

REGIONAL ROAD GROUP FUNDING

Urgency Motion

THE PRESIDENT (Hon John Cowdell): I received the following letter this morning -

Dear Mr President

At today's sitting it is my intention to move today, pursuant to Standing Order number 72, that the Council consider as a matter of urgency, the purpose of discussing Regional Road Group Funding from the State Road Funds to Local Government and the impact any reduction will have on road safety, local communities, local contractors and shire budgets.

Yours sincerely

Murray Criddle MLC

Member for Agricultural Region

[At least four members rose in their places.]

HON MURRAY CRIDDLE (Agricultural) [3.38 pm]: I move the motion. Mr President, as you have said, the purpose of this motion is to discuss the reduction in regional road group funding from the state road funds to local government and the impact that will have on the shires throughout the regions. The motion could not have come at a more appropriate time, as the Minister for Agriculture has just pointed out to us, he has made a submission to the federal Government asking for exceptional circumstances funding because of the difficulties faced by the people in some of these areas. This will only exacerbate their situation, because it could lead to an increase in rates in those areas in order to maintain the road improvement and expansion programs and the road asset preservation program, which was outlined in the agreement for the regional road groups in 1996 and which was put in place.

I have listened to the concerns of a number of councils. In fact, I was surprised by the number of councils that came forward. Only last week I was invited to a meeting of country councils, and since then this issue has snowballed. The issue arises from some documents which were released apparently last December by Main Roads Western Australia and which were brought forward to the regional road group meeting in February, at which the process that will be put in place was outlined.

Last week I asked a question of the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure about regional road group funding for 2003-04. I was advised that the Government had established the Functional Review Taskforce to examine these issues, identify savings and help fund priority service areas that manage the budget bottom line. Never before has there been a more urgent priority for road funding in regional and rural Western Australia. I will say more about the issues concerning road infrastructure and asset management. There is a clear indication that that asset will deteriorate if we do not maintain funding. The response I received through the parliamentary secretary indicates that until decisions are made relating to these recommendations, no notification will be made to local governments. I understand an e-mail was sent out yesterday - these things are starting to come to a head - from Main Roads indicating that a decision will not be made until May. Councils are preparing their budgets. Under the Local Government Act, which was amended in 1995, councils must prepare a four-year spending program. If they have no indication of consistent funding in the future, there is no way in the wide world those programs will reflect reality. Issues such as this, which involve reductions in funding, have an immense impact on local people. Under the local roads program, proposed funding for strategic and technical management will remain at \$1.3 million; direct grants will remain close to \$12 million; road project grants will decrease from \$45 million in 2002-03 to \$23.6 million next year and to \$18 million in 2004-05. Funding arrangements for local government and regional road groups will be transferred to state government initiatives. I will say more about that when I have finished discussing this schedule. The level of funding for traffic management and road safety will remain at around \$12.5 million; road access to Aboriginal communities will drop from almost \$3.5 million to \$1.5 million over those two years; funding for bridgeworks will remain the same at just over \$3 million; and road funding for the Department of Conservation and Land Management will remain at about \$2.2 million. However, funding for state initiatives on local government roads will increase from \$18.5 million to \$44 million. The decision-making process will be transferred from regional road groups to the State Government. The Treasurer tells us ad nauseam that Canberra does not give this State a reasonable amount of funding. That should not occur here so that local government is starved of funding. This initiative will impose a two to one ratio. Local government must contribute at least \$1 for every \$2 the State contributes. As was pointed out at a local government meeting I attended yesterday, in many cases, local governments contribute far more than the two to one ratio. Those initiatives sustain all the facilities that are very important to regional and rural Western Australia. Shires must maintain their infrastructure, machinery and work force. Unfortunately, the Minister for Local Government is away for various reasons. His regional development policy proposes all sorts of improvements to infrastructure and the like.

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However, we have not seen that. In fact, I am constantly being told by regional development commissions that their funding has been reduced. The Functional Review Taskforce is just another mechanism to help the Government reduce funding to local government, which could be used for initiatives taken by those people.

