that path. The meeting was held in your chambers.

**Mr G.M. CASTRILLI:** We worked hard to keep it out of the port. I will turn to the subject of the Bunbury port. It services the whole of the south west, as the member for Collie-Wellington will agree. It is the third largest exporting port in Western Australia, and is the tenth largest government-owned exporting port in the country. Its annual cargo volume is about 12 million tonnes, and that is expected to increase to 14 million to 15 million tonnes in four to five years. In addition, the expansion of the Worsley and Wagerup alumina refineries will add an extra 2 million tonnes. This is not to mention the container traffic, on which some studies have been under way for a couple of years. With all this coming together, the strategic planning of the infrastructure will be very important. The pressure is on the infrastructure now, so members can imagine what will happen when all these other factors come into play. It will be extremely important that this is done in a timely manner.

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Both sides of the house have talked about the port access road. I am very glad that both sides agreed to construct the new port access road. There is major traffic conflict between heavy haulage and passenger vehicles. It is great that a commitment has been made to construct that road, and the sooner it is done, the better. Hopefully, it will be completed by the fourth year of this Parliament. It needs to be constructed, because it will be safer and will eliminate the conflicts between heavy haulage vehicles and passenger vehicles. As some people have mentioned, the Eelup roundabout is probably the worst roundabout in Australia. We need to take away those sorts of impediments.

A commitment has been made to construct stage 1 from South Western Highway into the port. Members have talked about the Bunbury outer ring road; it has been talked about for years. It has been on the drawing board; I have seen the lines on a map showing the proposed location of the Bunbury outer ring road. The cost of that road was estimated to be \$80 million. However, it seems to have just dropped off the map. We do not know what the time frame is for its construction. I am not sure what the position is. The construction of stage 2 of the port access road has been estimated to cost \$36 million. That will connect the South Western Highway to the new Bunbury outer ring road.

The big issue is that this state has failed to actively engage with the commonwealth to identify and obtain the funding for these programs. That funding could have been provided under the AusLink program. Maybe there should have been a dialogue, and some provision could have been made for the funding in the forward estimates. However, I do not think that this state has even asked the commonwealth to consider this matter. That could have been done. The rail between Brunswick and Bunbury is under pressure. It is operating at close to capacity. Proposed future coal exports could be transported by rail, and that would put further pressure on the rail. The rail between Mundijong and Brunswick is also under pressure because of the amount of freight that is already carried on that line. With Worsley Alumina and the Wagerup refinery coming on stream, extra pressure will be put on the rail. That will also have an impact on the *Australind* passenger service.

There was a report on this called the "South West Passenger Rail Transport Study". That was completed in December 2002 and it went out for public consultation in June 2003. I have never heard of it since. I do not know where it is, what the outcomes were, where it has been and what has been done. Some of the issues dealt with in that report are similar to those that I am talking about.

For years there has been talk about the timber plantations that have been established. A lot of discussion has taken place about the routes used to get the timber into the ports, through either Bunbury or Albany. However, it appears that there is no overall road strategy to get that timber into the ports. Some of the local governments in the area are coping some of the expense relating to the bridges and the upkeep of the road.

On top of that, it is proposed to redevelop the outer harbour. The Bob Jane Bunbury international motor sports complex is another project that is being considered. That, together with other tourism projects that are on the boil in the south west, will put more pressure on the infrastructure. The large number of tourists and the population increase generally will make matters extremely difficult. We need to complete the study and to be really committed to spending money on infrastructure for the sake of future development and the safety factors that we have all talked about in this chamber this evening. The minister herself said that this is not about just the south west area; this is about the state of play across Western Australia generally. I know that my colleague the member for Moore has problems in his electorate with the bypass roads and the traffic around Toodyay.

