

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from 26 June.

HON M.J. CRIDDLE (Agricultural) [5.38 pm]: I take the opportunity to congratulate the Governor on his address at the beginning of this session of Parliament. He has fitted into the community in a fine way, and has been welcomed throughout Western Australia for the way in which he carries himself and the way in which he joins in with the community at the functions that he attends; he makes himself readily available for conversations with all folk. He is a great Governor for Western Australia.

Mr President, I have already congratulated you on your ascension to the presidency and I know that you will do a fine job. I also congratulate Hon George Cash for the way in which he carried out the office of President. He did a fine job; he had a very clear understanding of the requirements of that office and carried out his duties well.

In the previous Government I was proud to be Minister for Transport under the Premiership of Hon Richard Court and the Deputy Premiership of Hon Hendy Cowan. They were two great leaders in Western Australian politics and set a high standard. Leaving the rhetoric out of the debate on the financial state of Western Australia when the election was held, by any measure the State was in a very good position. An enormous amount of infrastructure was implemented in my portfolio of transport. The contributions to this State of those members are immeasurable and I wish them well in their future endeavours. Although Hon Richard Court has left Parliament, Hon Hendy Cowan is still a member of the Legislative Assembly. I am sure that whatever path he takes in the future he will serve the people very well.

I also congratulate Hon Monty House, another of my National Party colleagues and Minister for Primary Industry and for Fisheries, who held that job for eight years and who is acknowledged throughout the State for making an enormous contribution not only as a minister but also as Deputy Leader of the National Party.

Hon Dexter Davies succeeded Hon Eric Charlton, a minister who will go down in history as a forward-thinking person, prepared to make difficult decisions for the benefit of Western Australia. His role in providing road funding and in initiating the Graham Farmer Freeway tunnel development will be acknowledged by everybody well into the future. Unfortunately, Hon Dexter Davies was not re-elected. However, his contribution here in two and a half years is appreciated by everybody. He did a fine job on committees, was a great ambassador for the Agricultural Region and strongly represented his constituents in this House.

Hon Ken Travers: Hear, hear!

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: As Hon Ken Travers indicated, he will be remembered for that fine work. Hon Murray Montgomery was here for, I think, 12 years and in his own way he represented his electorate to the best of his ability. I think all the fine work he did on committees was appreciated. He was respected by the members in this Chamber. He will do well working in the vineyard and cattle industries.

Hon Ken Travers: He will need to come and prove it to us.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: I have had the benefit of tasting some of the Montgomery Hill wine, and I can assure members that it is a very high-quality wine. Anyone who tastes it will enjoy the drop his winery produces.

Hon Kim Chance: I look forward to buying a case to try it.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: I have recently purchased a case. I am sure he will be a ready salesman if Hon Kim Chance wants to taste a drop.

One of the people who worked hard for her electorate was Hilda Turnbull. She was most unfortunate to miss being re-elected by only about 34 votes. I think she suffered due to an acrimonious election campaign in Collie. She was disappointed, as was our party, that she was not returned to that seat. She was one of the stalwarts of Collie and always spoke strongly on issues in her electorate. The building of the coal-fired power station and the like will be marked down to her efforts. Regardless of what we think about the environment and other issues, she certainly worked for her electorate. She stood several times before being elected, which in itself is a reminder to anyone who wishes to become a member of the need to set one's mind to working in that direction, as she did.

Hon Ken Travers: Collie must always produce members of that nature.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: We will watch how the new member performs. In representing that diverse electorate, he probably has the toughest job of any member. Preferences had a huge implication for party members seeking election there. If one of the parties had decided to change a place on the ticket either way, it would have made an enormous difference. A difference of 34 votes reflects how close the result was. The new member should be

well and truly aware that he has a great opportunity to make a contribution in Collie. If he measures up anywhere near as well as Hilda Turnbull did, he will do a wonderful job for Collie.

I also pass on my thanks to Hon Norman Moore, Hon Peter Foss and Hon Barry House, who was, latterly, the Parliamentary Secretary for Education. As members of the coalition, we formed a very good team in this place and always got on very well. There were three National Party members and my Liberal Party colleagues. We worked well for the State. As a coalition, the Government in the upper House worked very well, although we obviously had our differences across the Chamber, as could be expected. I remember well some of the fulfilling debates on the dairy industry and the Westrail freight legislation. I am sure all members involved benefited from them. One Act is having a good effect while the other one has left some loose ends to be tied up. People have suffered somewhat; nevertheless, that is the way life goes sometimes. It was a difficult decision to pass the dairy deregulation Bill. Sometimes on reflection I think we should have left the dairy industry as it was and relied on circumstances to deal with it. However, in that situation people would have missed out on the contribution from the federal Government. It was a difficult decision.