I will provide something of a breakdown of the reduced funding that will result from the \$45.5 million to \$23.6 million proposed in 2003-04. The allocation in the 2002-03 years for the Gascoyne is just over \$1 million. The baseline is \$900 000 and the amount budgeted for next year is \$671 000. That is an enormous decrease from just over \$1 million, which will have an enormous impact. Given the two to one ratio, a third of that funding will be lost from local government. As well as the issues with the nine regional committees, according to this draft summary, the \$6 million contingency funding, which is usually allocated as financial assistance in the event of floods and other unfortunate incidents, will be reduced to nil. Local road groups would have to find another \$6 million. That is not acceptable. In years gone by, the Government found extra moneys to assist people who had been affected by floods. Floods have occurred in the north that have impacted on roads and bridges. This proposal will impact on the way funds are distributed.

The two issues involved are the transfer of funding from local government decision making to state government initiatives and the cutback in overall funding from \$98 million in 2002-03 to \$86 million overall in 2003-04, which is a major cutback in expenditure on local roads overall. Local roads in Western Australia represent 85 per cent of the total road network of about 172 000 kilometres. They cover an enormous distance, which has an immense impact on local governments. An increase in the overall funding pool should be linked to revenue increases across the State. In the 2003-04 budget, \$104 million was considered necessary to keep abreast of the models for improvement, expansion and asset preservation. The consumer price index should be covered, and could be addressed as a result of the rise in state revenue.

Another issue is the impact on regional road groups of the 20-20 strategy implemented previously. This funding proposal will impact on the mechanism that was proposed in the AusLink green paper. If funding is cut to the extent indicated, there will be no reason whatsoever to continue with regional road groups because the critical mass of funding will not be available to justify them. It is very important that these decisions about roads in country areas are equitable.

The other issue of great concern is that not only will these funds be cut but also other funds will be lost that were allocated by the previous coalition Government. Funds for lime sand routes have been drastically reduced and are almost non-existent. We are still waiting for funding for the Lancelin to Cervantes road and Muirs Highway. Some money has been spent on the Hyden-Corrigin road, but nowhere near enough; yet it is very important for tourism and heavy haulage vehicles.

The road safety issue is absolutely crucial. We constantly refer to the ability of drivers. The fact that the roads are deteriorating is not in the best interests of road safety. We should ensure that the necessary funding is available for regional road networks. The lack of funding also impacts on school buses and heavy haulage which mingles on these roads. Another important issue is the safety of students. I referred previously to the reduction in work forces from local government areas and the enormous impact that will be caused following the relocation of families. The social fabric in those areas will come under pressure once again. As I said at the outset, we know that regional and rural Western Australia is under enormous pressure at the present time.

Following the Machinery of Government Taskforce, there was a requirement to ensure some sort of cooperation between the various agencies. The loss of this re-allocation of funding will have a significant impact on those areas. I have referred to the impact on local government budgets. That is a serious issue now because local governments are preparing their budgets for the new financial year. We have not seen any indication of what money will be forthcoming.

The State also made an arrangement with local government following the kerfuffle about the Fire and Emergency Services Authority of WA levy. It was also agreed to establish a memorandum of understanding, so that when decisions like this are made, there will be some form of consultation with local government. In this case that has not happened. We cannot expect local government, or indeed the federal Government, to cooperate in some arrangement unless there is a reasonable understanding that those consultations will take place. This minister used to talk about consultation. There is no indication that there has been consultation on this issue, and that breaches the arrangement that was put in place.

I now refer to the impact of the loss of asset preservation funding. The Local Government Association issued a report on asset expenditure, and in 2001 the figure was \$293 million. In that year \$230 million was spent, creating a shortfall of something like \$60 million. If this approach continues, we will see a further impact on asset management. The funding arrangements in this State need to be maintained, because development in Western Australia is going ahead. The population is increasing, vehicle licence numbers are increasing and there will be increased pressure on roads in Western Australia. Development in this State is going ahead in leaps and

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bounds and we should make sure that the necessary infrastructure is in place. One thing I can inform members about is that road infrastructure leads to not only mining development but also tourism and other developments.