**Mr M.P. Murray** interjected.

**Mr G.M. CASTRILLI:** It is a problem that he has identified in his area. It just goes to show that we need a strategic plan that deals with the total infrastructure for the road and rail networks. In my former role, I launched an integrated transport strategy about three years ago. We are talking about the economic viability of the state, the safety of people on the roads and the efficient use of infrastructure for heavy haulage used for business and tourism. If Western Australia had properly integrated transport planning, it would have improved the economic performance across the board. I am saying this because I think Bunbury is the number one place in Western Australia and Western Australia is the number one state. All members in this chamber are here for one reason. We might sit on opposite sides of the fence sometimes but I think our overall concern is for the economic performance of Western Australia.

**Mr T.R. Buswell:** Did you explain the problems with the lack of supply of coal from Collie due to the industrial actions of the Premier?

**Mr G.M. CASTRILLI:** No, I have not. Even the member for Collie-Wellington understands as I do -

**Mr M.P. Murray** interjected.



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**Mr G.M. CASTRILLI:** I am trying to pay the member for Collie-Wellington a compliment. I know that his heart is in the south west, as is mine and the hearts of other members from the south west. We would like a commitment from the government to provide expenditure for efficient infrastructure planning. We cannot spend all the money now. Let us commit to strategic planning that can enable our state to achieve the best economic outputs it possibly can. I hope the minister will take that on board and that the government commits to the future of the state.

**MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie-Wellington)** [6.51 pm]: The Minister for Planning and Infrastructure has asked me to pass on a message to the house. Westrail has advised the minister that it would cost between \$25 million and \$35 million to upgrade the North Greenbushes to Lambert section of the railway line to a standard required to be competitive with the road transport. I do not have a great deal of time in which to speak, so I will be quick. I remind the member for Warren-Blackwood about a speech on privatisation recorded in the *Hansard* of 16 September 1999 in which he said -

Some of the benefits for the new entity will include operating efficiency and flexibility. It will have lower freight rates, higher capital expenditure, a network extension, on-rail competition and market growth.

What happened? My predecessor, Dr Hilda Turnbull, the former member for Collie, is reported in *Hansard* of 22 June 1999 as saying -

From where will the money come for that huge capital investment in equipment needed to haul the plantation timber harvest? It will come from private operators and private enterprise. A major objective and part of the sale of Westrail is to encourage a major transport operator, who has a commitment to rail, to make that investment.

What happened, boys? They have come in here with their tail between their legs and cap in hand to ask the government for a wheelbarrow full of money to fix the problems of privatisation created by the former government. They cannot have it both ways.

I agree with much of what the member for Capel said tonight about forward planning. That is a major problem. I have been on many trips through the timber country. The problems are occurring not only down south but also in the east and the north where Hansol Australia Pty Ltd has a lot of timber. The problem is not confined only to the bottom end in the south. We cannot say we will fix only that problem. It is tragic whenever somebody is killed. Sometimes governments respond with knee-jerk reactions. I ask that we not respond with knee-jerk reactions. We should have an overall plan and consider the configuration of the vehicles that are carting the woodchips. I have grave problems about that.

My background is in the motoring industry. When those types of trucks are a little worn and the steering wheel is moved slightly, the back trailer flips like mad. That will cause more problems, especially with younger drivers who, in wet weather in winter, drive behind those trucks, with their windshields covered in spray. I am sure everyone who has driven behind a truck on a country road during winter understands that.

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** Do you think dropping the speed limit is a good idea or should it be policed more?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** Trial periods of a lower speed limit should be conducted. Inattention for one second and a correction in steering can have consequences for the last trailer. It is really strange, but on the road trains in the north west the middle trailer can sometimes tip over. One would think that would be impossible, but it happens. It is no different with trains. The middle carriage of a train can sometimes tip over. There has been a push for longer road trains with an extra trailer. I oppose that very strongly. That is why I say we need to do some long-term planning.

