

RAILWAY, DIAMOND WOODCHIP MILL TO GREENBUSHES

577. Mr P.D. OMODEI to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure:

I refer the minister to the railway between the Diamond woodchip mill, south of Manjimup, and Greenbushes, which carries blue gum and marri chips from the mill.

- (1) Will the minister confirm that the Government intends to close this railway line?
- (2) Is the minister aware that if the railway line is closed, in excess of 400 000 tonnes of woodchips will be redirected onto South Western Highway, which will create a potentially dangerous mix with local and tourist traffic?
- (3) Given that the State Government intends to offer \$100 million stamp duty relief to the private owner of the gas pipeline, will the minister find the \$3 million to fix this railway line?
- (4) Will the minister act to stop the closure of this railway line?

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN replied:

- (1)-(4) I cannot believe the cheek and hypocrisy in that question. It was not the Gallop Labor Government that privatised that railway line or sold the people of country Western Australia down the drain; it was the member for Warren-Blackwood. He was, as a member in a Cabinet -

Mr P.D. Omodei: Will you act to stop the closure of the railway line? That is the question.

The SPEAKER: Order, members!

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: I believe that the member for Warren-Blackwood should come clean and tell us about the claims made by the coalition that it would -

Mr P.D. Omodei: Why won't you agree to fix the railway line?

The SPEAKER: I am sure that when the member for Warren-Blackwood asked the question, he actually wanted a reply.

Mr P.D. Omodei: That's right.

The SPEAKER: The member's voice is so loud that the minister cannot be heard. If he reaches those levels again, I will call him to order.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: The truth of this story is, I believe, a very tragic one. The previous Government, in an attempt to balance its budget, decided that it would sell Westrail, which included selling the rail lines.

Mr C.J. Barnett: The railway lines were leased.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: Yes, they were leased for 50 years. Quite interestingly, it was sold at a massive loss, and did not even cover the debt that remained. That left the current Government with a debt that is costing it \$20 million a year to service. It was a particularly great privatisation! It was sold at a loss, and the Government is paying off \$20 million a year. However, the great promise was that the company that bought it would spend \$400 million on capital upgrades. When we came to government and finally saw this agreement, we found that there is no obligation to spend \$400 million. There is virtually no obligation to spend anything. That is indeed what we are seeing. What we have here is an Opposition that, when in government, had an absolutely zero commitment to rail. There is a problem on that line, as there is on a number of lines. There is a problem because this line has been sold.

Mr P.D. Omodei interjected.

The SPEAKER: I call the member for Warren-Blackwood to order for the first time.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: This line has basically been sold and privatised. We are looking at ways in which we can -

Mr M.W. Trenorden interjected.

The SPEAKER: I call the Leader of the National Party to order for the first time.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: We are looking at ways in which we can clean up the mess yet again - another mess created by a conservative privatisation. When we came to government, we had to devise a funding model for the Mirambeena arrangements under which woodchips would be taken to Albany, because that would not be picked up by the private sector operator. We are working on a project to save that rail line. As I said, it is another testament to the complete debacle of privatisation presided over by the previous Government.