

FORREST HIGHWAY, EATON — EXCESSIVE NOISE EMISSIONS

Grievance

MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie–Preston) [9.31 am]: Today I grieve to the Minister for Transport. Firstly, I thank the minister for coming down to the south west last week; it was certainly appreciated within my community. My grieving today is on behalf of the residents of Eaton who have a problem with the excessive noise that is emitted from Forrest Highway, mainly between the intersection of Hynes Road to the north and the Old Coast Road–Sanctuary Golf Resort traffic lights. This has been an ongoing problem since the Forrest Highway was opened, and an extraordinary number of vehicles pass through that area. In fact, I have some figures that state an earlier traffic count in 2013 put the number at around 19 000 vehicles a day, which is around 800 an hour. The variances of trucks, motorcycles and cars cause different sorts of noise. One factor is the road surface, which is very coarse. At one stage, it was planned to seal the road surface to take away some of the noise. Another factor is stopping and starting; the number of vehicles and trucks pulling up and taking off from the lights makes noise, even when drivers slow down and then change gears. The other factor is engine brakes on trucks, which I am sure the minister is aware of, that cause a lot of noise, especially at night-time when it reverberates through the community. We have problems right the way through and, just to chuck in a couple of extra, we then have the odd Harley Davidson or two that goes down that road and certainly rattles people's windows. What differs from one area to the other is that at the Mandurah end of Forrest Highway, the noise mitigation has been done quite well with limestone walls, earthen walls with tin fences on top and earthen walls with vegetation, such as trees, which gives us another 30 to 40 feet on top of the earthen walls; however, in the Eaton area, this was forgotten, as it was at the end of the road. As I say, 800 vehicles an hour is just extraordinary and people have to put up with that noise.

The people themselves requested that the shire do some readings but, unfortunately, the shire has not released its noise readings. I have a paper here of the community's own readings, and some of them are extremely high. At 72 Millard Street, at the highway edge, the noise reading in that area was between 70 and 80 decibels. That is one of the highest. On average, in Ivy Court, Galen Close, Calico Court, Millard Street, Tulip Grove and Peppermint Way, the reading is around 60 decibels. We all know that that is well above the acceptable limits in any area. Adding to the problem is that in the future it is envisaged that another 30 000 people will live in that region. Where the highway crosses the rivers, the noise will travel and the problem will continue into the future.

I request that Main Roads do a study immediately, and get on with making some improvements to that area—some with noise barriers and others with the road surface. I am sure that the people of the community will be very happy if even the small issues are addressed, such as changing the road surface to stop the tyre noise that comes through, let alone the vehicle noise itself, and some of the new subdivisions in that area are made to put noise mitigation in place. In Melbourne, the road from the airport into town has structures that deflect the noise back onto the road and do not let it run up into the valleys or into residential areas. I am not saying that is the exact way to go, but there are examples in all parts of the world, including Germany, where there are noise deflectors along the autobahn where it goes past a small village. Certainly, I have noticed that even in some places in Perth, a wall with a fence on top has been built along the highway to bring the noise back down.

I think, in this day and age, it is untenable that people should have to put up with noise and the devaluation of their properties. Some people who wish to rent their properties have only short-term stays, because people cannot stand the noise in that area. To have one's property devalued because of a change of road route is a bit unfair on those people affected, considering others have had noise mitigation programs put in, including one on Forrest Highway, where extensive work was done and there is only one house, yet the works were done for them. I can understand why, because there is a new project up that end. However, we cannot forget people down the other end. As time goes on and there are further changes, it could be that more people are forced onto that road. When we have works done in the harbour, one of the other roads could be shut, which will mean more people will come onto that part of the highway, including another small area where the Millbridge–Treendale bridge may be built by this government, maybe later than sooner. That will again bring people onto Forrest Highway through that way and increase the number of vehicles.

Minister, this is an urgent issue. The people have been very, very patient and I have asked questions on notice on this issue previously. I ask that the minister take into consideration these people's health, welfare and wellbeing and get something done.