Another problem on the roads in the south west is that the truck drivers are getting up each other's tails. The driver of the truck in front may be driving one kilometre an hour faster than the driver of the truck behind, and when they get to the passing lane they both pull out and block the passing lane to the top of the hill so that no-one else has a chance to pass. That causes huge frustration, and after the next braking stretch the truck that is behind catches up again. I give Hansol its due. I spoke to the people at Hansol. They have taken a pro-active approach and are now spacing out the trucks on the Collie road so that there is not a problem. Sometimes there were three trucks in a row, and the drivers of other vehicles could not get past, which caused frustration and crashes and all the things that go along with that. The industry needs to have a code of conduct so that does not happen. What the hell is the point of getting into the port 10 minutes before the other bloke and then talking and having a cup of tea with him while he is unloading? It is causing a huge problem.

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** What will happen when six or seven different companies are operating on South Western Highway? It will make it much harder indeed.

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**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** I can understand that, but in the timber industry I am sure a code of conduct is the way to go. They do very well with the school bus routes, because they use a system of two-way radios. Some complaints have been made to me that trucks have had to park on the side of the road because of the school buses. In my area they use two-way radio communication so that there is not a conflict of interest about who should be on the roads. Those sorts of things need to be looked at. The member for Warren-Blackwood made the comment earlier that I sat on the fence -

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** Did you or did you not?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** If that had been the case I would not have spent a lot of time working with the Shire of Donnybrook and attending meeting after meeting to try to get the chip-mill up and running. In saying that, although I supported having a chip-mill in Donnybrook, it has caused a problem with the trucks. Let us look at where the accident happened. The accident did not happen at Donnybrook or past Donnybrook. It happened on the way to Donnybrook. Therefore, we could not have fixed the problem in that area, because people still need to travel through Donnybrook. There will now be a bypass into Bridgetown. That is great. However, that will not fix that section of road through Balingup and those other areas. I also heard mention of the truck that tipped over in Balingup - in the main street, for God's sake.

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** Three.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** The timber truck that I saw was upside down. It had been going south. The driver should have been doing about 20 kilometres an hour through the town. If the driver had been a reasonable sort of bloke he would have pulled up, knowing it was a small community and a very narrow road, yet here he was, with his truck upside down in a shop. It is unbelievable that anyone driving a truck that size would try to speed through a small country town. Work needs to be done on education. Only one or two per cent of truck drivers cause a problem, but they certainly cause it in a big way when they tip a truck upside down in the main street. Since then, the government has taken action. We met with the community, and the speed limit in the town was reduced to 50 kilometres an hour. I do not know whether that has helped, but we have not had another accident since. Balingup is a tourist town. The people in the town run very good functions and get a lot of people to go there. On weekends many people are in the town and they cross that road. If the truck drivers are dinkum they will take their foot off the accelerator. The speed limit is supposed to be 100 kilometres an hour. I do not know how many drivers do or do not abide by the speed limit. That should be another test. I have sat behind drivers travelling at 120 kilometres an hour. It is impossible to get past them. Just because someone is cheating the system and has taken off the speed limiters or wound up the differential -

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** They are big engines. I think it would be better to police the current speed limit than reduce the speed limit, because I have a horrible feeling that if we reduce the speed limit it will compound the problem.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** That is certainly a possibility, because there may be a long queue behind the truck because it is going too slow. It is a bit like P-plate drivers. When P-plate drivers are on the roads everyone swears at them and gets angry because they are hindering the flow of traffic. Limiters drop the trucks back so that they cannot do 110 or 120 kilometres an hour, but they still have enough grunt to get past when the road is clear. It is very ignorant of some of those drivers, when they have a queue behind them, to just pull out and cause those problems.

I want to make a few comments about the coal being brought down from Collie. The timber also comes down that road and when I come down that highway I pass two or three trucks. In a very short space of time we also carted 60 000 tonnes of coal down to the port, along with general freight. I found that the drivers were very good, so it is not an issue just there.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

*House adjourned at 7.00 pm*

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