

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS

**2020–21 BUDGET ESTIMATES AND
2019–20 ANNUAL REPORTS**



**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 18 NOVEMBER 2020**

**SESSION ONE
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT AND THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT AUTHORITY**

**Members
Hon Alanna Clohesy (Chair)
Hon Tjorn Sibma (Deputy Chair)
Hon Diane Evers
Hon Aaron Stonehouse
Hon Colin Tincknell**

Hearing commenced at 9.01 am

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON

Minister for Environment representing the Minister for Transport, examined:

Mr PETER WORONZOW

Acting Director General, Department of Transport; Acting Chief Executive Officer, Public Transport Authority, examined:

Mr PATRICK ABROMEIT

Policy Adviser, Minister for Transport, examined:

Mr MARK BURGESS

Managing Director, Public Transport Authority, examined:

Mr IAIN CAMERON

Managing Director, Department of Transport, examined:

Mr ANTHONY KANNIS

Managing Director, Metronet, Department of Transport, examined:

Mr PETER PAROLO

Chief Financial Officer; Executive Director, Finance and Procurement Services, Department of Transport, examined:

Mr JEFFREY STEEDMAN

Executive Director, Finance and Contracts, Public Transport Authority, examined:

Mr ROSS HAMILTON

Executive Director, Major Projects, Public Transport Authority, examined:

The CHAIR: Good morning, members. On behalf of the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations, I welcome you to today's hearing. Have you all read, understood and signed a document titled "Information for Witnesses"?

The WITNESSES: Yes.

The CHAIR: It is essential that all your testimony before the committee is complete and truthful to the best of your knowledge. This hearing is being reported by Hansard and a transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. It is also being broadcast live on the Parliament's website. The hearing is being held in public, although there is discretion available to the committee to hear evidence in private. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement during today's proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session before answering the question. Members, before asking a question, I ask that you identify whether it relates to budget papers or an annual report, and provide the relevant page number. Minister, do you have an opening statement?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I do not.

The CHAIR: Members, we have approximately 10 minutes per member for questions. I will start with Hon Diane Evers.

Hon DIANE EVERS: My first question is about tier 3 rail. I notice that there is no mention of it in the engineering report that was done to try to progress this. There is no mention of it in the annual report or the budget. Is there any update as to why it was not in there?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I can give you some information in relation to tier 3. At the minister's request, the Public Transport Authority has commissioned the tier 3 grain lines engineering review report. That is being undertaken for the state government by the Agonis Group. This is an issue that every time the minister is in the wheatbelt she hears from local communities and councils about how important the rail lines are to them. Obviously, they were built in the early 1900s and were used until about 2014 to transport grain. Then the Court Liberal government made a decision to privatise them and they are now held by Arc Infrastructure. It has been complex. In November 2019 there was an arbitration process between Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd and Arc. That was concluded with CBH considering the determined tier 3 network reopening cost to be uneconomical under the current arrangements. As such, CBH was no longer seeking access to tier 3 railways. Despite six years having passed, there are still high feelings in the wheatbelt, certainly in terms of the tier 3 closure. I know there was a petition tabled recently calling for the restoration of the network.

In the state government's Revitalising Agricultural Region Freight Strategy that was released earlier this year, we had already identified a list of prioritised rail and intermodal investment opportunities on the existing tier 1 and tier 2 rail freight networks. We have now gone on to commission this tier 3 report, which has been publicly available from the Department of Transport website since September. Obviously, September this year is outside the annual report and the estimates hearing timetable. But the report provides detailed estimates of the cost to restore each line section of the tier 3 rail freight network to a suitable condition for commercial operation, and it also looked at potentially upgrading some sections from narrow to standard gauge. Although restoring the entire network would involve significant cost, there are arguably specific lines where the cost of investment could be offset by ongoing commercial and community benefits, such as reduced truck volumes on local roads and cost savings to farmers.

Subject to further discussions with stakeholders, the intention is to first look at line sections from Quairading to York. The estimated cost is approximately \$111 million. The estimated cost for Koolin to Narrogin is about \$164 million and/or Kondinin to West Merredin. That cost is estimated to be about \$210 million for narrow gauge or \$238 million for standard gauge.

The transport agencies have already submitted the stage 1 problem identification and prioritisation submission to Infrastructure Australia with the aim of having WA's agricultural supply chain added to the next priority list. We are aiming to submit the preliminary stage 2 business cases within the next six months. Our aim is for the submission to demonstrate that upgrades to WA's agricultural supply chain is an issue of national significance and resulting economic benefits for the community justify the potential cost, but obviously that is an argument we have to make. Submission of business cases to Infrastructure Australia could lay the groundwork for potential future funding partnerships with the federal government for rail freight investment. The implementation of the proposals is likely to involve contributions from industry, but also from all tiers of government. In particular, significant funding from the federal government, like other major regional infrastructure projects, would be necessary for any potential restoration work on tier 3 and could reasonably be expected, given the substantial federal commitment to funding inland rail in the east. They are estimating to spend \$9 billion or something like that over east, so we are looking for our fair share in the west.

The Deputy Prime Minister said in August 2019 that the federal government was committing to \$9.3 billion, so we have to get some of that.

The transport agencies are now working with the CBH group, Arc Infrastructure and the other stakeholders to develop and submit further business cases to Infrastructure Australia that confirm the costs and the benefits, not only to government, but also to industry and to the community of the selected rail investments for tiers 1, 2 and 3.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Can I just ask, given that you said that these have been around since the early 1900s, when we are doing our return on investment, will we be able to use a time frame of 100 years?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: That is a very good question. Mr Burgess.

Mr BURGESS: I have not been involved in the actual economic analysis and the business case development. Some of our staff are. It is very much a portfolio PTA, DOT and Main Roads' effort to put these cases together, and we have a sort of centralised investment planning team that does that work. But, typically, if it is a bridge, a road or railway line, they would look at what is considered to be the economic useful life of the asset, which I do not think is 100 years, but it is probably more like 60 years, and depends somewhat on things like sleepers. If it is concrete sleepers, they will have a life of 30-plus years and they will try to understand all the various components and what their considered economic useful life is, so they would be able to measure the benefits against that.

[9.10 am]

Hon DIANE EVERS: All right. Thank you for that.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Further to that, I think it is usually over 50 years. That is my advice.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Yes. I guess it may look more economical if we can address that in the first issue and possibly build it to last the 100 years that we are going to need it.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Yes. Good point.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Another question is: on the *Australind* train service—this is in budget paper No 2, page 631—it talks about the upgrades happening to some of the stations there. I am just interested to know when is it expected that these upgrades will be completed? In addition to that, is there any consideration to co-fund the feasibility study into a fast train to Bunbury that the federal government has been talking about? So, first off is: when will the *Australind* be running again with those upgrades made?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am told the *Australind* is late 2023. But in terms of the Bunbury faster rail project, obviously we welcome the recent announcement by the feds that they support an investigation into the Bunbury faster rail project. PTA has been engaged with the National Faster Rail Agency—who knew there was a National Faster Rail Agency until this session?—to discuss the scope of a new feasibility study, and that conversation has been happening since mid this year. So, the intention is to work to ensure that any further studies represent good value for taxpayers.

The minister has written to the federal government expressing support for us being involved with the NFRA to determine a scope for a jointly funded business case. The recent federal budget confirmed \$4 million towards investigation of a Bunbury faster rail connection. Obviously, the line-up of the federal and state budgets was a bit out of whack, so they put some money on the table. Obviously, we are supportive of the project, but we need to work through our processes over the next little while. Given they put some money on the table, I think it may well be an issue that could be addressed either in the midyear review or the next budget.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Thank you. I am now on page 635 of budget paper No 2, the income statement for the public transport. I note that the sale of goods and services is about \$173 million in the current year, which is less than 10 per cent of the total cost of this. I think I ask a similar question each year, but I keep hoping that we are going to get closer. Understanding that the increase in public transport use is going to reduce pressure on our road systems in the city, has there been any consideration of reducing transport fees or even removing them altogether for public transport?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: The short answer is no; we are not. But I might ask Mr Burgess if he wants to make a comment on that.

Mr BURGESS: Over the years I think there has been some conversation about that with every minister I ever work with, as in talking about what the fare structure should be, and certainly the minister has put on the table consideration of a review of the current zonal arrangements and so on. That has been talked about a little bit and we have done some work on that. We have got a nine-zone ring—this is just for Transperth—and typically the regional towns will copy our zonal structure. They will have a zone 1 structure that matches the inner zone of Perth. We have an eight-kilometre ring, two nine-kilometre rings and the rest are 10-kilometre rings, and the question is whether that is legible for people.

I am a victim of having been in the business for a long time, so I consider it particularly legible, but perhaps whether it is—it is very much, with SmartRider, a simplified system, because with the tag-on, tag-off process, no-one really thinks about it and we have noticed that behaviour. Whereas you used to see people looking at the fare gate and checking how much value had been taken off their card, no-one looks anymore, so the concept of what the zonal structure should be and what the fares should be has been talked about, as I say, with every minister in every government that I can remember, and occasionally someone may have thrown on the table what would it cost if there were no fares, and that becomes a quite wideranging conversation because you have to understand what the impact is on demand and how many more trains and buses you might need and so on. I do not think it is anything that has had serious consideration for some years.