HON BRUCE DONALDSON (Agricultural) [3.53 pm]: I commend Hon Murray Criddle for raising this issue, because for me this is a sense of déjà vu. I was involved in local government during the previous Labor Government and even then we had to fight for every dollar we could get. From a national point of view, the Australian Local Government Association, in conjunction with the Western Australian local government group in those days when we had the country shires, the country urban councils - the LGA which was in Perth - were involved in a bunfight every year because of the limited funds that were available and the share that went to country, urban and metropolitan councils. That situation had to be negotiated with Main Roads each year. As time went on we stood alongside Main Roads. In those days I attended three or four budget subcommittees of Cabinet to argue for additional road funding in conjunction with Main Roads. To the credit of Bob Pearce, who was the Minister for Transport at one stage, he commissioned a report on road funding needs in Western Australia. The country shires and the local government associations contributed. I was disappointed that the Royal Automobile Club of Western Australia, which was jumping up and down about road funding, did not contribute. That report cost the then Government in excess of \$350 000, plus in-house support. I am sure Hon Murray Criddle has seen that report. It clearly showed that in those days there was a shortfall of over \$80 million annually for asset preservation and maintenance of our road system in Western Australia, and this compounded every year. Eventually, when the coalition Government came into power, it was realised that additional funds would be required for roads, because they were the lifelines of this State. Irrespective of whether people want everything to move to rail, we unfortunately do not have a rail system all around Western Australia and we therefore rely very heavily on road transport, not only to take products to ports but also to move commodities from many country and regional towns. All-weather roads are required. We all know the climatic conditions that can apply in the north during the wet season.

I saw the need for a local road system. At that stage local government was responsible for approximately 82 per cent of the road system. That percentage has grown, because the categories of some roads have changed and local government has picked up some additional responsibility. Hon Murray Criddle was probably more accurate when he referred to a figure of 85 per cent.

I have always given great credit to the department of Main Roads and local government for requiring very little funding. The department established a register of every road in Western Australia, whether under local government, state or commonwealth responsibility. In Western Australia the department developed the road management information system - ROMIS - which was offered to other States and local governments for a software package price of \$100. The Commissioner for Main Roads in each State realised the value of and the benefits that could be achieved with a road management information system. That system was used to establish the asset base for the roads in every local authority in Western Australia, and it has been very helpful. The department passed out meagre funding to ensure that at least the major local roads were being looked after, with significant contributions from local government. I said at the start that it was a sense of déjà vu, because we are going back into that old cycle again. People criticised the coalition Government for the amount of money that was being spent on roads, but they had only to drive around to see what was done during that period. Lord help us, if that work had not been done during those eight years, I would hate to think what our road system would look like today. I may have a suspicious mind, but what I think is happening is that the Commonwealth Government - when the fuel tax was given back to local governments in each State - is providing funds to local governments in each State on a direct basis.

Some local authority areas have huge road networks which would not be looked after without that money. The State Government has taken the opportunity to cut its funding of those programs, knowing full well that there is another two years of additional commonwealth funding. Large councils may be getting up to \$500 000 under the program, but their costs for road maintenance and reconstruction can be 10 times that amount. The present funding has been a saviour for local government, and this Government has taken advantage of the fact, because road building maintenance is obviously not one of its priorities.

When regional road groups were formed, people criticised them on and off for some time. They have not always been the ant's pants. The groups have meant that local governments have looked at regional road networks rather than what they can do within their own boundaries. This has had a positive effect. Although some local governments may grizzle and say that they would like to have had money for a particular road, they realise that roads in other regions may have greater priority. However, when the cake is cut and a few crumbs are left, it will breed a lot of discontent amongst councils whose representatives sit on those regional road groups.

When the regional road groups were first established, I was suspicious and cautious, but I could see the broader vision for their being developed. I believe they have had some very positive effects. Local governments are saying that they are not happy to be left with an amount of funding which will not enable them to gain any real benefits. They were quite happy with the pot of money that we left as a coalition Government. If local

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government had that sort of funding, it would cut its cloth accordingly. Local government is not saying that the Government should have put in all the money and that it is not prepared to spend its money. Self-regulation is occurring in local government and councils are carefully studying the Western Australian Local Government Association assessment. The funding from the Grants Commission represents what local governments are spending out of their funds.

Some councils are very quick to look at their neighbours and say that they are not doing the right thing. They are asking how some councils can demand more money when the greater input of money is from the State or Commonwealth Government and those councils are reducing their input. Those few recalcitrant councils really do not have a leg to stand on, but generally expenditure has escalated, especially when councils must look at the two-for-one principle for local government.

