

## TRAFFIC CONGESTION — WESTERN SUBURBS

### *Grievance*

**DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe)** [9.38 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Transport, and I thank the minister for taking my grievance. My grievance relates to the current government's failure to prepare my electorate and the western suburbs generally for current and projected increases in traffic congestion over the coming years. As Benjamin Franklin famously once said, "Failing to plan is preparing to fail." The specific issue that I want to discuss today is the lack of any published plan to deal with the ever-increasing traffic congestion throughout the western suburbs. It may be surprising to many in this house—especially the numerous Labor MPs who live throughout the western suburbs—that there is currently no funding in the forward estimates to combat the ever-increasing traffic congestion that is occurring throughout that area. A textbook example of this congestion is Stirling Highway during peak hour, which is also bracketed by school pick-up and drop-off times. Traffic now banks up all the way from the Claremont shopping centre through to the old Fremantle Traffic Bridge in the morning, and in the evening traffic banks up from Claremont to the Perth side of the University of Western Australia; in fact, it backs up even further, to the Cottesloe area. I am sure many members here would have firsthand experience of this congestion, as I am sure that a number of MPs in this house must use this route each time they wish to come to Parliament House.

Another example of this congestion is the significant volume of traffic on Curtin Avenue, which nowadays is consistently banked up in both directions from Marine Parade right through to Rochdale Road heading towards Oceanic Drive during peak hours. Adding to this congestion are the railway level crossings along the Fremantle rail line. There has for some time now been concern about the logjam of vehicles caused by the level crossings along this line—particularly the level crossings at Victoria Street, Jarrad Street and Salvado Street in Cottesloe. This is a concern that I have previously brought up in this house and that the minister has responded to.

I am especially concerned about the Victoria Street crossing. Traffic banks up along both Stirling Highway and Curtin Avenue, which causes chaos on both roads, especially Stirling Highway. Traffic running both north and south banks up in the turning lanes, reducing traffic flow to one lane. There are also numerous near-misses, with vehicles coming upon the banked-up traffic and having to brake suddenly. This bank-up of traffic is a significant contributor to congestion on that section of the highway. There are some 16 schools within the Cottesloe electorate alone. As I am sure members can appreciate from experiences within their own electorates, having so many schools in one area adds a significant amount of traffic to these already heavily congested roads. Likewise, the recent and significant increase in high-density housing throughout the area has also substantially increased the volume of traffic in the area.

An area of particular concern is that traffic studies associated with the government's infill program simply fail to take into account wider traffic congestion issues. The great majority of this infill is not occurring near the rail line, and essentially all of the new residents are further compounding the traffic congestion issues. We need a major traffic study across the area to properly assess and plan for the certainty of substantial increases in traffic congestion due to the infill program. The minister will recall the studies around the inner harbour relocation that predicted a 50 per cent increase in traffic across the Fremantle bridges within 10 years. Almost half that traffic is commercial traffic; only a small percentage is trucks—as I recall, around eight per cent. Thus, any eventual port relocation will not make a material difference to the traffic congestion issue compared with normal traffic growth. Traffic density across Perth will continue to increase, and when the numerous new developments that have already been approved are completed in the western suburbs, we will have a crisis situation and more gridlock throughout the area. In fact, I think we will have almost complete gridlock throughout the area.

This problem requires foresight. It requires a major investment in infrastructure and, most importantly, it requires a plan. I understand that there have been proposals put forward over the years on how we can fix the traffic congestion on local roads in my electorate and in the western suburbs generally. These proposals include constructing tunnels that would allow traffic travelling to Perth from Fremantle and along the coast to bypass local roads. This would significantly improve traffic flow within the area. Another idea that has been floated previously is to grade-separate the level crossings along the Fremantle rail line or to possibly sink or cover the Fremantle railway line from Subiaco to North Fremantle. This second option would also have the benefit of freeing up a significant amount of prime real estate that is in a perfect location for infill—that is, on the rail line—as opposed to the current process, which is more akin to a developer free-for-all substituting for proper planning and community input. I have spoken with major developers who believe that the sinking of the rail line could be done at minimal cost to government.