Hon DIANE EVERS: You said there will be a review. Is the potential for reducing fees, because I find that I still talk to people who do actually notice how much it costs to ride and they use the excuse that it is cheaper to drive, meaning the fuel they use to drive is less than the cost of the transport? So I am just wondering: is there ever a consideration for reducing those fees in order to encourage people, particularly in this post-COVID world where people are a little bit more reluctant to use our public transport systems?

The CHAIR: Just noting, with caution, that that is a future question, even a hypothetical question. But I am sure that Mr Burgess may give it a brief go, and that is your last question as well, honourable member.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Sure. I might make the point, though, that obviously this year fees have been frozen and previously they were capped at CPI. So there have not been significant rises. As you correctly pointed out, when people talk about it costing more, they are talking about potentially petrol, because once you talk about the costs of running a car, licensing, servicing, everything else, parking, parking at the other end, parking fees, it makes perfect sense to catch the train. I might ask Mr Burgess if he has anything else to offer.

Obviously, this year, in terms of public transport, it has been an extraordinary year with COVID-19. Our numbers dropped dramatically early on as people worked from home, and we are still seeing the case that there are some businesses where they have got people working from home. But in terms of where we are versus the rest of the states and territories, our bounce back has been significant. I think we are up to about 75 per cent of what we were pre-COVID, which is substantially

more use than the other states and territories, so Western Australians are back using public transport again, and that continues to rise—in fact, 76 per cent. That compares to about 70 per cent in Auckland; 68 per cent in Adelaide; Brisbane, 60 per cent; Sydney, 50 per cent. Obviously, Melbourne was a lot less at about 10 per cent. But, Mr Burgess, I am not sure if you have anything.

Mr BURGESS: Perhaps, Chair, just to close off, all the conversations I have been in in recent years, over a number of years, typically, if there has been tweaking of the system, usually the target has been for revenue neutral—in other words, to try and make roughly the same amount of fare revenue. But it is more about trying to address the balance between the distance travelled, whether people are being penalised too much for longer distance journeys.

The only other point I would make, member, is that one of the challenges we have is to try and control access onto stations with the fare gates and so on that we have at the moment. It is a measure of controlling. Certainly, all the major stations have got fare gates and, similarly, our officers can ask someone for proof of their ticket and that they have paid a fare. It is a genuine challenge because it is talked about amongst public transport operators around the world that if you have a free fare structure, and there are only a couple of examples where it has happened around the world, you do not have a control. I mean, people can just sit on the train all day. It is a real problem for all of us, obviously, to try and address homelessness and so on, but it becomes a problem. Public transport stations and vehicles become another place where—and we have had a challenge on the CAT system in recent times with that.

Hon DIANE EVERS: It is like a new sort of mobile home, I suppose.

Mr BURGESS: Indeed.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Interesting.

Mr BURGESS: Yes—obviously tragic circumstances, but, yes, it is another challenge.

[9.20 am]

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: I have a question around a line item on page 586 under “New Initiative”. It is the COVID-19 public information call centre for WAPOL. Firstly, I was curious why it appears under the Department of Transport. Can you tell me a little about what makes up the \$1.5 million budgeted for that call centre?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask Mr Cameron to comment on that. Obviously, during COVID-19, various agencies were involved in the response to the pandemic, so for many agencies, ongoing run-of-the-mill work was put on hold as we gave staff to central agencies. That is essentially what has happened in this case. Our DVS contact facilities were given over to police. I will ask Mr Cameron to comment on that.

Mr CAMERON: Thank you, minister and Chair. For a number of years, the Department of Transport has had a memorandum of understanding with agencies for emergency situations where public information may be required, and WA Police is one of those agencies. Typically, in the planning of that, we would have an annual review with police. The thinking and planning was always for short-term events—so, something would happen in our community and there would be this sudden demand and need for public information, particularly as it may relate to the movement of people and transport. We had never actually enacted it. It was always a planned training and an annual review process. When COVID came along, the police commissioner, as the State Emergency Controller, approached Transport almost immediately and asked us to effectively stand up and provide the support that was needed, and that involves contact centre staff that are drawn from Main Roads and the Department of Transport. For COVID, this was the first time that we had used it in a non-spill situation.

We started the hotline on 27 March to get prepared, and we were ready to go on 31 March. That was quite an incredible effort by our people to get that up in four days. We worked with the Office of Digital Government as well. We managed to get a cloud-based solution so that we did not have to have our people in a bricks-and-mortar phone-based contact centre. We were able to deploy our people from other sites and from home situations as well. Essentially, we went live from 2 April, which meant that police would be taking calls, but where there was an overload situation, the Department of Transport staff would be answering those phones and dealing with those inquiries. As you can imagine, as COVID took off and as the border situation was constantly evolving, the public's need for information would vary on a daily basis. What that meant for the Department of Transport staff is that we had to keep reallocating people. We employed additional people short term, so the budget item relates to some additional expenditure that we have had there. Essentially, we have employed existing staff and short-term staff. That means that on a daily basis we may need to review the number of customer staff that we have available for Department of Transport matters, but we have managed that and the public have been really supportive of that. We initially commenced from 7.00 am to 10.00 pm, seven days a week. We are currently operating Monday to Sunday from 8.00 am to 6.00 pm. Until the end of September, we dealt with in excess of 153 000 calls. Earlier this week, on Monday, as you would appreciate with the South Australian situation and the response from the state government in relation to the border changes, our staff took the highest number of calls that we have taken since July. That is actually the highest number that we have taken in the entire period, which is entirely logical because people were worried about what it meant for their travel and quarantine. Essentially, that is what that one is about. I am very proud of our people and the police commissioner in both his roles. He has been absolutely delighted with our response because it has been really important from the public information point of view.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: So there has been a reallocation of staff and hiring of new staff in some cases. What about capital? You mentioned that some software was required that you purchased that might forgo the need for a bricks-and-mortar call centre. Has any capital been used to acquire equipment or office space to set up that team?

Mr CAMERON: Not for buildings. We certainly needed to work with the Office of Digital Government, and there would have been some technology solutions as part of that, but the majority of that cost is really around our staffing and our hours and the additional contractors that we have engaged to do that. I can give you a bit more information. We had 38 staff deployed at one stage as part of the COVID line, and they are all, as I say, DOT employees. The technology aspect of it is actually managed through the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. Top reasons for calling were: all the Good To Go questions, travel applications, travel inquiries, health inquiries, COVID-testing requirements, and quarantine border control. Police does provide some funding to us for that and then if this requires any additional funding, we will actually make some adjustments as well. It is a state agreement with police in an emergency situation.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: Thank you for that. I have a few questions around the PTA. On page 632 under the "WA Recovery Plan" at paragraph 18, there is mention of \$1.8 million being spent in the next financial year to purchase and install solar panels on up to 60 bus and rail stations on the public transport network. What I want to know is: what are the projections for savings here once that program is completed and the solar panels have been rolled out?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Sure. I will just work out who the right person is to answer the question, honourable member. I will ask Mr Burgess.

Mr BURGESS: I will not be able to give you an exact number, member, but the intent is that they are solar panels that are essentially low-voltage power, so they will supply lighting and so on at stations.

That is predominantly what they will be used for. At this stage, we do not, for example, have battery solutions as part of that. We are just going for the solar panels at this stage, given that degree of funding. In the longer term, maybe they are options that we can look at. We have done this as a trial case at Mandurah station some time ago, and it has proven pretty effective. We have also done it down at Albany, I think it is, at our Transwa site. We are pleased that we had the opportunity to put in a submission and try to get some money from that COVID recovery program. So this is the first bite, if you like. I am not sure how material the saving will be, but there will definitely be a saving in our power bill. I think that the last time I checked, our power bill was over \$23 million a year for the trains and everything else. It will be in there somewhere and there will definitely be a saving.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: What I am interested in is if there has been a business case or a feasibility study—something that shows a return on investment for the \$1.8 million out of the COVID recovery fund. What I want to know is: is the installation of solar panels on bus and train stations backed up by sound economics, or is it merely a feel-good exercise to whack some solar panels there and offset the cost of turning the lights on at a train or bus station?

Mr BURGESS: We have clearly had, as I say, the trial at Mandurah station, and we have seen it as effective. I have seen a presentation on that as to how effective it is. We would not have put forward the proposal if we did not think there was something beneficial in it. We do run a lot of power-requiring devices at stations, whether that is lighting, escalators and a whole range of things, so we have demand right throughout the day. It is not just at night when people put the lights on; we have power demand right throughout the day. We were certainly convinced that there was a benefit in this, based on the experience we had at Mandurah station.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Obviously, honourable member, if you think back to when the COVID recovery came out, there were tens of thousands of Western Australians out of jobs, many of whom were small businesses and tradies. Agencies had to convince Treasury of not only the merit and usefulness of the project, but also that agencies were looking at getting people back into work. Up to 60 installations at rail and bus stations across the metropolitan area was deemed a valid and valuable project, so it got through the process.