MR D.C. NALDER (Alfred Cove — Minister for Transport) [9.38 am]: I thank the member for his grievance this morning, and just follow up on the previous grievance that he raised in this place only recently about Wellington Dam. I had the pleasure of visiting Collie last week, and I must say what a beautiful place it is. That visit was the first time in my life I had been to Wellington Dam and I could not believe what a magical resource it is. I would like to clarify some comments that the member also made in the house yesterday about me opening up the dam to all sorts of boats; there has been no statement made of any sort. He provided a copy of the

Bunbury Herald that suggested we were going to open up the dam to motorised vessels. The member himself approached me, when I was in Collie, about electric boats that are currently quietly using the dam and would like to continue to do so, and I thought that that was not a bad idea, that they should be able to continue to do so, and I am asking the department to consider that. With regard to the rest of the dam, there are concerns about the number of dead trees and logs in the dam itself, which makes it a safety issue for other boats there.

On to the issue at hand regarding noise, I want to clarify a couple of things. Main Roads is not responsible for mitigating noise in residential areas that have been built in the vicinity of an existing main road or highway. The Western Australian Planning Commission “State Planning Policy 5.4 Road and Rail Transport Noise and Freight Considerations in Land Use Planning” outlines noise mitigation requirements for new residential developments in the vicinity of a main road or highway. The WAPC policy does not apply to existing developments or existing roads, nor does it address traffic growth on existing roads. Although the WAPC’s policy requires noise to be managed within the prescribed levels, it does not compel a developer to remove noise, and there is also no retrospectivity to the policy.

There are challenges right across the state involving people who live near highways and busy arterial roads and who are concerned about the levels of noise occurring there, but it is not the policy of government to retrospectively go back to these major highways and provide noise mitigation.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: The minister is ignoring the Environmental Protection Act. The noise regulations —

Mr D.C. NALDER: I am talking about government policy for existing highways, whether it be Canning Highway or Forrest Highway and those sorts of roads. We will continue to look at these matters. The plans for Bunbury are a priority, but I cannot say at this point what sort of timing is involved. At some point a ring-road will be developed around Bunbury that will shift a lot of the freight and trucks away from this road. I cannot say what the time frame will be but it is under consideration and will be there for future governments to consider. Main Roads Western Australia recently reduced the speed limit on Forrest Highway between Old Coast Road and Eaton Drive. We have done the same thing for Collie as well. Although it is a safety issue, we wrote to the council and sought its advice on whether it would like to see the speed limit in Collie reduced by 40 kilometres an hour. We have reduced the speed limit to 80 kilometres an hour, which will reduce some of the road noise. We are conscious of trying to do what we can to help support these people. Main Roads will consider using alternative lower-noise surfacing treatments in future when the seal needs replacement. Members will notice when they drive into Perth along the highway that the road seal changes; when we get closer to built-up areas, the roads get quieter. However, those seals are not as strong and do not last as long as the ones that are rougher and noisier. But as communities build up, we will look at the size of the stone used in the seal to reduce noise levels on the roads, and we will continue to do that. Unfortunately, the current seal was applied in 2010 and has an anticipated life span of 15 years—so it will be another 10 years before it is resealed. However, I have asked Main Roads to review the situation with a view to scheduling work earlier and considering it as part of the next budget development cycle. I have asked Main Roads to look at the situation. I cannot promise anything at this time, but I will continue to work on it. It is not really our policy to go after highways that have existed for some time, and people chose to purchase a property near those highways —

Mr M.P. Murray: In this particular case, the road traffic was rerouted into their area because of Forrest Highway; that is where the problem came from. Those residents had quite a reasonable existence until that road was built.

Mr D.C. NALDER: Forrest Highway has always been the major arterial road for that area and a route for heavy vehicles to move along. We understand that the population is growing and that the number of vehicles is rising and we are sympathetic to the issue, but that highway has been there for a long period. In the long-term plans we are looking at creating a major ring-road to get traffic out of Bunbury altogether, but I cannot promise a time frame on that at this point.