

RAILWAY (METRONET) AMENDMENT BILL 2022

Second Reading

Resumed from 23 February.

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [11.42 am]: I rise to speak to the Railway (METRONET) Amendment Bill 2022, and in so doing I indicate that the opposition will not be opposing this piece of legislation. The purpose of this bill is to authorise, as part of the Metronet plan, the construction of the Armadale line railway project, including the Victoria Park–Canning level crossing removal and Byford rail extension projects, and for related purposes. In introducing the bill to the house, the minister made a number of points in her second reading speech. I note that the parliamentary secretary is here; I welcome the member for Kingsley’s involvement in the legislation. It is very good to see her stepping up to the position. As the minister said —

The line will run from Claisebrook station and proceed along the Armadale line railway in a generally south-easterly direction for 20.9 kilometres before continuing in a southerly direction for a further 21.2 kilometres to Mundijong.

The minister went on to talk about the removal of level crossings, and noted —

Five level crossings will be removed along the Armadale line by raising the rail over the road at Mint Street, Oats Street, Welshpool Road, Hamilton Street and Wharf Street. New ... stations will be built at Carlisle, Oats Street, Queens Park and Cannington stations. Welshpool station will close, with Oats Street and Queens Park stations providing improved passenger facilities.

The Byford rail extension will extend the Armadale line approximately eight kilometres south to the new Byford station. The minister stated —

I acknowledge that this transformation of the Armadale line will bring significant disruption.

Here, the minister was talking about the proposed closure of the service for 18 months. She continued —

A temporary shutdown of the Armadale line for up to 18 months has been announced and consultation has commenced to help plan for replacement services. We understand that the rail shutdown will be inconvenient for many people, —

I am sure that it will be —

businesses and the broader community and we apologise in advance for that. A number of options were considered, but this style of shutdown was chosen as it will allow this to be done more safely and quickly.

A decision has been made to do this shutdown. I ask the parliamentary secretary to note my query about who provided advice to the minister that this would be the best option. Was it advice from her own department, the Public Transport Authority or the consortia of contractors that are looking to do the actual development? When the minister does respond, I will be interested to know what process was undertaken to reach the conclusion that it would be better to suffer 18 months of complete shutdown and all the disruption that will mean for commuters in that area, who will have to make their way up Albany Highway and other already overstretched infrastructure to get to the city. I have some interest in that response.

The bill itself is relatively short—it has only six clauses—but I think that belies the potential impact of the Armadale line closure. Interestingly, the bill does not mention that there will be a shutdown, but the minister indicated in her press release and the second reading speech that it would occur. To understand how this closure will play out, we can look at a little bit of the history of some other projects that have been planned and developed under the tutelage of this government and minister. One that I would like to turn to is the Yanchep rail extension.

The Yanchep rail extension had a budget and appeared to be on track for completion on time. In the 2020–21 budget, expenditure of \$184.7 million was planned on the Yanchep rail extension. That was just for that year on that line. There were denials of any delays in the delivery of that line, but the actual estimated spend as per the 2021–22 budget was only \$87.718 million, which was less than the planned expenditure. In fact, \$100 million of work that had been planned to be done in that year was not done. That surely indicates that that project was already in trouble. I refer to an article in the *Wanneroo Times* dated 17 June 2021. The article, written by journalist Lucy Jarvis, states —

Plans to complete the Yanchep Rail Extension next year may be veering off track, as work appears to have all but ground to a halt.

In late 2019, the State and Federal governments and contractors NEWest Alliance—comprising CPB Contractors and Downer—announced it would be completed by mid-2022.

That is not very far away from now. The article also states —

However, 18 months on, a substantial amount of work on the \$530 million project remains to be done and there rumours that work has stalled.

It goes on further —

Public Transport Authority spokesman ... said construction was “well underway” and they were still working towards having trains running by late-2022.

When that article was written on 17 June 2021, we knew that that project was in trouble because the underspend was already there. The project had been delayed before the announcement by the government that various projects would be deliberately delayed—in fact, the word the government used was “smoothed”—to enable the market to correct itself in what was already an overheated environment at that point.