[9.30 am]

The CHAIR: Last question, member.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: I have some questions around the design of the Metronet railcars. Could you give me an idea of —

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Do you have a line item that you are referring to in the budget papers?

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: On page 630, asset investment program, I think the third dot point talks about railcar acquisition. I am wondering about the design of the railcars. I have only seen concepts circulated around media articles. Can you give me an idea of the amenities that these railcars are expected to include? Are we at that point yet?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Sure. I might ask Mr Burgess and also Mr Kannis. Between the two of them, they will give you an answer to that.

Mr BURGESS: They are going to be different from the current ones. They are going to be six-car sets. Unlike at the moment when you see a six-car set running up and down the Mandurah and Joondalup lines, these will be a straight six-car set, so there will not be the dead room in the middle where you have two drivers' cabs that are inefficient—not being used. These will be straight six-car sets, so will have an increased carrying capacity. They will have all the normal features that you would expect them to have—air conditioning and wi-fi, which we have put on a number of our trains now. Sorry, they will be capable of wi-fi—whether we have a wi-fi provider at that time is another thing. They

will certainly have USB ports. Probably the most significant difference and feature is having three doors per car. At the moment, we have two doors per railcar so if you see a six-car set, there will be 12 doors. With these, they will have three doors and because these will be heavily focused on the north–south line where we have the most significant patronage, given the elongated nature of Perth city, these will be on the higher volume, high-demand stations. If you look at our rail system, the north–south line is quite different from the older heritage lines. The station spacings are further apart and therefore you have higher volumes turning up at those stations. If you look at the history of rail in Perth, you can see the modern rail system has followed the flow of the city north and south. It is a different design. It is about —

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: I had the misfortune of catching a train during a peak hour so I know what you mean. Just because I am running out of time, what I wanted to clarify —

The CHAIR: This is your last question.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It sounds like a functional, utilitarian design. That is what I am wanting to clarify. I had seen concept designs with the inclusion of restrooms and kiosks. Are those being contemplated as features of the new railcars or not?

Mr BURGESS: No.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: Okay, that is good.

Mr BURGESS: On the train, do you mean, or at stations?

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: On the trains—on the railcars.

Mr BURGESS: No.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: That is good; that is what I wanted to clarify.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Sorry, just to clarify, the *Australind* train is different. That will have a kiosk on it, but the Metronet trains will not.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: Fantastic—thank you, Chair.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: My questions relate to page 632 and the works in progress table. The first item of interest for me is the radio systems replacement project, which is about 10 lines from the bottom. Can I just ask a question as to the expenditure of \$26.7 million—how those funds have been acquitted? What has that money been spent on?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask Mr Hamilton to comment on that. Obviously we are in a process at the moment, today, in relation to that so we might be limited in terms of what we can say. Certainly in terms of that line item, Mr Hamilton can advise.

The CHAIR: Sorry, is the question about actual expenditure?

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Actual expenditure—what has the \$26.7 million actually been spent on?

Mr HAMILTON: Given that this project has been underway for some period of time, there is a reasonable amount of money which has been spent on internal PTA costs for project development and otherwise. To date, on the Huawei–UGL contract, there is an expenditure of \$14.8 million overall out of that total \$26 million.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Would it be possible, by way of supplementary, to provide me with an itemised breakdown of how that full \$26.7 million has been spent?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I think Mr Hamilton said only \$14 million has been spent.

Mr HAMILTON: There has been \$14 million spent on the contract with Huawei–UGL, which has now been terminated. The remainder amount of that money has been spent on PTA internal costs, project management and development of the project. As I said, it has been going for some period of time.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Okay, thanks. I do not need that supplementary information; it has been answered. Can I ask, the figure of \$4.9 million in the next column, what was that money spent on?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask Mr Hamilton again but I am told it was quite simply basic project management costs for the agency. Mr Hamilton, is there anything further on that?

Mr HAMILTON: The \$4.9 million is the 2019–20 expenditure, which included some contract costs associated with Huawei–UGL as well as internal PTA costs.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Could I further clarify that amount? When you referred to Huawei–UGL, does that figure there incorporate a cost to extinguish the contract?

Mr HAMILTON: No, that will not include any of those costs in terms of termination of the contract. That concluded after the end of the financial year. The termination costs at this stage have not yet been finalised.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: With respect to the anticipated termination costs, could you anticipate when that process might conclude—when you would officially terminate that original contract?

Mr HAMILTON: In terms of the claims, there are a number of claims that are still being worked through with Huawei–UGL. It is probably a bit too early at this stage to say when it is likely to be concluded.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Would you be in a position to indicate the quantum of those claims?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I do not think it is appropriate, honourable member. This is still a live issue at the moment and it actually falls outside both the scope of the annual report and indeed the budget papers. It is happening at the moment. Those conversations are live, so it is not appropriate for us to put an amount out there.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Potentially, what I think is important, though, minister, is that obviously for every project you have an indicative total estimated value of the project. My direct question is: is it likely that any costs associated with the formal termination of that contract could be incorporated within that \$138 million project cost or will it be likely that you need to seek supplementation from another source?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: What I can say is that any revisions to the timetable and the budget for the project will be known once a new contract is awarded following the completion of the tender process. That is expected next year. Once we get to that stage, we will then be in a position to work out whether it can still be done in the same envelope or whether a further appropriation might be needed.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: With respect to the revised tender process, I appreciate there are things happening in parallel—the termination of the original contract and the composition of the new one. Minister, are you able to outline what progress is being made in terms of expediting that renewed tender process? When is that likely to conclude? What will the terms be and who will the partner be?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I cannot; that is forward-looking, honourable member, and that is probably a better question to ask in question time next week. In terms of the session before us now, I am not in a position to answer that.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I only have three opportunities next week, minister —

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Use them wisely!

Hon TJORN SIBMA: That might be one of them!

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Use them wisely, honourable member, is my advice!

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Look, I have a chance: when might it be likely, on a quarter-by-quarter basis next year, that that revised tender might be evaluated—quarter 1, quarter 2, quarter 3 or quarter 4?
[9.40 am]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: My advice is that it will be Q2 at the earliest, but likely after that.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Okay. Madam Chair, I have one more question. It relates to the same page, Bayswater station. There is probably a series of questions I might ask.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Honourable member, just to be helpful, are you referring to the same page, 630?

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Yes, same page, page 630—that was remiss of me—under “Metronet” about 10 lines down and then the first project listed after big bolded “Metronet” is “Bayswater Station”.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Thank you. I simply ask because our folders are done in such a way that if you point to the line item, we can find the appropriate note for it, so thank you. Fire away.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: That is okay. I probably will not get to extinguish every line of curiosity. Can I ask what the implications might be in terms of service scheduling for lines running through Bayswater. It has been put to me that there might be the possibility that existing services would be in some way compromised or reduced as a consequence of operationalising Bayswater station. It is a broad question, but the knowledge exists over there.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: It is a broad question and it is a future forward-looking question, too, honourable member. Mr Kannis can give you some information because obviously I do try to be helpful in these sessions. I might just say though in terms of the project itself, it is a significant project. It will deliver a new station at Bayswater, so a new and extended railway bridge. Hon Donna Faragher would know about that railway bridge.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: The viaduct.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: There will be a turnback siding between Meltham and Bayswater stations, replacement of the pedestrian underpass at Leake Street. It also involves changes to road infrastructure, car parks, integrated bus facilities, demolition of the existing station and modification to the public rail, plus we did move a tree—we moved a very important tree out of the centre of Bayswater down to a park recently as well!

Hon TJORN SIBMA: The record should show that was quite a forward-looking response. I know we get in trouble when we go too far.

The CHAIR: Thank you for making your point, honourable member, and your question is?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am going to ask Mr Kannis if he can comment about the frequency stuff, and that is stuff is probably still to be worked out.

Mr KANNIS: If I interpret your question correctly, does the construction of the Bayswater station impact on services on the line? No, it does not in itself. The operational aspects of the Midland line will be reviewed when we have the Forrestfield–Airport Link, the Midland line and the Morley–Ellenbrook line in place, but the Bayswater station in itself does not have any adverse effect on services.

The CHAIR: Last question, Hon Tjorn Sibma.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Last question—this is not forward-looking. Can I get a sense of the project scope, whether those documents or that work is capable of being tabled with respect to work on anticipating the demand—this is particularly around Bayswater—its operational plan, the rolling stock requirements and the integration expenses, I suppose, which was the question previously? Is there a document or documents which encapsulates that kind of business plan-related work and could you table it?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: So was there a document before 30 June I think is probably the question. No, there was not.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: But there might be after.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Who knows.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I will ask next week.

The CHAIR: That was a very broad ask, member. I am sure if you narrowed your scope, you might be more successful. We move on to Hon Colin Tincknell.

