

## COLLIE–BUNBURY BUS SERVICE

### *Grievance*

**MS J.L. HANNS (Collie–Preston — Parliamentary Secretary)** [9.55 am]: My grievance this morning is to the very busy Minister for Transport. I would like to thank the minister for taking my grievance today and for her support for public transport for all Western Australians, including those in the regions.

My grievance relates to the Transwa Collie–Bunbury bus service. As the minister knows, Collie is a large country town located approximately 54 kilometres from the regional centre of Bunbury and 190 kilometres to Perth. Many of the residents of Collie rely on access to transport to both Perth and Bunbury for a range of reasons. Some residents travel to Bunbury or Perth for medical appointments, some travel to access a range of courses at the Bunbury campus of South Regional TAFE and Edith Cowan University and others to access services at a range of government departments in Bunbury, such as Centrelink and Medicare. A number of adults with disabilities travel to Activ Foundation industries in Bunbury to access their employment.

A number of people also travel to access south west support services in Bunbury, such as South West Women's Health and Information Centre, Waratah Support Centre (South West Region) Inc, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and a range of other services. Although they are located in Bunbury, they service the wider south west region, including my electorate. People also travel to and from Collie to access the new tourism initiatives that the state government has introduced, including the Wellington Dam wall mural and the \$10 million Collie Adventure Trails program, which in recent years has resulted in a doubling of tourism numbers to the town.

The small hamlet of Burekup, also in my electorate, has been asking for access to public transport for many years. In January 2022, South West Coach Lines, which ran the transport for the community, removed its Collie–Bunbury bus service. This was an incredibly disappointing move as those services provided the daily transport option for the reasons I previously outlined. This was a decision made by South West Coach Lines based on commercial reasons.

The company sent a letter to its stakeholders on 14 December 2021. According to my notes, it stated —

Dear Valued Stakeholder,

Following an extensive review of both the Collie and Manjimup commercial bus services, we wish to inform you of our decision to withdraw the services as of 1 February 2022. A recent feasibility study in to COVID-19 has revealed a severe drop in patronage to such an extent that the business model is now unsustainable.

Given the importance of the service to many in town, it was very distressing to see the significant impact this decision had on people in my electorate. Even more disappointing was the short notice provided by the company to stakeholders, including the state government. This decision gave my community five weeks' notice, and I note that that was over the Christmas period.

In response to this, I worked with my community and the minister to explore options for reinstating this service. I ran a petition to have the government trial a public transport service between Collie and Bunbury. Residents of Burekup also asked to be included in this transport service.

I would like to thank the minister for listening to the concerns of my community and committing to a trial of a bus service in response. I understand that Transwa has recently conducted a review of this service that indicated a low number of people using the service. As a result, I committed to working with my community to provide feedback to Transwa and the minister to try to increase patronage on this very important service. The feedback I collected from my community indicates a desire for some changes to the bus route to better service their needs. In particular, residents asked for the bus to travel into the city centre of Bunbury rather than passengers disembarking a kilometre or so outside the city centre at the Bunbury terminal and then switching buses. There was also support for additional stops to be added to the current route, such as at Activ Industries, so that members of my community can directly access this very important disability employment service.

My community desperately wants this bus trial to continue, but they understand that the community needs to show usage for the service for it to continue and to be supported. Again, I thank the minister and her agency Transwa for working with my community in providing the initial trial for the bus. I ask for her support in continuing to offer this important service. Can the minister please outline what changes may be possible to the bus service to encourage better patronage, and can the minister also advise whether the bus trial will continue, giving my community the chance to demonstrate the ongoing need for this service for residents of Collie and Burekup?

**MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan — Minister for Transport)** [9.51 am]: I thank the member for her grievance and acknowledge her strong advocacy for her community. The member has highlighted some of the history of this service and the fact that when the private sector service ceased, it took us by surprise and had an impact on her local community. In October last year, I announced that Transwa would conduct a 12-month trial of a daily service between Collie and Bunbury to replace a service that had been provided by South West Coach Lines. It was important that we stepped in to trial the service, particularly given the short notice; however, we continue to review the service to ensure it is well

supported and that it is worthwhile. Over the past few months, Transwa has been reviewing the service. Patronage has been consistent, but it has been relatively low given the size of the coach, which is a 56-seater. Following the review by Transwa and the feedback from the local member based on her survey, we are making some changes to the service to better service the needs of the Collie community. The 56-seat coach will be replaced with a fully accessible coaster with a capacity of 13 seats plus two wheelchairs, and two additional stops will be added to the route, based on feedback. The route will now stop at the Bunbury central station, so that those travelling into Bunbury will not have to catch a connecting service into the town centre. It will also stop at Activ Industries. I understand that a number of the member's constituents work at Activ and have indicated that they would use the service to travel to and from work. I am very happy that we have been able to facilitate that stop in particular. It will make it much easier for those working at Activ Industries in the future. Of course, we will also make sure that the road coaster is fully wheelchair accessible.

Transwa will increase advertising and promotion of the service, including through social media advertising, placing posters and timetables at local businesses in Collie, and advertising in local newspapers. Staff and Transwa will also hold a pop-up stand in Collie to assist residents explore the travel options available to them through Transwa and connecting services into Bunbury. I will work with the member for Collie–Preston to arrange these pop-up events. These changes will come into effect on 10 July. We hope these changes will better service the needs of the member's community. I am very pleased and grateful about the proactive approach the member has taken on this issue in helping us to develop a service that will cater for more needs and more people in her area. I am happy to advise that we are extending the trial period through to January 2024, to ensure that more people become aware of the changes. We hope to increase the patronage numbers to ensure that the bus service can continue.

I thank the member very much for her work on this issue. As I said, she is a proactive member who has been working with my team through Transwa to develop some options that we believe will improve the service and see more people catching this service to ensure it can continue to work and run for a longer term.