Again, I turn to some information in the media at the time and an article in *The West Australian* on 9 September 2021 titled “Metronet projects, including Thornlie–Cockburn link and Yanchep train line, will be delayed by 12-months”. We already knew at the time that the Yanchep line would be delayed by 12 months because it was that far behind already. However, in what was seen as a positive move and disguised as a “smoothing out” of the project, there was the announcement that other projects would be deferred for about a year, including the expansion of Casuarina Prison, the upgrades to Tonkin Highway and the Roe Highway–Great Eastern Highway bypass and the Bindoon bypass, which is of some interest to me because I know how vital that particular piece of infrastructure will be to complete the jigsaw of expenditures that has gone into the hundreds of millions of dollars that have been spent so far on the Great Northern Highway Wubin–Muchea project and on the development of NorthLink. The missing part of that jigsaw to enable better freight to the north west from the metropolitan area is, in fact, the Bindoon bypass, but it has disappeared and been smoothed.

The Premier was quoted in this article as saying —

... the decision to delay certain big ... projects, like Metronet, came after consultation with industry and in part, thanks to the soaring amount of home buying and building happening in WA.

“To help ease pressure and extend WA’s economic boom, we’ve reviewed our infrastructure program in consultation with industry so it’s better tailored to our new economic conditions,” he said.

The Premier made that statement in September 2021 and two months later, in December 2021, there was an announcement about the preferred proponents for the next step of two major projects. Proponents were appointed for a key milestone for two major Metronet projects. Preferred proponents were announced to design and build the Byford rail extension and Victoria Park–Canning level crossing removal projects. The announcement referred to negotiations with the preferred proponent for each project and how they would commence finalising the detailed scope and cost of the project before an alliance contract would be signed in the coming months.

Apparently, that is how things are done now. The government itself does not design a project. The Public Transport Authority and the government, apparently, do not have the capacity to develop a project to the point of putting out a concept to the market. Instead, it appoints proponents that go away and look at developing up the concepts and the final project that will be delivered. In some ways, the contractors are designing projects that they will build rather than the government clearly defining what it expects before entering into a contract. These arrangements are a little different from the public’s understanding of how some of these projects are actually done.

A joint press statement put out on 20 February 2022 announced that the projects that would transform the 129-year-old Armadale line had been let and that it was anticipated that just under \$2 billion would be spent on the projects. I wonder at what point of this process of cooperative development of the project between the contractors, the developers and the government that figure of \$2 billion was arrived at? How was that figure arrived at? Did it involve the contractor going to the government and saying, “This is what it is going to cost to deliver this range of options; you consider that”? Was there a budget before that? Just how was this process carried out? It would be instructive to know who set up the parameters of the project and who set out the costings for the delivery of the project, or do contractors just develop their own projects and put their own expenditures and ideas in as to what it will cost and the government just accepts it and moves on? Does it consider the danger that it might not be a realistic proposal or value for money? I do not know. Can the minister explain just who decides when these things happen and how much they have attached to them?

The second page of the press release goes on —

To enable work on these projects to occur as quickly and safely as possible, the Armadale Line will be shut down for up to 18 months starting in the first quarter of 2023.

While a number of shutdown options were examined, the extended shutdown was the preferred option, as it was seen as the least disruptive over the longer term and allows the project to be undertaken faster with a safer workplace environment.

Those words are very similar to the words of the second reading speech, which I referred to at the start of my contribution. Again, I ask the minister: Who decided on the 18-month shutdown? Obviously, it was a government decision, but on whose advice was that decision made? Was it on the advice of the department? Was it the proponent? Who did the minister listen to in coming to the view that an 18-month shutdown would be the best way forward?

We know that this project, like many projects in Western Australia at the moment, are receiving very strong support from the federal coalition government. Further in the press release, it states —

Comments attributed to Federal Minister for Communications, Urban Infrastructure, Cities and the Arts, the Hon Paul Fletcher MP:

“The Morrison Government is continuing to fund the delivery of important infrastructure projects like this one, having committed over \$3.3 billion to 15 METRONET projects to date.