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: My question is to annual report, page 144, Department of Transport. It is regarding the taxi industry development account. I would like to know why the department transferred funds from the account to consolidated account back in 2018–19 and 2019–20.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask Mr Parola to comment.

Mr PAROLO: Through the on-demand transport transformation program that has been underway, we actually had a taxi industry development account, which is a special purpose account under the Financial Management Act. As the reform process was completed, the TIDA fund, as we call it, was no longer needed and under the FMA requirements, what would happen is any of those funds that were collected over a period of time would be put back into the actual consolidated fund in alignment with the Treasurer's requirements under the FMA.

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: Sticking with the annual report, page 143, the Perth parking licensing account. I am asking: is there a policy framework in place that determines how the funds from the account should be spent and is there a cap on the amount of payments to be made from the account?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask Mr Cameron and I might supplement.

Mr CAMERON: If I understand the question, in terms of the guidance of this, this is covered under the Perth Parking Management Act 1999 and there are regulations there. A levy that is applied to non-residential parking bays within the Perth parking management area, which is defined. The revenue from that levy can only be spent on initiatives that achieve balanced transport outcomes for central Perth or for the administration associated with the act. There has been no increase in any category of parking licence fees for 2020–21. Does that answer your question?

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: Yes, thank you, Mr Cameron.

Staying with the Department of Transport, budget paper No 2, page 598. You will see on page 598 around about two-thirds of the way down "Other Grants and Subsidies". My question is: why do a number of these grants and subsidies appear to have flatlined over the estimates?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Sure. I can tell you what the money is for. In 2020–21, there is \$98 000 going to the Rail Industry Safety and Standards Board; \$9 000 is going towards TravelSmart; \$70 000 is going to the Planning and Transport Research Centre grant; \$40 000 is going to the Cycle Instead

Bike Week. There is an amount that relates to regional aviation support in RforR of \$107 000. The grants change from year to year is the short answer.

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: It is very hard to guestimate, if you like.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Yes. That is essentially the amount for 2020–21, but that could change in the future.

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: Moving to PTA, budget paper No 2, page 623, paragraph 9. It talks about SmartRider. I ask for an update on the upgrade to the SmartRider ticketing system. Paragraph 9 explains it but there is no mention about an upgrade to the ticketing system.

[9.50 am]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Perhaps I can give you some information in relation to it. There have been some delays due to the UK vendor having staff lockdowns due to COVID-19. Aside from that, the project continues, but, obviously, COVID-19 has been playing havoc with a few things. The work continues. The PTA is seeking funding for stage 2 of the upgraded project, and that will allow customers to tag on and tag off with credit cards and mobile phones. It continues essentially, but that COVID-19 restriction has made it difficult for us.

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: Hon Aaron Stonehouse mentioned something about railcars. During that conversation, I did not hear whether there was a timetable. I am keen to know about the A-series railcars. That is on the page before this—page 622, paragraph 3.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I can ask Mr Burgess to respond that.

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: Looking at that timetable.

Mr BURGESS: There are 246 railcars—that is the contract with Alstom. Obviously, it is coming as six-car sets. The first 102 are basically to do with the Metronet expansions—the new lines and stations and so on—and then the remainder are for the replacement of the A series. So that will happen from approximately the mid-20s, basically—the replacement of the A series.

I am not sure whether you have driven past it, but the railcar assembling and commissioning facility out at Midland is well underway. That is the site where Alstom will basically assemble the trains. The commissioning building is a high-voltage test facility to make sure that they are working right when they have been built. They will then come into service progressively for each of the Metronet projects. We will get the ones for Yanchep and Thornlie initially, and then we will get the DMUs, as the minister referred to, to replace the *Australind*. Then we will go back to EMUs—the electrical multiple units—for the rest of the Metronet project and then the A-series replacements.

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: My last question is in relation to Main Roads. The reference is budget paper No 2, page 605. It is a general question really. I am asking: does the authority have any —

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Honourable member, did you say in relation to Main Roads?

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: Yes. Sorry; it is on budget paper No 2, page 605.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: That is the next session—Main Roads.

The CHAIR: Just a minute, minister. Let the honourable member get the question out and then we will see whether it is relevant to this. Do you want to reread your question, honourable member?

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: Yes. I am trying to find the reference now—page 605, paragraph 8. It talks about congestion. I am wondering: does the authority have an estimate of the impact on road congestion on its bus and coach services? It talks about how congestion is going to cost somewhere between \$1.7 billion and \$3.6 billion by 2031. Does the department have an estimate of the impact on road services with buses and coach services?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Obviously, that figure that you have just quoted now —

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: Yes. It is in paragraph 8.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: It is part of the Main Roads estimates. Those figures were put together by the Commissioner of Main Roads rather than by this agency. I am not sure whether Mr Burgess can provide an answer.

Mr BURGESS: I could probably provide a general response. In the portfolio setting we work in, which is with DOT and Main Roads and PTA, there is a lot of collaborative effort across that planning. Quite often the corridors we would seek to have for, for example, bus priority measures, are on R roads—that is, Main Roads roads, rather than local government roads. So there is an absolute consciousness of the delays that occur to buses, particularly in peak periods, on corridors such as Canning Highway, Stirling Highway and so on. We have, obviously, longer term plans. We have been more successful over the years, not so much in wide-scale bus priorities measures, although there are very good ones on, for example, Beaufort Street. But we have been pretty successful at queue-jump lanes—so, approaching a set of traffic lights, you might have a sneak-up facility for the bus to get up close to the lights and then there is a B phase on the lights and the bus gets to get away ahead of the traffic.

In terms of that cost of congestion, I do not think we have the fine detail of what a contribution is—in other words, what is the lost time and lost opportunity of the bus passengers versus the other motorists and the freight traffic, which is all part of that cost of congestion. But we have done some fairly detailed work on the impacts on our services, which we have shared with, for example, local government and Main Roads, which, therefore, I guess, paints a picture of where we would like to see priority. We have shared that quite openly.

The CHAIR: We will move on to Hon Martin Aldridge.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: Minister, I want to go the questions that I asked prior to the hearings today and seek some clarification on a couple of matters. They relate to school bus services. With respect to questions 1)f) and g), which are about the surveys, can I get a bit of an understanding of how many surveys would ordinarily be done in a year or perhaps how many surveys are currently underway at the moment with respect to bus routes?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Sure. I am just finding my way. Your question asked prior to the hearing was 1)f).

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: They are 1)f) and g), relating to surveys of bus routes.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Mr Burgess, are you in a position to answer that?

Mr BURGESS: Yes, minister. There are various trigger events that trigger a survey. For example, they will be changes around a school closure—that is probably one of the main ones—or the loss of a number of students on a bus. Obviously, all the orange school buses are not like a Transperth bus or even one of our regional town buses. The orange school buses are an entitlement-based system, so the child has to meet certain criteria—basically, be outside of a public transport area, be more than 4.5 kilometres from their nearest school and so on. We have tried to, generally, keep fairly constant, fairly consistent routes and contracts in place typically. We do not change them for the sake of changing them. But if a school closes or, in some cases, a high school becomes a junior high school rather than a senior high school —

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: I understand all that. That is not my question. My question is: how many surveys are done in a year and how many surveys are currently underway?

Mr BURGESS: I do not know that I have that number.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: We will have to take that on notice. Just to clarify it again, how many surveys are done in a year and if there are any surveys ongoing at the moment.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: Yes, and where they are—the current areas that are subject to surveys or “reassessment”, if “survey” is not the right word.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: It is kind of outside the scope of this session, honourable member. We can tell you about the surveys that are in the annual report period, but obviously this session today is not about today and it is not about what is happening at the moment; it is about what has happened previously in relation to the annual report and the budget.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: No. This is a budget estimates hearing.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Yes, but it is past looking; it is not forward looking.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: No; well, the budget is a forward looking. There are four years of the forward estimates.

The CHAIR: Order, member. The Chair will make a ruling on that when the question is asked. Can we please have, first of all, the reference to the annual report and then we will go back to the honourable member to re-put the question.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: Has that been taken as supplementary?

The CHAIR: The minister is providing information right now, so can we just listen to that and then you might need to refocus your question.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Page 24 of the PTA annual report lists the new contract services for 2019–20 and the ceased contract services for 2019–20. It lists the various schools that are linked to those either new or ceased services. In each of the cases, a survey would have been undertaken for all of those projects.

Any 2020–21 new contract services or, indeed, ceased contract services will appear in next year’s annual report. You have asked the question. You have made it clear what you are after. I am happy, by way of supplementary information, to see what we can provide to the committee in the future, but that stuff ordinarily would appear in next year’s annual report.

[Supplementary Information No A1.]

