

TONKIN HIGHWAY — UPGRADE

Grievance

MR S.J. PRICE (Forrestfield) [9.15 am]: My grievance is to our new Minister for Transport. I thank her for taking my grievance and thank you, Mr Speaker, for your indulgence in allowing me to do this.

Tonkin Highway is a really important piece of infrastructure that runs through my electorate. In April this year, the McGowan government announced its Tonkin Highway transformation package, which will get underway in 2020 and create approximately 5 200 jobs, according to a press release from April this year. That press release outlines some of the work that will be done on Tonkin Highway, including fixing the Tonkin Highway gap, which really needs to be looked at, and extending Tonkin Highway. There is also reference to the upgrade of three intersections, all of which are in my electorate. Two will be interchanges and there is a concept for one to have a flyover. The intersection of Welshpool Road East and Tonkin Highway is the state's most congested intersection. That really important piece of infrastructure needs to be completed.

What caught my attention and also my constituents' attention was the proposal for Tonkin Highway and Hale Road in Forrestfield. Going back a little, the Hale Road intersection at Tonkin Highway provides the main access to and egress out of Forrestfield and Wattle Grove. It is a very important piece of infrastructure for the residents of Wattle Grove and Forrestfield.

Main Roads produced a concept plan for the three intersections that I mentioned earlier. The concept plan that is currently being looked at contains a flyover at Hale Road and Tonkin Highway, with no access off Hale Road onto Tonkin Highway. This was always going to be a major issue. When I first became aware of it, I raised my concerns. More recently, the residents have been made aware of it through the concept plan being available on the Main Roads website, which is what we like to see. As expected, the reaction from the community has been almost one of outrage. The community is very disappointed with the concept plan. It has certainly expressed its disappointment with that, to the point that an online petition has nearly 3 500 signatures on it. I thank the community for getting involved in the issue, providing feedback and expressing how they feel about this proposal.

I first discussed the concept plan that we are referring to with the Wattle Grove Residents' Association in February 2018. After that discussion, we decided to invite Main Roads to the next Wattle Grove Residents' Association meeting in April 2018. Main Roads attended and presented that concept plan. It received similar feedback over the proposal.

The minister and I had a meeting with Main Roads in May this year. More recently, I met with Main Roads in late October this year to further discuss this concept. Main Roads has been aware of my concerns and the potential concerns of my residents, which have now materialised, over what it was proposing. It is a complicated intersection. I am aware of the constraints with the road reserves around that particular intersection. There have been plans for it since the Stephenson plan or whatever things are drawn from. It was always envisaged to include a flyover. There was never adequate provision for a full interchange. There are some restrictions, and I appreciate that. The residents' concerns pretty much come down to four key areas: the importance of access to Tonkin Highway, which has been in place since the early 1980s; delays and restrictions on access to the area for emergency vehicles, especially fire and ambulance vehicles; the impact the concept plan will have on the provision of public transport, which is already a bit of an issue; and the main concern, which is the redistribution of the traffic flow—I think there are around 12 000 vehicles in the morning, and probably more in the afternoon.

If that access point is removed, the traffic flow will have to go somewhere else, and there are only a few other exit points. People can go straight down Hale Road through Wattle Grove to Welshpool Road East, which then becomes another intersection of concern; they can go down Reynolds Road or Dawson Avenue to the Berkshire Road intersection, which was done as part of the Gateway WA project, but that route goes past a primary school, which means there will be a heap of kids there first thing in the morning, and that primary school already has access issues; they can go down Hale Road to Berkshire Road and onto Roe Highway, which goes past Darling Range Sports College; they can go down Hartfield Road to Lewis Road and to Welshpool Road East again, which is already a blackspot intersection, so that is very problematic as well; or they can go down Anderson Road onto Lewis Road and Welshpool Road East, which runs past Jeremiah Donovan House retirement and aged-care village, so that, too, is a problem. There is also the potential of creating rat runs from Arthur Road to Bruce Road through Wattle Grove.

This is a very important intersection that has a lot of challenges. My constituents who currently use Hale Road to access Tonkin Highway rightly expect to maintain that access to the highway following the McGowan government's Tonkin Highway transformation works. I know the minister has previous experience with this issue and I appreciate that. I ask the minister to please assist my constituents to get a better outcome from the McGowan government's Tonkin Highway transformation package than the current concept plan, which appears to close access from Hale Road. Thank you.