Without the money that is flowing from Canberra, we would not see a lot of these projects and there is not enough acknowledgement of that fact. All public commentary put out seems to suggest that all this is all Western Australian state government expenditure. But we know that a lot of money has come from Canberra, just as there has been a lot of support for Western Australia to arrest the situation of the GST distribution from the coalition government in Canberra, which reversed a situation that was playing havoc with the finances of Western Australia. We know that very, very well because in the last days of the former government we were dealing with very low levels of expenditure from Canberra.

It is good to see that turnaround in federal support. Western Australians should be very, very aware that the coalition government in Canberra is a very strong supporter of Western Australia both in the projects and infrastructure that are being developed here, but also for its support of and acting on our concern over GST distribution. I think all accolades should go to the commonwealth government for its strong support of many, many projects right across Western Australia.

As I said, there was an announcement that the Armadale line would shut down for 18 months and the press has picked up on it. An article by Josh Zimmerman on 20 February stated —

Asked whether she was confident the upgrades would be completed on time, Ms Saffioti said an 18-month closure was an “upper end” estimate.

“We’ve had varying different forecasts but we believe that 18 months gives the contractor plenty of time to actually do the work,” Ms Saffioti said.

There you go. The government is very confident that the work can be done in 18 months. I asked the Premier in this place whether all the state Labor members who are affected by this line were actually confident. To be clear, I asked whether any of the members who had been named in the electorates of Victoria Park, Cannington, Forrestfield, Thornlie, Southern River, Armadale, Darling Range, Murray–Wellington, Collie–Preston and Bunbury had raised concerns about the disruption that will be caused to their communities during this extended closure. The Premier answered, “No, not as far as I am aware. No, members are very excited. They were all there standing there.” They were all standing there and were all very excited. They will all wear the consequences if this 18-month closure turns out to be more than 18 months. I expressed my view that it probably would be longer. If we go back to the example of the Yanchep line, we know that that project was already well behind—\$100 million in underspend in one year. If those types of delays occur here, with all the commuter chaos we will experience over that 18 months, I think the government will pay a very heavy price. The voters in those electorates that I have named may well be concerned about the effect the project will have on the quality of their lives as they spend hours and hours commuting through various makeshift avenues, whether it be inadequate up-roads or a bus service that travels in a disjointed function to the CBD.

Going back to the matter of smoothing projects, a few months ago we heard that the overheated market needed to be smoothed. Starting in the first quarter of 2023, before many other projects have been completed, we will have this massive spend on the Armadale line. Do not forget that apparently other projects are waiting in the wings for the opportunity to be developed when the heat comes out of the market. Those projects include the Casuarina Prison expansion; Tonkin Highway grade separations at Welshpool Road and Hale Road; the Tonkin Highway–Kelvin Road grade separations; the Roe Highway–Great Eastern Highway bypass; the Manuwarra Red Dog Highway; the Great Northern Highway–Bindoon bypass; the Reid Highway grade separations; Balga TAFE; Armadale TAFE; the Joondalup light automotive workshop; Albany TAFE; the Muresk new trade workshop; the Thornlie–Cockburn Link, which has been deferred a year; the Yanchep rail extension, which has been deferred a year; the Port Hedland Spoilbank Marina development, which has been deferred a year; and the Geraldton finfish nursery, which has been deferred a year, but I think it has been deferred indefinitely, if my sources are to be believed. A whole range of projects are sitting there waiting to come on at about the same time that this Metronet project comes on, like the Bindoon bypass, which has not even started at this point. It does not make sense.