[10.00 am]

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: Just to be clear, minister, all of my questions relate to the budget estimates; none relate to the annual report.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: That might be very true, but the annual report is the answer to the questions in some cases.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: That is fine; that can be your answer. Question 1)i) was a question about financial impacts and an arrangement by which contractors to the state can be remunerated for a loss on sale. On how many occasions has that occurred? Is it something that happens frequently? Is it something where, as part of the appropriation for regional school bus services this year and across the forward estimates, there is a quarantining of funds to provide for that, or is it something that happens relatively infrequently?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: We do not have any numbers with us, but I am told that it is very infrequent; it does not happen often at all.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: From the answers to questions prior to the hearings, there are I think four contracts where notice of termination has been made but the contracts have not yet been

terminated. Can I ask about the process with respect to the termination of contracts internally within the Public Transport Authority and the rights of appeal of the contractors? It would appear to me, based on the evidence that the committee received prior to hearings, that it basically boils down to one person in the department calling the shots, and it looks like appeals to that decision go back to that same person. I am just wondering, when decisions are being made to commence or conclude contracts in relation to school bus services, what rigour there is and what procedural fairness there is in terms of determining winners and losers of those contracts.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Sure. It is not just one person; there is a whole school bus services team, headed by a manager. In fact, I do not think the answers that you are referring to in terms of the “four” were in the pre-hearing information. I think it was actually a parliamentary question that you asked.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: It is both. You will find it at 1)m).

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: You are right, but you did ask a parliamentary question in the last few weeks on that issue. Mr Burgess, are you able to provide anything further in relation to that question?

Mr BURGESS: There is a process. The team is there and the manager has been there for roughly 20 years. He is a very capable fellow, in my opinion. Based on history, they have achieved very balanced outcomes, trying to be fair to both—obviously the taxpayer and the government, but also contractors. We have had situations where contractors have been reassigned areas and put into new places. Clearly, that can only occur within the bounds of reason, because if a contractor lives in a certain area and there is a job down the other end of the state, that is not going to work. We have had contractors reassigned. We have tried to split work; in other words, if there becomes an imbalance because a particular school is changing, it may well be that children are moved from one bus to another. In my experience and from the history that I have had with it, they have always tried to achieve a very balanced outcome. If there is a termination, it would typically be because there is a quite fundamental change to the student population in that area or what is happening in the schooling in that area, and the demand, basically.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: Is there a policy or some sort of assessment matrix that sits behind those decisions of that very experienced person that you talked about? The issue that has been put to me is where you have a number of these evergreen contracts and, say, the PTA wants to consolidate them for the reasons you have set out—a school opening or closing, numbers changing. Inevitably there are winners, and inevitably there are losers. How is it that that assessment is made? What is the process that is then followed to make sure that there is procedural fairness in those decisions?

Mr BURGESS: Someone has to make a decision at the end of the day, so there is always going to be a judgement call. I have often become involved in those matters, certainly when there is a degree of consternation or protest. Typically, if it is just a matter of course, then I may not be involved. Indeed, at various times, ministers of the day have been approached and we have been asked to review things and so on. Generally, whenever that has occurred and there has been a review of how the decisions were taken, it has been proven that the decisions were based on sound judgement and the best interests of particularly the students in terms of making sure that they get the most efficient service they can get, but also in the interests of the taxpayer, and trying to achieve some degree of balance in terms of looking at the best outcome for the contractor that is possible.

The CHAIR: Last question, honourable member.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: That has come around quickly! The government made a policy decision in 2017, I think, to move away from the evergreen contract model and move towards the tendered

rate model for school bus contracts. This might be a question to the minister. How alive is the government to the concern that school bus contractors are being driven to purchase fully imported buses from China at some \$140 000 discount over buses that are produced here in Western Australia in order to achieve these cost efficiencies that the PTA has just talked about? How alive is the government to that real issue, with particular reference to, for example, the government's position on building railcars in Western Australia and making a \$228 million investment on an assembly and maintenance facility in Bellevue?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Look, we have received a request from BusWA recently for a meeting, so that is in the process at the moment. A meeting will be organised. Other than that, we are not aware of it being an issue. The remuneration terms for school bus contractors are quite generous, I have to say, and reflect both the commercial requirements and also the risks associated with owning a school bus contract. It is not something that we have been aware of, but obviously we will meet with BusWA. If that is one of the issues that they are raising, we will look into it.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I refer to page 591 of volume 2 of budget paper No 2, which concerns driver and vehicle services. In the table there, we see an explanation given for an increase in driver's licence testing examiners, if that is the right term—it is not, but you know what I mean—to cope with the backlog caused by the COVID interruptions. My question is: could you give us brief comments as to what progress is being made in terms of driver practical test availability and, specifically, the sort of waiting time that a prospective driver might have to wait to get a driver practical test?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Sure. I am very happy to start off with that by saying, yes, there was a backlog during the COVID period. That backlog has been cleared now, as of a few weeks ago. The department conducts about 120 000 tests every year, so it is a pretty significant figure. In relation to the waiting times, I will ask Mr Cameron if he can tell you what the answer to that is.

Mr CAMERON: Thank you, minister and member. As the minister said, we have recovered fully. Our aim was November. We have achieved that. We release more test slots every day. As part of COVID, we employed additional driving assessors, which you have referred to. We also reopened the Welshpool centre, which we were in the process of moving towards a sale. That became dedicated for driving assessments only, so it is not one of our multifunction centres.

[10.10 am]

On our waiting times, I do not have the exact figure, but we have had minimal complaints and no issues there. People are able to get tests; they are released every day. I have just been around to all our metropolitan centres just talking with staff around how we have gone through COVID, and there was not an issue from any centre manager about delays or overburdening staff with test requirements. I do not have the exact figure, but I certainly do see the complaints when they come through, and a year or two ago, we would have had more significant numbers. We had some during the height of COVID—people frustrated that they could not get a test—but most people were very understanding and very supportive of the situation. We kept doing the priority tests, but we had to delay the others. I am really pleased to say that we have fully recovered and there are no apparent delays to us. We release test slots every day.

At the Welshpool centre, the public and the instructors are also finding that because it is open Saturday and Sunday, that provides people with a lot more flexibility, so we have increased our hours and the availability. That is something we are looking at to go forward with; I do not have the exact details of that yet. But we are maintaining that Welshpool centre. That will stay open until at least March next year. This time of the year, as you would be aware, with school leavers and all the rest of it, we anticipate extra demand over the next few months. But we are not seeing any

concerning signs, and in actual fact we are in a much better situation. So out of COVID, I guess there are some positives, in that it has actually given us different opportunities, and I think the public is a beneficiary of that at this stage.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: A couple of pages earlier is my reference point to bounce the question off. I refer to page 586, under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency". The reference to the Westport Taskforce states —

Work has commenced to develop the Westport: Port and Environs Strategy and provide a business case for Government consideration.

I notice that in this year's budget there is over \$3 million being spent in furtherance of that. Then, of course, in the out years we are getting up to very substantial sums of money, into the tens of millions. My question is: when will a business case for government consideration be provided so that government can continue to commit such large sums of money?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am told funding has been provided to develop a business case over the next few years. It is years away at this stage, honourable member.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Looking at it briefly, over \$50 million is committed to developing a business case.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: The money is for a range of things, honourable member. I am told it is for a business case, but it also relates to work around environmental and social sustainability research and studies, some stakeholder engagement, Aboriginal stakeholder engagement, work on location, project governance and corporate support. The money is for a range of things. The business case will be worked on literally over the next few years.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: While appreciating that for such a large project large sums do have to be invested in advance for all of those sorts of considerations, that indicates to me that the ultimate task is going to be very, very substantial indeed. Do we have any indications in the future? I am seeing all sorts of wild sums bandied around in the sector—\$8 billion and \$10 billion and what have you.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I guess it is really a case of what ends up being in the business plan as to what it might cost at the end of the day. It is a significant project. It is a state significant project so it could well be very costly.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: I have a couple of questions. I refer to page 630, under the "Asset Investment Program". Paragraph 3 relates to the construction of an assembly and maintenance facility at Bellevue. Could I get some clarity on whether the Metronet team has provided a proposal to the City of Swan yet with regard to the proposed closure of Robinson Road as part of that facility?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am told a proposal will be soon submitted to the City of Swan that outlines why Robinson Road will need to close when the Bellevue railcar facility begins operating. The City of Swan is set to advertise this for public comment at the end of the month. Due to space constraints, the Bellevue facility requires all trains entering the depot to use a turnback located across the existing Robinson Road and beneath Roe Highway. The rail infrastructure required for the operation of the railcar facility extends across Robinson Road and therefore the road may not be able to remain open to vehicle traffic. I am told there is not enough room between Lloyd Street and Robinson Road to accommodate the facilities required to clean, maintain, store and turn back trains. We are looking at nearby local roads to see what may be done. Certainly, in answer to your question, the City of Swan is set to advertise for public comment at the end of this month.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: You mentioned local roads and its impact. Minister, you would be aware that there are some significant concerns within the community, particularly from local businesses, but also even those in Koongamia and other areas that utilise this section of the road to get on to Great Eastern Highway and other parts. Has traffic modelling been undertaken on the impact of the closure of Robinson Road at this stage?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: We think it would have been but we do not know for sure. We do not know. We think it has so we might have to —

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: Could I take on notice any information with regard to traffic modelling and the impact of the closure of Robinson Road to existing traffic?