Accordingly, I respectfully request that the minister immediately work with Main Roads to begin investigating options that could be implemented to tackle traffic congestion throughout the western suburbs. Further, I also request that the minister ensure that before further infill in the area is considered, there is a comprehensive study of traffic congestion impacts to inform any such plan. Thank you.

**MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan — Minister for Transport)** [9.44 am]: I thank the member for Cottesloe for his grievance. Stirling Highway—like many of the older key routes such as Albany Highway through Cannington and Canning Highway through Bicton and Bateman—suffers from longstanding issues related to significant use and a lot of interaction with businesses and connecting roads. They share certain characteristics: they are major connecting roads that have a lot of activity. As the member knows, we have been looking at some of these areas—Canning Highway, in particular, and of course Stirling Highway.

The member will be aware that in 2012 the previous government undertook a study of Stirling Highway that looked at the existing reservation, proposed reservations and future needs. The then government went through a metropolitan region scheme proposal and there was a rationalisation of parts of the Stirling Highway corridor. The original corridor was quite wide and the rationalisation noted that there was sufficient space to provide queue-jumping lanes for buses and other paths and activities. There was a plan in place.

With regard to the statistics, I know it is very busy, particularly with the number of school drop-offs. There are a number of major schools on Stirling Highway that have students from all suburbs. They are not schools that have a student population only from the local area; they have large catchments, and as a result people come from other areas to drop their children off, so I totally understand that there is a lot of usage.

We had a look at some statistics. I know that sometimes statistics provide no comfort to people who are stuck in traffic, but in looking at the statistics for usage over time, we see that on certain sections of Stirling Highway, in some instances, there has been a drop in usage, but, more generally, there has been a stabilisation of car traffic between 2017–18 and 2021–22, which is a good thing.

I also make the point that the government has increased public transport services through that area. I understand that the frequency of public transport advantages some kids in getting to school. In particular, I have had feedback that there is more accessibility to those schools because we now run extra trains through to Claremont. We have also completed stages 1 and 2 of the principal shared path through the member's electorate to the city. Again, the feedback I have is that that has supported more people cycling to work and children cycling to school because they now have a safe cycling path away from traffic.

As I said, many of the schools on Stirling Highway attract students from other suburbs, so we have also provided the Connecting Schools grants program. On Wednesday, we launched an action plan to increase the number of children walking or cycling to school; of course, catching public transport is part of that, too. Historically, around 70 per cent of children walked or cycled to school; that figure is now down to 25 per cent on average, so we want to try to increase that level of activity.

With regard to Stirling Highway, plans were submitted that drove the MRS I mentioned earlier. The plans included widening the highway, in many instances; provision of median strips to make crossing safer the highway for pedestrians; and creating wider intersections to allow for dedicated bus lanes. Those are all worthy projects. As the member knows, the government has made a record spend on transport, so our ability to address all these issues over the next few years is limited. Another issue is that whenever we try to take a bit more from a road reserve, there are a lot of complaints. I am not ambitious enough to address that issue right now, because even though people's front verges might be in the metropolitan region scheme reservation, they do not want that reservation touched. There is always a challenge in getting the community to support any works on Stirling Highway. That being said, as part of some of the developments happening, a requirement will be to improve turning lanes to try to, in a sense, get cars out of the two lanes into turning lanes or dedicated turning pockets in a safer way. All those types of initiatives will be considered as part of any development application along Stirling Highway.

Regarding the level crossing removal, I agree that the current level crossings have an impact on traffic flows and congestion that often blocks the left-hand lane of Stirling Highway, particularly going into the city. We will continue to look at how we can shape some of these proposals. I note that a lot of developers say that if we sink the line, it will be of no cost to government, but I have never seen that actually work—as in, there is always a cost to government. I am very happy for anyone to come forward with any market-led proposals to try to capture some value and that have ideas to either sink or lift the rail line in order to remove those level crossings. I am happy to contemplate it all, but, as I said, we have a very full book at the moment. It is definitely an area that we need to tackle into the future.