Today we had a discussion around the Perth City Deal. There was a top-up to the Perth City Deal funding today. A joint media statement about that deal states the need for the top-up of some extra money to keep those projects going because of the cost escalations that have occurred in some areas. The joint media statement was put out by Hon Mark McGowan as Treasurer and Hon Rita Saffioti as the Minister for Transport. It talks about many of the projects and again contains quotes attributed to Paul Fletcher. It talks about things like the new Swan River bridge. The press asked questions later. My understanding is that the minister basically admitted that the bridge, which was initially estimated to cost \$50 million, is now estimated to cost \$100 million and that the main reason for that is that costs have risen across whole industry and in the market. The minister went on to refer to the steel prices but was told that the price had not doubled. The minister said that the cost is constantly changing and that is why it is hard to budget for. A journalist asked a question about the total cost blowout on the entire pipeline. The answer was that it is a challenging time to manage contracts but that the government knows that over the past two years it has done it well.

We know that there is already pressure in the marketplace and there are already pressures on costs. The government is trying to build another massive project at the same time as it has a bank of projects that it has already put on hold because they were seen to be needed to be smoothed. A few months ago, the government announced the projects that were to be smoothed, but a whole raft of projects came on before those other projects were even delivered. We will see increased costs and cost blowouts. I will look at some of the history of the projects the government has taken on. This goes back a while ago to when we did an analysis on things around the last budget period. The Forrestfield–Airport Link was originally due for completion by late 2020, but it still has not been delivered. Apparently, it has stayed within costs thus far, so that is encouraging, but it has been somewhat delayed. The Thornlie–Cockburn Link was started in 2021 and the deadline was early 2024. Now that has been pushed back to the end of 2024. As I have said, the Yanchep rail extension has been delayed by a year, but it was already delayed. The Morley–Ellenbrook line started in 2021 and the original deadline for completion was late 2024. It will be interesting to see whether that comes anywhere close to coming on stream at that time. The government has delayed a range of projects and has had trouble delivering them on time.

Does anyone seriously believe that in 18 months the entirety of this project to rebuild the Armadale line and the extension to Byford will be anywhere close to completion? I predict that we will see traffic and commuter chaos for that 18 months, and longer. It will not be complete in 18 months; it will be more like two or three years. The government is hoping to open this line just before the next election. The danger with that time line is that any delays will mean there is every likelihood that when all the members I named talk to their constituents, the constituents will be very angry because they will be waiting to get to work on time without having to sit for hours on an overcrowded bus or in congested traffic waiting for the traffic lights. Those people will be well and truly sick of it before the project is done. It will not be done in 18 months; it will be more like two or three years. That will not bode well for members in those electorates when that happens. They are taking quite a deal of risk.

I will go back to some of the matters on the consultation and discussions with the local governments and communities who will be affected by this decision. Hon Dr Brian Walker asked a question in the other place on 23 February. He referred the minister to the proposed 18-month closure of the Armadale line to allow for Metronet connectivity and the removal of various railway stations. He asked about the individuals and organisations that had been consulted and how that consultation had taken place. I will not read the whole question because it is quite lengthy. After thanking the honourable member, the answer supplied by Hon Sue Ellery representing the Minister for Transport was —

The state government made the decision to announce the closure 12 months in advance in order to allow for extensive consultation to be undertaken with the community. A number of different shutdown options were considered; however, it was determined that other options such as shorter, more frequent shutdowns over a longer period would be more disruptive to the community over the longer term. Prior to the announcement, the Metronet managing director personally contacted the relevant local councils.

That is very interesting. I have here a newspaper article. It is quite interesting to look at various newspaper articles and see how different things unfold. The article quotes the Mayor of the City of Gosnells, one of the areas affected by the project. She said —

“I got a phone call at 8.30am in the morning on Sunday from the managing director of METRONET ... to let me know what was happening, so I’m appreciative of that but I had no idea.

That is the government’s idea of communicating with local government: ring that person on Sunday morning and make the announcement on Sunday afternoon. The mayor may not even have been at home. Luckily, she was there to take the call and learn what was to happen. I would have thought it is not really an appropriate way to provide notice to a local government—to ring a mayor and drop that on them on a Sunday morning with no notice whatsoever. What would have been wrong with communicating with the local government CEO during normal business hours and letting them know? Is there some view that we cannot trust the competencies of mayors or professionals in local governments? What is the reason behind that? In fact, is that not part of the problem? If the government will not talk to the people who are going to be affected, how on earth will it understand what the ramifications will be?