Hon Murray Criddle and any other country members can look at the road system today and remind themselves of what it looked like 15 or 18 years ago, when it was not healthy. Had those injections of funds not occurred during the period 1993 to 2001, we would be living in the stagecoach days, which is where I believe this Labor Government is trying to take us.

HON GRAHAM GIFFARD (North Metropolitan - Parliamentary Secretary) [4.06 pm]: I thank members for the opportunity to debate this issue today. The State Government recognises the importance of regional road groups. We acknowledge that, as previous speakers have indicated, it is a successful model. The program was formed under the previous Government in 1995-96. We understand the pressures on regional road groups and that a further reduction in funding might affect the viability of those groups. There were reductions in road funding to local governments in last year's state budget when the Government indicated that there would be an annual reduction of \$18 million in grants to local governments for state road funding. That extent of the cuts has been known since prior to May of last year.

Cuts in funding to Main Roads have been generally anticipated for this year. There is general pressure on the state budget overall, particularly because of the strong community priorities that this Government has identified primarily for health, but also for education and police. The health portfolio is an area of particular need that continues to grow and to place pressure on the state budget.

The Minister for Planning and Infrastructure has identified areas of pressure on our road budget. She has said that she wants to quarantine as much as possible the following areas from further cuts: maintenance, because she regards maintenance as obviously necessary; black spot and minor improvements, because she is very keen to ensure that there will be no reductions in that area; and regional road grants to local government, notwithstanding the reduction they have already suffered. This last area continues to be under budgetary pressure and it is true that reductions in grant funding are expected this year. Main Roads is talking to local councils with a view to working out the best way in which to accommodate any reductions that may come through in the next budget.

It is important that the concerns that people have about the funding to local government be placed in the context of the overall funding to regional roads. I understand that about 18 months ago the Commonwealth introduced its roads to recovery program, which I am advised gives local governments in Western Australia funding of \$45 million per annum. That program has changed the road funding relationship in Western Australia, because the State Government has had funding from the Commonwealth reduced during that time.

Hon Murray Criddle: By how much?

Hon GRAHAM GIFFARD: I will go into that in a moment. The Commonwealth has been giving more to local governments and less to State Governments, which means that the State Government's road budget has been correspondingly reduced. I am advised that the State Government puts in an extra \$6 million to top up the national highway program for maintenance requirements. We have been receiving only three per cent of roads of national importance money. Notwithstanding that Western Australia has 25 per cent of the national highways, we have been receiving only eight per cent of national highways funding for the preservation and upgrade of those roads. If we combine the overall state and federal government funding to local councils, the amount that local councils were getting a couple of years ago when this Government came to office and the amount that they are getting now is roughly comparable. There has just been a shift in where that money is coming from.

Hon Murray Criddle: The State Government has pulled the funding. That is what has happened. The federal Government has put in the money but the State Government has ripped it out.

Hon GRAHAM GIFFARD: I am not denying that. I am saying that the overall funding to local councils is roughly comparable, because the federal Government has increased its funding to local councils by a corresponding amount. It is not a question of disputing the figures. Hon Murray Criddle has made the point that the State Government has reduced the amount of road funding. That is true. However, in response to the claim that the level of road funding has decreased under this Government, it is costing this Government about

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\$28 million or \$29 million a year to pay off the previous Government's Transform WA program. We do not get any credit for that. The previous Government gets the credit for that because it allocated money for that program.

Hon Murray Criddle: I am talking about all the projects that -

Hon GRAHAM GIFFARD: If we are talking about what money has been spent, we should mention that we are still carrying in excess of \$40 million a year for those programs. The debt for those programs was incurred under the previous Government. That accounts for the very high level of funding that existed under the previous Government. I am not saying that the previous Government did not spend a lot of money on roads; clearly it did. However, it also wasted a lot of money, and we are still paying for some of that. With regard to the priority of spending money on city roads rather than regional roads, it is worth pointing out that the mover of the motion and the SOS committee - and I am not sure whether it is save our suburbs or save our seats -

Hon Kate Doust: Save our skins!