Hon B.K. Donaldson: I do not think the federal Government intended to put in any money.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: Hon Bruce Donaldson is right; it was a federal government initiative for farmers to receive a compensation package.

Hon Kim Chance: They made half a billion dollars out of it.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: Yes.

I now pay tribute to the staff in my ministerial office. Unfortunately, with the incoming Government every single one of them has gone by the wayside. As a result, the State has lost an enormous amount of knowledge. Approximately 100 years of knowledge in the transport industry went out the gate when all those advisers and my ministerial staff were swept aside. To some extent I find that difficult to fathom, particularly with the people who were not senior advisers. I can understand the Government's reasoning for not reappointing the senior advisers. However, the staff who did the more mundane work in the office could have been retained. An enormous void now exists in the transport portfolio that will be very difficult to fill. I say thank you to those people, many of whom worked for the previous Labor Government. When I became Minister for Transport I said that they had three months to make up their minds whether they were happy with me and that I had three months to decide whether I was happy with them. As it turned out, I think a couple left and we retained the others.

Yesterday Hon Barry House touched on some of the achievements of the previous Government in building roads. The real achievement in the construction of roads came in 1993-94 when Hon Eric Charlton implemented some road funding mechanisms which, over the period, took the amount of funding available for roads from about \$320 million to \$806 million in last year's budget. That is an enormous rise in road funding. I will speak later about the ramifications of not continuing that road funding. However, that saw the development of the Graham Farmer Freeway and tunnel, which have been an enormous success despite all the criticisms thrown at me and Hon Eric Charlton. I could write a book about the tunnel, which has been an enormous success linking into the Mitchell Freeway to the north and the Kwinana Freeway to the south.

I took the opportunity to look over the new additions to the Kwinana Freeway just before they were opened. The freeway in that area is a magnificent infrastructure, as is Safety Bay Road to Read Street and the interchange at Ennis Avenue leading down to Mandurah, which is 115 kilometres of highway. It has set up the city of Mandurah well into the future with routes from both the north and the south.

Of course, further development will go north in the future. With due credit to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, in answer to a question the minister advised that the Lancelin-Cervantes road will be completed by 2003. That will be an enormous improvement. The planning is well under way.

That leads to roads up the coast. The road north of Lancelin to Clifly Head, which Hon Kim Chance will know well, has been a tremendous success. Also the Kalbarri road, which a lot of people said would be a waste of money, carries 500 vehicles on a standard day, and from time to time carries well over that. That road has been an enormous success.

Another road funding issue that is pertinent is the funding agreement with the Western Australian Municipal Association, which has given security to local government authorities. Regional road groups are in place, and local people get involved. In recent days I heard the announcements on the black spots program. Those initiatives will do very well, and will improve road safety.

Ports around Western Australia have developed and progressed. From my point of view that is one of the real success stories of the former Government. I should mention the Narrows Bridge duplication, because it is pertinent when I refer to the Geraldton port. The suggested costing for the Narrows Bridge duplication was

around \$70 million, but it was completed for \$50 million, which is an enormous saving. The relevance of that to the Geraldton port and yesterday's discussions about a budget overrun is that one never knows until the tenders come in what the price will be. I know some people say there have been cost blow-outs. However, that simply indicates there may be some savings, and efficiencies might result when the tenders are let. The costing of the Geraldton transport corridor, for which we have heard various estimates, will not be known until the final tender has been let on the construction of that infrastructure.

On the subject of Geraldton, the deepening of the harbour and the benefits from selling into Asia will be well and truly welcomed by the mineral exporters and also the grain exporters. Enormous advantages can be gained by exporting out of Geraldton, rather than Kwinana.

The Esperance port has had significant upgrades for the export of iron ore. Yesterday I mentioned briefly the enormous amount of money that has been spent in Esperance. Between \$40 million and \$50 million was spent on dredging to enable larger vessels to load there. Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd has spent \$60 million on construction at the port, and construction on the railway line north from Esperance amounted to about \$40 million. Perhaps in the near future we will see further investment there. The people in that area are extremely pleased with those advancements, and the way the port is working with its work force.