I think it is instructive to hear some of the things that the mayor had to say. The article continues —

She said residents of Gosnells would bear the brunt of the shutdown, with no reward for their train pain. It would appear that Gosnells is not actually getting anything out of this except the traffic chaos that I have mentioned before. The mayor is quoted as saying —

“It seems we’re going to have a fair bit of inconvenience for our local residents and the wider community as well, so it’s disappointing nothing is happening in the City of Gosnells considering how much we’re going to be disadvantaged by not being able to catch trains.

“It would be nice if there was light at the end of the tunnel for our residents.

“It absolutely skips us, I’m not sure what I’m missing. I’m not sure.

“Maybe they don’t think the demand is there.”

The City’s own statistics disprove this theory, with one example being the in excess of 21,000 cars that go over the William Street level crossing next to the Beckenham station.

How does that not qualify for works?” Cr Lynes asked.

“They’re putting another line in there, so I’m not sure what that means for residents but it could be a case of up–down, up–down, disrupting the flow on both side of the tracks so that’s an issue as well.

“We’ve got three level crossings in the Gosnells town centre and elevated rail there would create some opportunities for a nicer amenity for the town centre.

“Also Kelvin Road, they could do something there because we’ve got high-density zoning in that area— If they don’t do it now, when are they going to do it?”

The failure of the State Government to include Gosnells in the planned upgrades also has the potential to kill off a major development in Beckenham, according to the Mayor.”

“We’re losing a rail service and not gaining any benefit.

It does not sound as if there has been much consultation there. She did say that she had had a meeting with the Minister for Transport that week. I think that article was written at the end of the week and there was a meeting on the Thursday morning. The minister is quoted as saying —

... the state government continues to explore options to improve transport networks in and around Gosnells.

Apparently, when the project was defined in that process I was talking about whereby the government appoints the proponents and works together with them to build up the project, the government either did not speak to the people of Gosnells or completely ignored them. I do not quite know why that would be. I do not understand how the process would ignore such a vital component of the whole route.

Certainly, throughout this 12 months of consultation, the opposition will be seeking to keep up communications with all the affected local governments, such as Victoria Park, Canning, Armadale and Serpentine–Jarrahdale. By the way, I note that the Shire of Serpentine–Jarrahdale has already put out some information about its priorities and some of its concerns about what is happening in its neck of the woods in a document called *Federal government election: Priorities and requests*. It refers to the Byford Metronet rail extension. The opportunity is “elevated rail and station within the Byford Town Centre” and the request is “Additional \$100 million for elevated rail”. The expected outcomes are to create jobs, create a vibrant and connected Byford town centre and improve road safety for pedestrians and motorists.

The document goes on to state —

The inclusion of elevated rail for the Byford station precinct, as part of the 8km rail extension —

This is if it were to occur, because I understand at the moment it is just a degraded separation or a degraded rail — will help realise the community’s vision for a vibrant and connected Byford town centre.

The document continues —

It will also help unlock a range of opportunities for the delivery of new public space beneath the elevated rail for our community and to support the activation of the new city centre.

Here we have a city centre that is still being developed, and there is an opportunity to do it straightaway, instead of the redevelopment of a brownfield site, like in some other areas. It would seem to me to make sense to at least talk to the Shire of Serpentine–Jarrahdale throughout this 12-month process. But, again, with the way that this is being developed, I do not know whether the shire should talk to the government or the proponents who make the decisions. Who makes the decisions around budgets and costs is all a bit of a mystery under this process. I am sure the minister can outline exactly how it occurs in her second reading reply.

By the way, minister, while we are here, I might as well run through some of the other transport issues that the Shire of Serpentine–Jarrahdale has mentioned. Other opportunities include Thomas Road upgrades; the development of the West Mundijong industrial area; the improvement of local road safety; the upgrade of various of its own roads; the Byford Metronet rail extension, which we have already spoken about; and other infrastructure opportunities that are probably not relevant to the Minister for Transport; Planning. But there are a number of requests there and I think it would be a very good idea for the minister to talk to those people and gain an understanding of what they want.