The CHAIR: We will call that A2.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am sorry; I am not going to take that on notice during this hearing. The next session is with Main Roads, and we think Main Roads has done it. The member can ask the same question in the next session.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: Okay. I will be here for the next session, so I will ask that question.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Yes, ask it, and if we cannot at that stage, we will take it on notice. I think the next session is probably more appropriate because we think Main Roads have done it.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: Can I clarify: is it best for me to ask Main Roads a question about any alternatives that you have considered outside of closing that road?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask Mr Kannis to provide an answer to that.

Mr KANNIS: My understanding is, given that I am once removed from this project because this is being managed in a particular team within the PTA, that the site constraints do not at this point have an obvious alternative, and that is why they have gone to the position of closing Robinson Road. It is physical constraints and I am not aware of any alternative options available at this point in time. I am not sure if Mr Burgess would know anything on top of that.

Mr BURGESS: The only thing I would add, minister and Chair, is that the significant investment that was undertaken obviously with Lloyd Street grade separation was thought to be, from a wider perspective, the means of getting across the railway at that point. I would suggest that any traffic assessments that have been done would have contemplated that Lloyd Street would be—because, clearly, we only have grade separated crossings of the railway at selected points. We cannot have them at numerous points because they are very expensive.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: I will ask a further question at the hearing with Main Roads.

The CHAIR: I will withdraw supplementary information A2 from this hearing. You can ask that question in the next hearing.

[10.20 am]

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: That is fine; thank you. Also on page 630, I refer to the fifth point, level crossing removal. I have asked about Caledonian Avenue in previous estimates hearings. Can you tell me the current status of that proposed removal? Is it the case that you are simply going to close the level crossing? What actually is being proposed?

Mr KANNIS: The situation is that the government does not have an official position on the removal of the Caledonian Avenue level crossing at this point in time. It has not got a formal decision on the matter.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: I thought it was an election commitment to close the road. I appreciate the fact that you cannot answer that question; maybe the minister needs to do so on that one. That is my recall, minister.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: If I can say, we are currently in the planning phase for that. A decision has not been made as to what the solution is, but we are in the planning phase to work out where we go in relation to that.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: Are you proposing to close it or not?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: We are looking at the removal of the level crossing at Caledonian Avenue. As to what it might look like, we do not know yet.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: Was it not an election commitment to close the Caledonian Avenue level crossing?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: No, the election commitment was to remove the crossing at Caledonian Avenue.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: Okay—to remove the crossing. So, are you removing the crossing or not?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: As I said, that is being worked on at the moment.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: So we are not sure if you are or not? I am not trying to be tricky here; I am just trying to understand what you are actually saying. Are you intending to remove the crossing or not? It is a yes or no.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Yes, we do intend to remove the crossing. Just what it looks like, what the solution is—what is put in place—has not been worked out yet.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: Okay. Is there a time frame with regard to that planning and expected removal?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Obviously in the budget before us, in the asset and investment program, there is that \$108.2 million set aside for work on Denny Avenue, but also the planning for the future removal of seven additional level crossings such as Caledonian Avenue and then some others as well. That is underway at the moment. As to when a decision might be made, a decision will be made before the FAL commences.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: I refer to page 598 under “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies”. I am not sure whether this is the right spot to ask, but it relates to student fare concessions. It is in relation to a specific issue that has been raised with me and I know with the minister as well by the Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association regarding the student travel subsidy scheme. Is this the correct place to raise it?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Who knows, but raise it anyway, honourable member, and we will see whether we can get you an answer.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: Okay; it is not entirely clear as to where it is.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: That is all right; ask the question and we will see whether we can get an answer.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: Thank you. My understanding is that whilst the eligibility requirements of the scheme have not been changed, the Department of Transport is considering applications under this scheme in a slightly different way and rejecting what were previously eligible applications based on the proximity of a transport hub. My understanding is that a transport hub could mean anything from a stick in the ground to it also not mattering how frequently the service operates, whether it

goes to the nearest school or even if it goes in the opposite direction. Could I get some clarity as to what the situation is with regard to that?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Sure; my advisers tell me we are not aware of a policy change, honourable member. You have some correspondence? Did you say the minister has also got the correspondence?

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: As I understand, she has also received correspondence. I understand that whilst the eligibility components have not changed, what was previously being accepted is now being rejected, and there are differences with regard to how one might perceive a transport hub.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: These are senior people from the executive saying that the process or policy has not changed. If I can get a copy of your correspondence, separately, I am happy to take that behind the Chair and get you that.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: If that is okay, minister, I would be happy to do that. Thank you very much.

Hon JIM CHOWN: My questions are with reference to previous comments by the minister and Mr Burgess in regard to patronage on the metropolitan passenger rail service. Obviously over the past four years patronage has been in decline, and is still in decline. I am just wondering when the PTA believes that that patronage may level off or will it keep declining?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask Mr Burgess to comment. My understanding is that up until just before COVID, passenger numbers were up two per cent, I think I recall from an earlier briefing on that.

Hon JIM CHOWN: Two per cent from the previous year, but they were not back to their peak in 2016–17.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: No, but they were on the rise again.

Hon JIM CHOWN: They are slowly coming back but they are nowhere near their peak of 2016–17.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: My advisers tell me they were going down in 2016–17—anyway. I will ask Mr Burgess to make a comment.

Hon JIM CHOWN: Sure, you are the expert.

Mr BURGESS: The bumper crop for the PTA was 2012–13. That was the highest, which was just over 150 million. The minister is quite right, pre-COVID, if you took the numbers as per end of February, we were headed for an increase of close to two per cent on the train system and over two per cent on the bus system. COVID has obviously put a dent in that and reversed the situation. I guess the pleasing thing with that, as the minister mentioned, and it is probably to do with the way WA has kept itself relatively COVID free, we have had the best returns. I keep looking but I do not think anywhere else in the world has the numbers on public transport that we have at the moment, and have had for quite some time. We returned reasonably quickly after COVID. At the moment, on a daily basis—we check every day, obviously—it is typically somewhere between 75 and 80 per cent. On a couple of days we have been over 80 per cent relative to the same day last year. It is hard to say in the current COVID climate what patronage is going to look like for the rest of this financial year and indeed into the next financial year. One would hope that if there is a medical solution to the challenge, that we will get back to the sorts of numbers we had before.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: In relation to student numbers and concession card holders and pension health care card holders, we are back to about 100 per cent now. That has bounced back significantly since March. As Mr Burgess pointed out—I think in the briefing I was told we were at 70 to 80 per cent at the end of October in relation to patronage use again.

Hon JIM CHOWN: My question is in relation to the latest RAC report which states that in their belief, road traffic is likely to increase fourfold, greater than expected, over the next five to 10 years, and how that could relate to patronage on a public transport system. Obviously there is a limit number of people in this state, so one must be wrong and one must be correct.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I have not seen the RAC's figures. That might be a question for Main Roads, which is the next session.

Hon JIM CHOWN: I do have another question: when we add up the various costs in the budget papers, the cost of Metronet at this stage is about \$5.7 billion, excluding the FAL, which brings the figure to around \$7 billion-plus. How much of that \$7 billion-plus will be commonwealth moneys?

Mr KANNIS: The \$5.7 billion that you are referring to is the spend over the forward estimates on Metronet, which includes the Forrestfield–Airport Link. The commonwealth contribution to that is on page 137 of budget paper No 3, which over the forward estimates period is \$1.5 billion.

Hon JIM CHOWN: So out of the total cost of Metronet, we will get \$1.5 billion out of the commonwealth?

Mr KANNIS: I should clarify that of that spend of \$5.7 billion over the forward estimates period, \$1.5 billion is commonwealth funded.

Hon JIM CHOWN: In regard to a previous response earlier to Hon Diane Evers, for public expenditure of commercial freight lines, does the PTA have a limit per kilometre of tonnage? How do you make that assessment that a commercial freight line is viable for public expenditure?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: We do consider broader economic benefits—so, if there is a benefit to a local community, if there is a benefit in terms of getting traffic or trucks off roads. But, Mr Burgess, have you got anything?

Hon JIM CHOWN: But surely, minister, there must be some guidelines here.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask Mr Burgess.

Hon JIM CHOWN: When you talk about, say, broader economic benefits, what exactly are they? They almost have a dollar cost.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: We actually think it is probably a better question for Main Roads, honourable member; that is what I have been told.

Hon JIM CHOWN: Main Roads? Rail lines? I do not think so!

Mr BURGESS: Only on the basis that we do a lot of stuff in a portfolio fashion nowadays—Main Roads, PTA, DOT—and the officer involved in that investment analysis is part of Main Roads.

Hon JIM CHOWN: You are not flicking this off, are you, Mark?

[10.30 am]

Mr BURGESS: No. No, member; I would not do that. But I think the minister is right. All economic analysis and business case assessments try to consider the externalities. Even the business cases for Metronet will always assess what are the overall benefits and they will include travel time benefits and in the case of level crossings, for example, cost of crash and cost of fatalities and cost of injury assessments—they will all be factors involved. The detail of your question of what the component parts are and how they are weighted, I do not have.