Hon GRAHAM GIFFARD: Yes. The SOS committee of the southern suburbs of Perth is supporting the construction within the next four years of the Fremantle eastern bypass and Roe Highway stage 8. Those roads are not necessary and will incur expenditure in the order of \$200 million.

[The member's time expired.]

HON BARRY HOUSE (South West) [4.13 pm]: I am pleased to support the motion moved by Hon Murray Criddle. We hear a lot from the Western Australia Police Service, the Office of Road Safety and ministers of the Government about the major factors that cause road accidents and fatalities in this State, such as alcohol, drugs, speed and fatigue. However, two other factors are absolutely vital in that equation. The first is driver education, which Hon Murray Criddle, as the former Minister for Transport, genuinely tried to address and made some inroads into addressing during our time in government. The second major factor is the condition of our roads. That is never fully acknowledged by the commentators on road accidents and fatalities, but it is clearly a major factor in the equation. It is disturbing that the Labor Government does not seem to attach any priority to that factor. I have just been informed that the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, who is responsible for transport, has indicated in the past hour in answer to a question in the other place that government spending on cycleways or bikeways has increased, in broad figures, from \$20 million to \$40 million. That is very commendable if that is the position. However, I question the priority that has been given to that funding over and above regional roads throughout the State. I will not take up much time, but as a member of a country electorate - I hope every member in this place would be able to do the same thing - I will run through some of the roads in my electorate that are in desperate need of some money being spent on them. The only road funding that this Government has allocated to the south west occurred in the first six to 12 months of its tenure. That funding was a continuation of road projects that had been entered into by the previous Government. Since that time, the road funding has dried up to less than a trickle. The only activity that is occurring on country roads in my electorate at the moment is on shire roads. It is not occurring on any of the major roads for which Main Roads is responsible.

One project that requires urgent attention is the Peel deviation as a service road for all the south west. That is needed not only to take the pressure off the Mandurah area, which is growing by the day, but also to improve access to the rest of the south west.

Hon Murray Criddle: The traffic there is growing by seven per cent a year.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Yes. It is growing at a phenomenal rate. The timetable for that project needs to be given urgent priority. The South Western Highway has been a problem for years. The major concern is the rumour that the Donnybrook woodchip mill project has fallen over. That will put an enormous amount of heavy traffic back onto the South Western Highway, because it will mean that all the product that is going from the hinterland to the Bunbury port will end up on road. The theory is that we should get it onto rail. That is fine. However, it will not work in this case. I do not know the exact number of truck movements because I do not have the figures with me, but it is in the thousands. That will make life in places like Donnybrook, Boyanup, Balingup and Bridgetown unbearable and very unsafe. That stretch of highway needs urgent attention.

Another road that people have written to me about, as I am sure they have other local members, is the Coalfields Highway. A dangerous section of that highway navigates the escarpment. That highway also needs urgent attention. The Bussell Highway between Vasse and Margaret River is also becoming extremely critical. A study is being done at the moment, and that is fine, but if no money is committed to that highway in the next three years all that work will have to be done again in the next three to five years. I am told that in the next 12 months to two years, three areas on that road will attract some black spot funding from the federal Government. My information suggests that those areas are near the Fonti Farm intersection, where there have been a couple of serious accidents; the Cowaramup Bay turnoff, where there have been some serious accidents; and around the

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Metricup area. However, other areas of that stretch of road are in dire need of attention. A five-kilometre section of road from Margaret River to Cowaramup, a small stretch of road that I have mentioned in the House previously, has horrific accident statistics of about eight deaths in the past five years. If that is not critical, I do not know what is.

I have also mentioned previously an operating dairy farm there with titles to both sides of the road That require cattle movements across the road. That area is becoming very critical. There is a need for an underpass. The minister, in answer to my questions, has given me a commitment that flashing amber lights will be installed. However, again, I have heard words but seen absolutely no action.