As I have said, at a time when we are already struggling to complete projects and contain costs, it seems strange to throw an additional huge amount of money at a project. I am not decrying the need for the project; I am just wondering about the timing of it and how those costs are going to be contained. We know that we still have a booming construction industry in home building, mine sites and other matters throughout the state. There are many projects still on the go, many yet to be completed and many that have been promised but are yet to be started. At the same time, the government is predicting that it is going to be able to do this project within 18 months and keep it within costs, when the government itself had to double the price that it put on the bridge over the Swan River in the Perth City. That went from \$50 million to \$100 million on the basis of cost escalation in a few months. We are now talking about a year or two down the track.

We know what is happening with the price of commodities right around the world and the pressures on supply chains, shipping, labour and all the rest. However, the government is confident that it will be able to deliver this project in 18 months while the network is shut down. I must say, I admire the government's nerve to believe that that is possible. I am not sure that I would be quite so brave. My expectation is that it will be significantly longer than 18 months and will cost significantly more than the amount of money that the government has allocated at this stage, unless some huge margins have been applied within the budget.

Interestingly, I read in the newspaper today about other opportunities around the state. Although we are concentrating a huge amount of money in Metronet, which is basically a commuter service for the city of Perth, there are many other opportunities to provide necessary infrastructure right across Western Australia. The report in the newspaper today was titled "Get regions on right track" and referred to a report released by Infrastructure Australia. It states —

A shortfall of 60,000 homes, thousands of kilometres of substandard roads and unreliable internet could all be holding regional WA back.

That is not being addressed by this government at this point. The article further states —

The Infrastructure Australia report paints a picture of each region's diverse assets, growth industries and infrastructure requirements—and it doesn't always make for happy reading.

I will provide members with a copy of the report, if they would like; I am happy to print it off. It refers to many gaps in each of the regional development areas. It highlights that Western Australia needs another 19 300 affordable homes and 39 200 homes for social housing stock. There was an average wait time of 94 weeks for public housing in the midwest–Gascoyne region, which is part of the area that I represent. I tried to get some information from the Minister for Housing about housing stocks in the midwest area, and all I got was some pap that included the whole lot together, with no specific outline of what was in each of the communities that I actually wanted to know about. The report goes on to state that the goldfields–Esperance region is experiencing a housing shortage that is preventing more people moving to the area and thus is restricting the workforce. There are also 15 642 kilometres of unsealed roads, which are inadequate to service the region's biggest industries of mining and agriculture. Access to reliable internet is a major issue facing the Kimberley, with almost a quarter of small businesses unhappy with the quality of their connection. Even the Peel region is facing a water supply crisis at the moment. Many diverse problems exist right around the state.

The concentration of investment in relieving some commuter pressures in Perth is becoming perhaps a little disproportionate. We are talking about billions and billions of dollars being spent on the project. We are not opposed to Metronet, but we are asking: what happens for the rest of Western Australia's infrastructure needs? Perhaps Infrastructure WA should have a look at this document. This is a much more comprehensive report than any I have seen put together by Infrastructure WA to this point. I do not know what involvement it had in helping Infrastructure Australia do this, but I suggest that this is exactly the sort of information the government needs to use in prioritising its investments in the future, rather than jumping on the bandwagon of political expediency and trying to pander to the metropolitan area. Investment is needed throughout the whole state.

Infrastructure WA has a document called *Foundations for a stronger tomorrow*, which is the state infrastructure strategy. It is still a draft, as far as I know; I do not think it has been finalised at this point. The final version was due back in October, but I do not know what has happened to it. It states, for instance, that there needs to be a statewide transport strategy and statewide strategic transport planning —

... developing a new 20-year+ regional transport plan, including a focus on freight supply chains across all modes and across all regions outside of Perth and Peel. This should build upon recent region-specific freight plans and also consider strategic cross-regional issues;

It goes on to say exactly what I have been saying—that we should be looking wider than just at the commuter traffic in Perth for the main expenditure in the transport area. There needs to be a wider view.

