PATIENT ASSISTED TRAVEL SCHEME

1175.   Mr MURRAY to the Minister for Health:

Will the minister explain what further measures the Government is taking to make the patient assisted travel scheme more accessible to country people?

Mr KUCERA replied:

I thank the member for Collie for his valuable input into the review of the patient assisted travel scheme.

The State Government made an election commitment, as you, Mr Speaker, are well aware from your input into the matter, to review the patient assisted travel scheme and also to increase funding to the scheme by $4 million over the next four years. As a result of the review, a number of changes have been made to the scheme to make it far more accessible to country people. I am pleased to announce today a small amendment, which will be important to about 50 people who have been discharged or moved from a public hospital because the nature of their illness requires them to be treated in a private hospital. Until now, people in that situation have not been able to use the patient assisted travel scheme for their journey home following discharge from the private hospital. That has been changed. Currently, people are eligible for PATS only if they are discharged from a public hospital. In reality, people would be moved from the private hospital back to the public hospital so that they could be discharged from that hospital and access PATS. That was creating problems. From today it will cease. If a person has been required to seek treatment at a private hospital, that person will now be discharged from that hospital and be able to access PATS for his or her journey home. This will affect people in your electorate, Mr Speaker. The simple amendment will take effect from today. The previous system was a waste of time and money. This is one of the key issues that arose as part of the review, and I am happy to announce today the first small improvement.