An upgrade of Mowen Road is another vital need to improve the east-west access in the south west as the viticulture and tourism industries grow. An agreement was entered into some years ago between the former Minister for Transport, Hon Eric Charlton, and the Shire of Augusta-Margaret River. I guess that is a step in the right direction because it has resulted in some activity on that road. At the end of the agreement in 2007, there will be a great balloon of spending on major work on that road. At least something is happening there but it is happening at snail's pace. Muirs Highway has been mentioned in the House for as long as I have been a member of this place, and probably for longer. The 20-kilometre section of road between Manjimup and Rocky Gully is dreadful and requires a great deal of money spent on it. The Albany Highway, of course, is always in the news because of fatalities and road accidents. There is continual debate about the safety of that road and the need for at least passing lanes.

That is just a snapshot of the area that I know best. I am sure all members of the House could tell a similar story about the need for roadworks in their area.

HON JIM SCOTT (South Metropolitan) [4.22 pm]: I am pleased that Hon Murray Criddle has raised this issue. The allocation of road funds is a very important issue. It is particularly important at this time in history because we must make some real changes to the way in which we will deal with transport in the future. As the parliamentary secretary said, Western Australia is in the unfortunate position of being a very big State and, therefore, has a lot more roads than other States. However, WA receives a percentage of road funding from the federal Government that relates more to its population than to the extent of its roads. Therefore, the State is already on the back foot. Yet, we know that WA is one place on the planet that has more roads per capita than many other places. That is partly because of its small population but also because of the huge amount per capita that is spent on roads.

We are coming to a point in time in which the finite oil reserves in this world will become more and more expensive. We must think carefully about our allocation of road funding. We must be very careful about not only to where we allocate that funding but also the alternatives we can use to reduce the need to travel. Ultimately, the best way to ensure that sufficient funding is available for desperately needed country roads is to build roads that will genuinely be a big advantage to this country. We must also acknowledge that the more roads we build, the more maintenance they will require. All these matters must be taken into account, rather than the Government's building a road because members say there must be more funding for roads or a lobby group has asked for one in a particular area. That appears to be the as-needs basis in which this State started, without legislators thinking through the most efficient way to develop the road system.

I think the parliamentary secretary raised the issue of spending on urban roads. The percentage of money spent on urban roads for the size of the State is far too high. The only way we can have money to spend on country roads in the future is by better planning our cities and establishing a better mass transit system. It is no good saying that we should build more roads in the city or in the country. We cannot do that because we do not have that much money.

A royal commission in Britain examined the issues of building more and more roads to meet the demand and the most efficient use of resources. The commission found that no matter how much money was spent, it would never be enough. The whole of the United Kingdom's budget would not be sufficient to provide for the growing need for roads if it continued along that path. It is important that we look at other measures. We must also consider why there is a problem with maintaining roads. It is not just a matter of insufficient funding for maintenance.

I know there is a big problem in country areas. Anybody who has driven along country roads would have seen bitumen roads with gouges and deep channels in them caused by large, heavy trucks that use those roads, which were not designed to accommodate the size and weight of such vehicles. That problem has been created partly by a long period of subsidising truck transport and, through those subsidies, the running down of the rail system in country areas which has forced heavy loads onto roads.

Claims have been made about the efficiency of trucks. We know that a railway cannot go everywhere, but this Government desperately needs to sit down and work out very clearly the best places to build roads and rail and the most efficient system to be used in the city. We must also examine the way in which the city is planned. We

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cannot run a mass transit system in a city that is so spread out that it has a lower population density than rural Java. That is not a good system on which to run public transport. The city must be planned better. The problem is not just about fixing country roads; it is about dealing with a lot of issues. It is about thinking about the future. We cannot afford to drive as far as we do in our private vehicles. We cannot afford to put heavy loads on less fuel-efficient trucks when they could go on rail. We cannot continue to subsidise trucks that cause huge damage to the roads. We must find a different approach. Unless we do that, we will never have enough money to provide all the roads that people in the country and the city want.

To reiterate, we must examine our taxing structures to ensure that heavy transport trucks are paying their way, because they are not at the moment. We must examine the most efficient use and building up of our rail system. I blame all previous Governments for allowing those sorts of taxation systems to be put in place. It is particularly outrageous when one considers that the rail systems in this State have had huge disadvantages in that any money that was required for infrastructure had to be borrowed, whereas that was not the case with roads. Secondly, the rail systems had a great disadvantage in that a fuel tax had to be paid, which went towards helping the competitors of those rail systems through the building of roads. That must have amounted to hundreds of millions of dollars over previous years. It is little wonder that there has been a shift away from rail to those heavy vehicles that are chewing up country roads at a rapid rate.

