

DRIVING TESTS IN RURAL AREAS

381. Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE to the Minister Assisting the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure:

My question of the Minister Assisting the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure is without notice. The minister has just announced a range of improvements to licensing centres in Perth. In other places in Western Australia such as Northampton, police used to take people for their driver's licence test. How are those people now going to get their driver's licence?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH replied:

I thank the member for the question. Clearly, the ongoing opportunity to provide people in regional or rural areas with access to facilities that would enable them to undertake their driving test - that is, practical and theoretical - is obviously being very carefully considered. In fact, we have been working through this issue. Historically, police officers stationed within a town had the responsibility of conducting those tests. Often, they conducted those tests for categories of licences that they themselves did not hold. Quite clearly, if a police officer did not have a heavy vehicle licence or, alternatively, a motorbike licence - all he had was a class C category of licence - he still conducted the examinations for both heavy vehicle and motorcycle licences. There was, therefore, a question about that officer's capacity to undertake those tasks. There was also the issue of risk, and there was also in many of those locations the issue about undertaking those tests in very restricted conditions. For example, there may not have been traffic lights, and there may not have been major intersections etc.

Therefore, we are working with the police department to ensure that there is coverage. Department for Planning and Infrastructure officers from licensing centres will undertake the assessments required in those areas where there currently are not police who hold specific categories of licences. If they hold current categories of licences - for example, heavy vehicle, motorbike or class C licences - they will continue, at least for the next six months or so, to administer those tests. However, the priority for the police is to get on with front-line policing. At the same time, the priority for me, as minister, is to ensure that people in regional and rural areas are not disadvantaged and that they are still able to undertake their theoretical and practical licence tests and acquire those licences, so that they can get on with the business of driving, whether it be for everyday living or for work purposes. However, quite clearly, we have to work through some issues to make sure that there is no disadvantage to those people. I have to say that so far, where some transitioning is occurring, major issues have not emerged. There seems to be a fairly good transition process underway.