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan — Minister for Transport) [9.21 am]: I thank the member for Forrestfield for this grievance. The member is absolutely correct. He has spoken to me about this from day one. To provide some background, these plans have been in the top drawer of Main Roads' projects for many, many years, but we secured funding this year, as outlined, for the Tonkin Highway transformation project. That project encompasses three separate projects: the grade separations of Hale, Kelvin and Welshpool Roads; the Tonkin gap project; and the Tonkin gap extension project to Mundijong. As a result of securing those funds from the state and commonwealth governments, we have started the next stages of planning for these projects. Part of the Tonkin gap project is already out in the market for expressions of interest, and we are now doing the detailed planning for the Tonkin Highway extension to Mundijong and the removal of the three sets of traffic lights and their replacement with interchanges.

When we first talked about this project, the member outlined local residents' concerns about access to Tonkin Highway. This is always an issue when we plan major upgrades to roads. We are basically trying to improve the flow of traffic through Tonkin Highway, but whenever we do projects like this, there are always access issues for the residents who live closest to the intersections. I experienced the same issues as the member for Forrestfield with the NorthLink WA project. There was no access to NorthLink from Benara Road or Marshall Road, and that issue was raised with me by local residents before the election. After we won the election, I looked at whether we could improve that access, but the planning was too advanced and we were about to enter into contracts, so that was something we could not deliver. But I did understand the concerns of local residents; they lost access to a major highway and there were distributional impacts on the local suburbs as a result.

I use Tonkin Highway often, and I know the local roads very well. The intersection of Welshpool Road and Tonkin Highway has now become the most congested intersection in the network. One of my worst memories of that intersection was when I was driving my sick father home from hospital to Roleystone; we were waiting a long time when he was not doing very well. There have been some upgrades to Kelvin Road but it still has major traffic issues, as does Hale Road.

Main Roads has been working on the plan since April. The member for Forrestfield raised with me very early on the possibility of changing the overpass to provide local resident access, and that is something I am very keen to investigate and work on. As a result of our main meeting, there has been further modelling and traffic work done. It is hard to visualise, but the existence of on and off-ramps at the Roe Highway–Tonkin Highway intersection, and what will be the Welshpool Road–Tonkin Highway intersection, limit the length of on and off-ramps at a potential Hale Road intersection. Main Roads is concerned about how we can actually feed in those on and off-ramps, given the proximity; I think it would be about a kilometre from the Roe–Tonkin intersection and one and a half kilometres from the proposed Tonkin–Welshpool intersection. The concern is really just about the ability to get on and off those ramps safely. We asked Main Roads back in May to look into this, and a team is working on how we can redesign that overpass and what other access we can provide. I am sure there will be a solution that will provide local residents better access than what is currently proposed.

As the member said, this primarily affects residents of Wattle Grove and Forrestfield. Those who live closer to Berkshire Road will, I suspect, use Berkshire Road, but I also understand the member's concerns about Welshpool Road East. That road is used a lot by cyclists going up to the hills and to the dams, and a lot of grain trucks travel down it as well. Welshpool Road East is getting busier and has a real mixture of traffic. Again, I use Welshpool Road East a lot to go up to the Karragullen and Pickering Brook area, so I know it well. We do not want to create any further safety issues on Welshpool Road East. As the member said, Berkshire Road has a bit of a complicated intersection; I am not sure who designed those roundabouts, but it is a quite interesting set of roundabouts and lights!

I understand the distributional impacts and I can assure the community that this is at the concept stage. We are out engaging with the community and doing traffic modelling. We will be able to prepare a further design by the end of the first quarter next year. We will take all their issues on board. The member for Forrestfield has been working very well with the local community, and I think we can reach a solution that will provide much better access for the local residents. It is really about seeing whether we can incorporate those ramps and how they will impact on the other ramps. All that work is being done now. I have been out there and have looked at the maps to see what we can do to make sure that the residents of Forrestfield and Wattle Grove have access to Tonkin Highway, and to make sure that we reduce congestion in the area so that the people living in those areas can enjoy the benefits of those road upgrades.

I thank the member for his advocacy on this issue. He has worked really productively with the government and Main Roads. I am sure that, working together, we can get a solution that will improve local access.