Hon JIM CHOWN: I am happy to ask it in the Main Roads session, as long as the minister is happy with me asking it then.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Yes. I am happy, too.

Hon JIM CHOWN: Okay. Fine.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: That is what my advisers are telling me—absolutely, honourable member.

Hon JIM CHOWN: So I will get another three or four minutes, obviously, in that session!

Hon KEN BASTON: My questions are from budget paper No 2, volume 2 and page 585. I picked up on the spending changes with regard to COVID-19. Obviously, the drafting gates have pushed these particular projects across that can be done and started up, and that is the Carnarvon fascine entrance. I saw somewhere else in the budget where they are actually going to build floating pens et cetera, and this is all part of that. Can I have that as the first question: how big is that actually going to be and over what period of time and has it been fully investigated or is most of the funding going into investigation?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I can answer that. Obviously, the project is about addressing sand movement, which we know has blocked navigable ocean access to and from the fascine for most vessels. Honourable member, we share the electorate and we know; we hear this. It is a gripe of that community; it has been for a long time. As part of the recovery plan, \$7 million was approved to resolve the access issues. Out of the total \$7 million funding, \$2.5 million is for the construction of approximately 15 to 20 pens, and \$4.5 million is for the recurrent funding of the technical studies, followed by a permanent longer term dredging solution.

The funding also includes bringing forward construction of additional boat pens in Carnarvon boat harbour. These initiatives include regular DOT hydro surveys to measure changes to the fascine; regularly moving the channel markers in the existing channel to ensure that boats can safely use the deepest part; arranging for the relocation of larger vessels that are currently not able to navigate the fascine entrance, and this may include craning the vessels; and providing pen fee relief to relocated yacht club vessels once the new pens are completed. DOT are working very collaboratively with the Gascoyne Development Commission, obviously the Shire of Carnarvon and the Carnarvon Yacht Club to deliver the various aspects of the plan.

Hon KEN BASTON: Chair, my other one is about financial support for regular passenger transport air services and airfares in regional WA. How many airfares are expected to be required? Obviously, there is a fair lot of subsidy on airfares across the state and in regional areas.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Honourable member, can I ask you to tell me what page you are pointing to and that will help me navigate my folder?

Hon KEN BASTON: Sorry. That is on line 3 just below the Carnarvon fascine and the election commitment—“Financial Support for Regular Public Transport Air Services and Airfares”.

The CHAIR: It is page 585 under “Spending Changes”.

Hon KEN BASTON: Page 585.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Thank you. Sorry; I was looking at the wrong page.

The CHAIR: While the minister checks that, a fascine, for other members who are interested, is a bundle of rods or plastic pipes bound together used in construction for filling in marshy grounds or other obstacles. Is that correct, honourable member? Just say yes.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I have found the page. Apologies, honourable member. So your question again, sorry?

Hon KEN BASTON: The question was basically: how do you arrive at who actually needs that subsidy on airlines? Where do you need to focus that financial support? How is that arrived at?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Sure. I am told that the state continues to actively investigate ways to further support regional air services and we are engaging with a range of stakeholders as part of that process. Obviously, the high cost of RPT travel from Perth and regional communities has been a longstanding issue and it is one that I think you can say has really been exacerbated by COVID-19, because what we have seen over the past few months, and in particular in the early days, was plane flights stop, essentially. Then when they came back on, they came back on; in some communities, it was one, two or three a week, which was down from multiple flights a day, and that was a significant issue for us. As a result of that, conversations began, so the state, but also the commonwealth, put some money on the table to ensure service continuity.

Now, in terms of where to from here, there has been a grant provided for flights between Perth and Geraldton. There has been a grant provided for flights to Kununurra and there also has been a grant provided to continue that service to Balgo. Aviair are doing it. So that is where the money has been spent. As to where to from here and other routes, those discussions are ongoing within government.

Hon KEN BASTON: So one would presume there are obviously conversations being carried out between the feds and the state to cover them as long as possible?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Yes, that is correct.

Hon SAMANTHA ROWE: Minister, my question is in relation to cycling infrastructure. We saw during the height —

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Honourable member, do you have a page that you are referring to?

Hon SAMANTHA ROWE: Yes. It is page 598 and it is “Western Australian Bicycle Network”—that is the line item.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Thank you. Sorry. Ask away!

Hon SAMANTHA ROWE: Thanks, minister. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, I think we saw, particularly here in WA, many of our constituents, and particularly many of mine in the East Metro Region, were not using public transport. There was nervousness around using buses and trains. I think maybe because of what we were seeing during the pandemic, we really saw this renewed interest in cycling infrastructure. People were wanting to be able to ride their bike to work in the CBD, students were wanting to be able to ride their bikes to university and so forth. My question, minister, is: how is the government expanding that priority planning around infrastructure for cycling, particularly along those key corridors to and from and within the Perth CBD?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Sure. I am happy to provide some information on that. You are correct. Between April and June, I think there were an extra 80 000 people riding bikes every week compared with the year before, and that corresponds with what we have heard in relation to passenger numbers on trains and public transport. Obviously, with that drop, people took it into their own hands and started cycling to work.

We are investing about \$200 million for new and upgraded cycling infrastructure projects across the state. Obviously, one that has been of particular interest has been the Causeway cyclist and pedestrian bridge from Victoria Park to the CBD. I often run around there. So that path has always been a very busy thoroughfare for pedestrians and cyclists, and sometimes it can become very uncomfortable and unsafe; in fact, you see prams and buggies and stuff. If you think of that little pathway across the bridge at the moment, it is tiny. You can fit a bike on either side, but there is always congestion there.

[10.40 am]

More than 1 400 cyclists and 1 900 pedestrians use that path each day. The new bridge that will be built will be six metres wide and it will have dedicated pedestrian and cyclist lanes. It will connect the Victoria Park foreshore with Heirisson Island and the CBD. The work on that will include tributes to prominent Aboriginal people from the area.

We have a range of projects underway over the next few years. Obviously, the Mitchell Freeway extension will have principal shared path extensions; Mitchell Freeway from Hodges Drive to Hepburn Avenue, again, will have a principal shared path added to it; and the Tonkin gap project, the Armadale to North Lake Road project and the Fremantle line PSP will all come online over the next few years. That is what is happening in the future. Bike use continues to grow and certainly has risen significantly over the past 12 months. You only have to ask bike shops, to be honest. You cannot buy a bike in many shops. Particularly coming up to Christmas, it is a challenge if anyone wants to buy a bike for their kids. For whatever reason, people are using them and we are happy to facilitate their ongoing use. Essentially, \$200 million will be spent on the upgrade of those pathways over the next few years.

Hon MATTHEW SWINBOURN: My question relates to the fifth paragraph on page 630 of budget paper No 2 under the heading “Level Crossing Removal”. Specifically, I am interested in Denny Avenue, which I have the pleasure of passing by and through many times a week. I notice that the work has now commenced on the removal of the Denny Avenue crossing. My constituents and I are interested in finding out how the government is progressing with the delivery of this project.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I thank the member for his interest. Obviously, the Denny Avenue crossing closed with an alternative east–west connection built at Davis Road. The Davis Road grade separation will provide safer and quicker access between Albany Highway and Railway Avenue. Denny Avenue is the first project in the level crossing removal program. A design and construct rail work package was released in October last year with a further design and construct road and civic package released in November. Downer Group was successful in both packages and a single design and construct road and rail contract was awarded in May earlier this year. That contract was delayed, of course, due to COVID-19. The total approved budget for Denny Avenue is \$100.6 million, so that is fairly significant. Additional scope was included by introducing the removal of the Gilwell Avenue at the Albany Highway intersection upgrade, which included the addition of traffic control signals and a new signalised pedestrian crossing across Albany Highway near Gilwell Avenue. Stage 1 approval was received from Main Roads. The demolition works at the corner of Third Avenue and Railway Avenue were completed in December last year, and the design and construct works commenced in May this year. I am told that the design and development is underway and is progressing towards 85 per cent design, and 85 per cent design for the Canning trunk link main has been issued. PTA developed a nine-day possession in April 2011, when the Denny Avenue level crossing will be removed and the Davis Road underpass road opened. The tree removal along Railway Avenue between Third Avenue and Camillo Road was completed earlier this year. I understand that a number of community reference groups have been established. There has been significant interest out there. They have formed and are starting to meet. The current target date, barring another pandemic or anything else, is December next year—so December 2021. A number of works are scheduled for this financial year, including the third party service relocations, the 10-day possession that I mentioned in April, the construction of the new rail bridges over Davis Road and the opening of the new subway in April.

Hon MATTHEW SWINBOURN: Minister, can you clarify—I think you said the Gilwell Avenue underpass will open before December. The works are quite complex.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: No, I said that the Gilwell Avenue—Albany Highway intersection upgrade is included, so that scope was included in the plan. I did not say when it would happen and I am not sure if we know in what order it might happen.

Mr KANNIS: Not exactly for that one. I believe the opening of the Davis Road grade separation will be in April next year.