The port of Albany will shortly be used for the export of woodchips. Two berths are being constructed for \$14 million, as well as an industrial site to the north with a rail spur. That will provide enormous benefits to Albany. The port of Bunbury is ticking along very well. Broome needs further expenditure on it to take full advantage of expansion in the exploration industry offshore from Broome. The opportunity to export from Broome needs to be exploited, otherwise the trade will go to places such as Darwin. Western Australians do not want that; they want to take up every opportunity. I know that the rate of cattle exports from Broome has been high. The management of the port of Broome has been ticking along very well since it became an autonomous board. The board is doing great work in that area. The port of Dampier is also moving along very well.

The regional airport development scheme has resulted in 60 upgrades to airports around Western Australia. The other day I had a brief look at the latest development - the Kalbarri airport. It is magnificent infrastructure. Tenders have also been called for the construction of the terminal, and that will be ready for service in the near future. That will be a great benefit to Kalbarri, as will the terminal in Geraldton, into which the State Government put one-quarter of a million dollars. Other upgrades are occurring at present at Mt Magnet and elsewhere. Dongara and Mullewa had recent upgrades. RADS funding is spreading throughout Western Australia, including Lombadina, where Hon Tom Stephens and Hon Kim Chance flew in ahead of me. Lombadina has a great piece of infrastructure.

While I am talking about Lombadina, I will refer to the Cape Leveque road project, for which about \$1 million a year was made available. That project was to involve the local community in the structure, so they would have some pride in it. I hope that involvement is maintained as there was cooperation between Main Roads, the shire, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and the local community. I hope Hon Kim Chance takes the message back to the Government to continue to involve the local community. It would be useful to train members of the local community on how to look after the roads using some of the heavy machinery available. In the future, when the road has been constructed, they will need to maintain it, and this would give them an opportunity to be involved in the work force. It is a positive step to involve local people.

Hon Kim Chance: Hon Tom Stephens and I spoke to the One Arm Point community about that.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: The former Government took up that issue, and it was in place. I hope that continues. I understand the current Government is continuing the \$2 million allocation to the regional airport development scheme. RADS is a great initiative and it certainly needs to be continued.

The recreational facilities fund has benefited small boat owners, through the construction of facilities such as ramps, jetties and the like. That has been a good fund, which has resulted in the construction of projects throughout the State on a year-to-year basis.

I will touch on some road construction that I hope will be continued. There is always talk about the roads in my area. People must think that my farm extends for between 85 kilometres and 100 kilometres, but it does not. With the cooperation of local people, the improvement to local roads has been of enormous benefit to the community. The roads that are continually talked about cost about \$2 million. The total cost of the 85 kilometres of roadway built by the local community was \$4.2 million. That is a great return in anybody's language. The west Binnu Road and the east Ogilvie Road need to be completed; and the Tenindewa-Yuna-Geraldton road needs upgrading. I hope those projects remain in the budget. This road will give an enormous boost to tourism. It is a linkage from the road from Mullewa to Geraldton. It cuts off a distance of about 60 kilometres, and enables motorists to go straight through on a flat road to the Great Northern Highway, without going up the hills and through the valleys. It would be of enormous benefit if those roads were upgraded.

Similarly, it is planned to build the Horrocks-Port Gregory road in three to four years time. We must build either a new road or new bridges. The difference in expenditure is small. If the road were built, it would be a great benefit.

The agricultural lime routes have become more of an issue since I learnt of the discussion about saleyards being located at Northam or Muchea. Agricultural lime route No 1 will become a crucial road if sheep are transported from the east. I am not saying that all yards should be built at Muchea, but there is a good argument for cattle saleyards to be built at Muchea whether or not the facility will include sheep. I see inefficiencies in not building one facility. The crucial point is that heavy haulage cannot travel down to Perth and then go back up; it needs to go cross country using agricultural lime route No 1. I hope the Minister for Agriculture will look at the need for this. I have met with people in that area on a number of occasions. There is a hostile element among the property owners along the road from Bindoon Hill to Toodyay. Some of the people to whom I spoke indicated that they did not live in the area, but they owned a property there and did not want interference from passing trucks. That issue needs some consideration. The whole of the lime sands network needs attention. Agricultural lime route No 2, the road from New Norcia across to Goomalling, requires about \$7 million worth of immediate attention.