We must have a new way of looking at this issue. I sympathise with Hon Murray Criddle. However, we must look at this issue in a more holistic way, and not simply in the context of more money going into the country and the country being hard done by compared with the city etc. That is a pretty shallow approach. I agree that a certain amount of autonomy is needed in the regions regarding some of that spending. However, that should also be tied to those roads on which money will be spent being required to meet certain criteria; otherwise, whoever has the strongest lobby group will get the road funding in that area, rather than the allocations being based on good planning. I support the motion, but I ask that the debate widen a bit.

HON MURRAY CRIDDLE (Agricultural) [4.31 pm]: I was pleased to listen to the debate today, and I am pleased with the support the motion has received. It was interesting to hear the parliamentary secretary admit that the State Government has taken an enormous amount of funding away from this area.

Hon Graham Giffard: I do not know about it being an enormous amount of funding.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: It has been hundreds of millions of dollars in the time that the present Government has been in office, so it is an enormous amount of funding.

The issue on which I was really focusing - Hon Jim Scott missed the point to some extent - was that of local governments maintaining funding for the regional road groups. I agree to a large extent that planning is needed. I point out to the parliamentary secretary that the coalition spent an enormous amount of time on the 2020 strategy when it was in government. The planning base for that was the local people, the local shires and the local development commissions. They were all brought together to do the planning for those areas. Therefore, there was every opportunity for all transport means to be discussed and put in the planning mix before a decision was made. Rail, air and shipping - the whole lot - were considered, and a comprehensive program was put in place. Certainly, I was involved in that throughout the State. I believe nine 2020 strategies were put in place from Esperance through to the north west. That issue was looked at.

Everybody would agree that planning is required for the city in particular. However, I also point out that the decision that the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure made to bring the railway line directly into Perth was made with the flick of a finger. There was virtually no planning. At present the minister is examining various ways to put the planning in place, where the railway line and the tunnel will go and related issues. However, the decision to bring the railway line into Perth was made virtually with the flick of a finger, as was the decision to get rid of the Roe Highway extension. I inform the parliamentary secretary that the previous Government did some research on this issue and was informed that the Fremantle eastern bypass link to Roe Highway stage 8 was costed at about \$88 million. The people in Main Roads would be able to verify that.

Hon Jim Scott interjected.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: I am telling the member that the previous Government did some research and planning, and that is the information I was given as minister. I do not think the member has been in that position and maybe is never likely to be a minister. I am talking about a program and a costing that was put in place by Main Roads for the funding of that area, and that is the cost it came up with. That is the information I was given.

Hon Graham Giffard: What about stage 8?

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: I have just outlined it. The member can read it later.

Hon Graham Giffard interjected.

President; Hon Murray Criddle; Hon Bruce Donaldson; Hon Graham Giffard; Hon Barry House; Hon Jim Scott

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: I am telling the parliamentary secretary that that is the information I was given. If that information is correct, the parliamentary secretary has no faith in the people who are currently giving him information. I also inform the parliamentary secretary that recently in this House I asked for a briefing. The parliamentary secretary said that he would arrange that. I was told that it is not possible to have a briefing at present. I hope that the people who are organising it will brief me in the near future. They can nominate the time now. They asked me for and I nominated a time; that is, tomorrow morning. However, they said that they could not make it. If the parliamentary secretary cares to tell those people that I will make myself available at any reasonable time, we will have the briefing. From my point of view, it will be interesting to find out how the Government arrived at the estimates of the cost of the line from the Narrows Bridge into Perth and of the Roe Highway, when the minister suggested that the amount could be up to \$500 million.

This issue is about funding of local government roads, and in particular the regional road groups. I stress to the parliamentary secretary that it is absolutely important that that funding remain in place for local government in those areas. There should be an incremental rise in the funding over the years because the expenditure always increases. Local government is certainly not happy that it is not able to budget into the future with any sort of reliability, because it does not know from one day to the next what the funding arrangements will be. I do not know why the emphasis of this Government is away from road funding and onto other areas when road funding is so important.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.