Hon MATTHEW SWINBOURN: Sorry, that is what I meant—Davis Road—because that is going under. So will that open in April next year and relieve some of the pressure because Denny Avenue will then formally close at the same time?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: That is correct. Denny Avenue will close and Davis Road will open.

Hon MATTHEW SWINBOURN: Yes, and that will relieve a lot of pressure in that area.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: It certainly will.

The CHAIR: I have three members with one question each, starting with Simon O'Brien.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Very quickly, Madam Chair, and I thank you for the way this is being conducted. On page 632 and elsewhere there is reference to the multistorey car park at Mandurah train station. Perhaps I will make my question in a couple of bits. In the first instance, how many extra car bays net will be provided above and beyond what is there now, and can we look forward to seeing other rail stations that are under pressure for parking being treated similarly in the future?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: In relation to the second part of your question, honourable member, who knows in terms of how we might treat things in the future?

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I will take that as a definite maybe.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: But in relation to Mandurah, the proposal is to build a new multilevel car park. I think it is to provide an additional 700 bays, but I will ask Mr Hamilton —

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: That is extra, is it?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Yes, that is an additional 700.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Okay, so that is about \$45 700 per bay. What is the charge that passengers will be subjected to to use each of these bays?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: At the moment we not charging anybody anything, but the intention is to charge the same \$2 fee that you would be charged at any other train station that has a car park. I should also point out that at that train station at the moment, there are 1 104 standard bays, so it is an additional 700 on top of that.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: So at that rate, if all the bays are fully occupied on each of the 255 working days per annum, each bay will have been paid for in only 89 years! What are you going to do then? Build another one?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Your maths is obviously better than mine, honourable member, but certainly this has been a sore point in the Mandurah community for a while. The need for car parking down there continues to grow. It is a great train line. Obviously, you have been Minister for Transport previously, so you know the importance of the line.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I have looked at multilevel car parks, too, with your same advisers.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am told that the federal government is paying for half of it and that the federal member down there, Andrew Hastie, has been a big supporter of it, too. It is a joint state–federal initiative.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Your admiration for the federal government is noted, and Mr Hastie is a fine member.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: As the honourable member knows, I am always happy to give credit where it is due. Certainly in relation to this train station and this car park, it is much needed, and I think that the good burghers of Mandurah and further will be fully supportive of it.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: My compliments to your department; they are a fine creation from 2009!

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will pass that on to them, thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, honourable member, for that fine contribution.

Hon DIANE EVERS: The question I have is from page 629 of the budget papers and is in regard to the service item residual freight issues management. I wonder if the residual freight issues management refers to the lease with Arc Infrastructure; and, if so, when was the last time the inspection was carried out, what were the findings, could a copy be tabled and how much did the inspection cost? It is shown in note (a), where it describes what that is.

[10.50 am]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Honourable member, I am struggling to find the part you are talking about. Tell me again.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Sorry. It is service 4, "Rail Corridor and Residual Freight Issues Management". There is a note (a) under it, which says —

Under the terms and conditions of the Railway Infrastructure Lease, an independent inspection of the Railway Infrastructure is carried out every five years.

I forgot to read that part out.

The CHAIR: To reiterate, it is on page 629, service 4 under the PTA, "Managing the rail freight corridor and infrastructure leased to the private sector" and the explanatory note under that.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Mr Burgess will answer that.

Mr BURGESS: Member, most of the larger amount of money that is in the line item there, the substantial amount of money—Mr Steedman could give you more precise detail—relates to depreciation of the asset. The asset is a state asset; in fact, it was revalued this year. Most of that will relate to depreciation. The inspection that is talked about at note (a) is a requirement of the lease that an independent party goes and inspects and provides a report to the corridor minister—the Minister for Transport—on the condition of the asset. That comes to the agency as well, obviously. That is quite a modest sum. We pay an engineering firm, basically, to do an assessment of the rail line.

Hon DIANE EVERS: I understand that. I am just wondering if that is the lease with Arc Infrastructure that you are talking about.

Mr BURGESS: Yes.

Hon DIANE EVERS: When was the last time the inspection was carried out? What was found? Could a copy of it be tabled? The cost is irrelevant; if you are saying it is just a small amount, I understand that, but I am wondering when it was last done and what was the result of that inspection.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Honourable member, the inspection was undertaken last year. As to whether or not we can provide it, I am not sure. I will have to take advice. The report may well be getting finalised at the moment, so I am happy to —

Hon DIANE EVERS: Take it as a supplementary question?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Yes. Can you ask if it is possible and then I can respond?

Hon DIANE EVERS: Yes.

The CHAIR: Then the minister's response will be whether or not it is possible and why not.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Then I can respond if it is possible or not, if that is okay.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Excellent; that would be good. Thank you.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: We will be happy to, if it is possible we can do it.

[Supplementary Information No A2.]

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: My question is not as entertaining as Hon Simon O'Brien's, but it is just as important. I refer to page 22 and section 2.1.3, "Regional", and what they call in brackets —

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Hang on; sorry. What document are you referring to?

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: The PTA annual report; sorry.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: That is all right; it is just so we can find it.

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: I keep forgetting there are two. It is page 22 and section 2.1.3, "Regional (TransRegional)". The report mentions there are 14 major regional towns in rural WA that were consolidated with Transwa. I have a few queries on that. Can you please elaborate on what is meant by "consolidated"? Have the 14 contracts been consolidated into one? What impact will that have on the cost and frequency of the services?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I can start, and then I will ask Mr Burgess if he can respond to that. Obviously, as a member based in Port Hedland, I am a beneficiary of a Trans service—we have the TransHedland service and it is fantastic. What it has meant is a more accessible service. As part of the Trans branding, new buses were provided. They are the buses you get in the metropolitan area, essentially, where people with mobility issues or people with prams can have the floor lowered down so that they can wheel on a wheelchair versus what we had previously with the older style buses that had the steps up. I saw somebody in Hedland have to get out of their wheelchair and crawl up the steps and then the wheelchair was lifted up after her. It has been a tremendous shift in terms of the accessibility of the services. In Hedland, I have seen an increase in the frequency of the services and certainly the quality has been significant. It has also meant you can obviously use your SmartRider in those new buses. I will ask Mr Burgess if he has anything further to add.

Mr BURGESS: Member, you are quite right. I apologise if there is any confusion created. There has been no change to the management of the regional town bus services—so, the 14 services including the TransAlbany, TransGeraldton, TransBunbury et cetera. There has been no change to those. They stay in the same team. Effectively, it is a team that sits within the Transperth division and we try to mirror as much as possible the service that people get here in Perth—the same service, so the buses are the same. Eight of the 14 regional towns have the SmartRider rolled out to them and we try to mirror as much as possible the same sort of service. Driver training should be the same so that it is a high standard.

I refer you to the bottom left of page 20. The regional town bus services group managed the services within the regional towns, but they also used to, including in the 10 years that I was the ED of Transperth, manage some contracted services which are much less regular and which are inter-town. There is an example running up the inland highway through Meekatharra all the way to Port Hedland where we use Integrity Coach Lines. Some of those are fairly infrequent services. As you can see there, six inter-town contracts—two in the Pilbara and one in the Kimberley, Gascoyne, midwest and goldfields—were moved out of the Transperth division in our organisation and put into

Transwa. Transwa, by virtue of what it does, is all about inter-regional travel. We wanted to put all the inter-regional stuff in one basket. It was just picking that up and moving it there. It was just the management of it; there was no change to the services as such.

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: Minister, considering COVID-19 is here with us and it could be for a while, Western Australians are travelling intrastate a lot. Does the PTA have a relationship with Tourism WA to look at destinations—maybe Northam and places like that? I wondered whether you work very closely with Tourism WA on those possibilities.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: We certainly do. I will ask Mr Burgess to comment on that.

Mr BURGESS: Member, we definitely do. We talk to Tourism WA and all the stakeholders you would expect us to talk to—the development commissions, the local governments and so on. If they have specific circumstances—one that comes to mind is Toodyay, which approaches either us or, over many years, the minister's office as well—they will make various approaches about particular tourism activities they are undertaking, including festivals and so on. They will seek some special services to support that. Certainly, our GM of Transwa has personal contact and relationships with all those key stakeholders that you would expect him to have to understand those regional tourism destinations and what we can do to tweak or improve our services to support them.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I should add that DOT also works with tourism in relation to the aviation space.

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Thanks, honourable member. That concludes this hearing.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you for your attendance today. I remind members that due to time constraints, the electronic lodgement system is not open for additional questions this year. For witnesses, I advise that the committee will forward a transcript of evidence, which includes the questions you have taken on notice highlighted on the transcript, as soon as possible after the hearing. Responses to questions on notice are due by 5.00 pm 10 working days after receipt. Should you be unable to meet the due date, please advise the committee in writing as soon as possible before the due date. The advice is to include specific reasons as to why the due date cannot be met.

Thank you for your participation. I ask that you leave the chamber promptly for COVID-19 cleaning between sessions. Once again, thank you for your attendance.

Hearing concluded at 10.59 am