Sitting suspended from 6.00 to 7.30 pm

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: I will now comment on the Hyden-Corrigin road. I have had correspondence about this road recently. The previous Government was intending to include in the budget for the coming year a sum of \$23 million. This is a very important road, much used by heavy transport and by tourists, attracted in large numbers to Wave Rock. Any upgrade to this road in the next few years will be welcomed by those people. In the Esperance area, the Ravensthorpe-Esperance road will also need attention in the near future. This road has not been budgeted for but, with the advent of a mine in the Ravensthorpe area, it will experience a large amount of additional traffic. I referred earlier to the roads leading to Lancelin, and the continuation of the road from Cervantes to Lancelin will be an important project to complete in the near future. The minister has given some indication that this will be done by 2003.

I refer now to the road funding initiatives put in place by the previous Government, with the fuel franchise levy, the commonwealth funding from the goods and services tax, and the registration fees that were raised recently by the Government by some five per cent. Registration fees go into the Main Roads trust fund. The other funding raised for use on roads was a result of a 1997 High Court ruling that required the federal Government to collect the fuel franchise levy on behalf of the States. This became a safety net revenue facility. There are also commonwealth grants, previously known as the national and rural arterial commonwealth road fund, which were designated to roads by the previous Government. If the present Government's commitments on roads are to be met, that funding will need to be directed to roads, and it would be unethical to take that money away from roads. People would have a very good argument, if the money was not directed to roads, to have the money that is raised from the fuel franchise levy removed. This is an area that I will be watching, and I may even make some suggestions for having that funding designated for roads through legislation.

School bus operations in country areas have been accident free and have been very well run by local operators, but there is some concern about the spurs. The previous Government had in place an implementation committee looking at difficulties with regard to the Morrel report. I am concerned that there is no flexibility allowed with spurs. Perhaps the minister in charge of this legislation needs to make sure that the people in the Department of Transport understand people in country areas and their need for spurs. Issues of perpetuity with contracts have also arisen. Tim Shanahan was looking at a review of the rates for the contractors, and that review needs to be finalised in the near future to ensure the viability of school bus operators. This is a very important issue for people in country areas.

The dry season in the wheatbelt and the agricultural region has reached a very serious stage. The Minister for Agriculture has an understanding of that situation. The impact on livestock is probably the most serious and immediate problem. In my own area, we have to shift stock off the land, which has an immediate effect on the condition of the country later in the year. If no rain falls soon, there will be nothing to hold the country together, and we will face erosion, which will be very detrimental. I will deal further with salinity, drainage and erosion issues shortly. The impact of the drought on small business is already being felt by machinery dealers. There are indications that their industry is in deep trouble. Schools and hospitals are suffering the impact, contractors are moving out, and the trucking industry is under pressure. There is an immediate need to consider issues such as rates and charges in country areas to give the farming and business communities some sort of relief. I would like to think that the minister will allow me to make some suggestions, because I have had a close understanding of the industry for many years. If I can have any input into that area, which would be of benefit, I would look forward to taking the opportunity.

The economic pressure on primary industry will undoubtedly have an impact on salinity, and on wind and water erosion. If they do not have the money, people will not be able to spend on meeting these challenges. There must be a commercial advantage in any initiatives that are taken. If trees are to be planted, they should be able to be harvested. Tax relief is also needed for fencing work. There is also the possibility of pumping some of the water, which is rising at a rapid rate, into some of the lakes in the area, which can then be used for aquaculture in the future. Some people may think these are wild suggestions, but I know, from some of the work that has been done in northern areas, with barramundi in tanks, for instance, that such ideas can come to fruition. We need to bring commercial reality to country areas to overcome salinity, erosion and poor drainage so that some value can be derived from it.

On the agricultural side, there are issues involving the Australian Wheat Board and single-desk selling. In the move towards commercialisation, it must be remembered that the returns to growers are absolutely paramount. That goes also for the Grain Pool and Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd, which are operated by producers through boards. We must always keep in mind that these entities exist to advantage the growers. That should not be overlooked in future ventures.

I move on to a couple of other issues of interest to country people. The Taxi Act needs to be amended to allow a change in the boundaries so that country operators are covered by that Act rather than the Transport Co-ordination Act. In that way, the operators would be able to take part in negotiations over the buyback. They would also come under the auspices of the fare evasion legislation and enjoy perpetuity of licences. Presently, licences in country areas run for only 12 months. Country operators have sought from me an assurance that I will put those concerns to the minister dealing with the issue. I have done that, and she has indicated that she will move those amendments as a matter of priority. I hope she keeps that in mind.

Telecommunications is also a vital issue in country areas. Over the next 12 months, the installation of code division multiple access bases through the Wired Wide West Project will provide 95 per cent coverage in the mid west and on the highways to Perth. Those areas will be greatly served by that. There is talk that the federal Government's \$50 million telecommunications grant could help to link up Western Australia between the Great Northern Highway and the North West Coastal Highway. That 2 900 kilometres of road network requires 40 bases at a cost of \$23 million. The major issue is funding the power to go to the bases, which would be expensive. Under the latest funding arrangements, Telstra, the Commonwealth and the State will each contribute a third. The State needs to make a contribution.

Road train summits have been held throughout Western Australia. The heavy haulage industry in Western Australia is vital for not only mining but also agriculture and business. Although the summits would have been of some benefit, the issues they have raised were those with which we were already dealing; that is, fatigue, quality assurance and, of course, where road trains should go. I have always said there should be a network of high-quality roads throughout the State for those trucks. It is a matter of a graduated move towards that. I am going to a trucking industry conference on 6 and 7 July to learn how that has progressed. The issue needs to be handled in a realistic way. The Minister for Planning and Infrastructure has prevented heavy haulage trucks from using Jarrahdale Road, metropolitan Albany Highway and the lime sands route. That has made the situation difficult through a loss of confidence in the industry. More consultation should have taken place. The transport industry is intermodal - road, rail, air and sea. We need those links, wherein lies the importance of the trucking industry in Western Australia.

I close on issues involving the bus fleet in the metropolitan area and youth. The bus fleet is in a process of upgrading through the arrangements with DaimlerChrysler; new buses have come on-stream. That has been of enormous benefit to passengers. I understand patronage has risen significantly. Much of that has to do with the purchase of those buses, the new circle route and the accesses into Perth. People can now travel on very comfortable buses. We added to those upgrades through a hydrogen fuel-cell bus trial. I went to England and Germany to sign up to a joint arrangement with DaimlerChrysler for three experimental buses. Perth is the only city outside Europe to be involved, and that is a real feather in the cap for Perth. BP Australia Ltd has signed up to put in place the infrastructure for the hydrogen, so it will also be involved in the trial. I am sure we will see a successful conclusion to that trial. I am impressed by the hydrogen fuel-cell technology, in which water is the only emission. The buses in Canada work very efficiently. Canada gets its hydrogen from the water through hydro-electricity. It is a very clever process. We will take our hydrogen from the BP refinery, which produces about 40 tonnes of hydrogen every year. That hydrogen will need to be cleaned before it is used in the buses. However, further initiatives will allow for the extraction of hydrogen at the wellhead and the pumping of the other products - carbon dioxide and the like - into the aquifer so there will not be any emissions into the atmosphere, which would create a great pollution problem.

Finally, I make a couple of remarks about younger people in Western Australia, especially in my electorate. For far too long, we have concentrated on the few young people in Western Australia who cause trouble, and not on the absolutely fantastic young people we have in our community, who have all the ability in the world. They are

very well trained. I brought some young people into the gallery last night; unfortunately, members were dealing young people a savage blow. Those people left here asking what they have to do to be understood. Those people are intelligent young people who have been to university and have embarked on careers and set themselves up. I ask members to recognise that 80 to 90 per cent of our young people are outstanding. A few might cause trouble, but the others are the ones who will lead us into the future and stand us in good stead. I applaud the way in which most young people go about their business. They face extraordinarily tough times, as the situation with drugs and the like is very difficult. However, with all their experiences, they will become excellent ambassadors for us in the future. They certainly have more experience than I have had with modern technology and the like. Most are very intelligent and worldly in their outlook. I encourage members to get involved with our younger people and to point out the good things they do so that all of us in Western Australia benefit.

I have enjoyed putting forward some of the positive things that have happened in this State and pointing out some of the things that I think should take place for the benefit of Western Australia. Mr President, thank you for that opportunity.

Debate adjourned, on motion by Hon B.K. Donaldson.