The current situation with supply chains is dire. The recent closure of the rail line to the eastern states shows just how fragile our connection to the rest of the world is. We need to strengthen our supply chains right across the state and develop multiple ways of getting products in and out of the state. I know the minister has formed a task force to look at coastal shipping. I see that as being a bit of a sop to the maritime union. It does not appear to be looking at the whole issue of supply chains. That is what we need to be looking at. The trucking industry, for instance, is facing a great deal of difficulty in attracting fresh drivers. There is a great shortage of drivers and a huge amount of pressure on the industry. This is not necessarily related to COVID; it is a long-term trend. The average age of truck drivers is well into the 50s, and there are not enough young people coming into the industry to keep it on the road.

We have seen how having one slender train line into Western Australia leads to fragility, but there are other pressures on our rail freight network. The sheer volume and the narrowness of the Avon Valley section of the east–west rail link is an issue. There is nowhere to unload goods from a train; there is no intermodal transfer facility in which freight can be unloaded from the train and put onto trucks for local distribution from there. As we saw when the east–west line was down, the section from Port Augusta across to Kalgoorlie was the longest haul. If there were more intermodal facilities along that section of track, not only would there be opportunities to service communities from there, but also, in the event of a closure, products could be moved by road in a much more efficient manner. For instance, if there were three or four such places between Perth and Kalgoorlie, it would mean that if there was a fire or an accident or something had happened to the rail link, goods could be feasibly moved by road and placed straight back onto rail to continue their journey.

Those are the types of things that need to be looked at, not just the idea that we will buy a fleet of ships as the answer to our freight needs. I am not saying that shipping is not part of it; it could well be part of the strategy, but there needs to be a much wider focus than this government has at the moment. It tends to grab onto one solution and does not look at things in a holistic fashion to try to ensure that it is curing the problem rather than just making a nice headline and an announcement so that it can have another ribbon to cut in a few years' time.

I am afraid that members in the southern metropolitan area will not be cutting ribbons for any of the Armadale line expansions before the next election. I think that they will be dealing with a lot of angry people who will be wondering why they cannot get to work in the morning, why they cannot get their kids to school and why the project is delayed, with no light at the end of the tunnel for completion of the project. That will play out in the next election and will demonstrate quite clearly the failure of this government to deliver projects. It is very good at starting projects, it is very good at making announcements, and it is very good at making funding announcements and, to be fair, it has been reasonably successful in getting money from Canberra, but very much so with the cooperation of the coalition government and its support for Western Australia. It is relying on the state government to determine what are the key projects and it is trying to support the state in those projects. I urge the government to look a bit wider in the future and consider the range of opportunities and needs that exist in our state to ensure that not just the commuter traffic in Perth, but also the wider interests of Western Australia, are served better than they are being served by this government at the moment.

DR J. KRISHNAN (Riverton) [12.30 pm]: I rise in support of the Railway (METRONET) Amendment Bill 2022. I thank you, Acting Speaker, for the opportunity to make a short contribution. It is routine for me to go through my diary and prepare in advance for my appointments. When I saw that one of the appointments booked in my diary was with Veer and Mehar Sareen, it rang a bell. I had met those two kids during my recent visit to the Scout group in Bull Creek. I was surprised that a nine-year-old and a seven-year-old sought an appointment with me and I queried what the appointment was about. I was told by my staff that they wanted to speak about public transport. I was very surprised, and I was looking forward to that meeting. In that meeting, the two kids gave me a presentation. They wanted to run a treasure hunt in the Perth CBD encouraging kids to use, with their parents' assistance, public transport and promoting the use of public transport. I was so happy with that idea that to encourage the kids I even went to the Minister for Transport, who kindly agreed to meet the kids in the future to encourage such things. Public transport is important for the next generation, and that is what the McGowan government is doing by investing in the next generation's infrastructure.

When the Deputy Leader of the Opposition started his contribution before mine, he made a clear statement that the opposition would support this bill. I was pleased to hear that. However, after sitting through his contribution of close to 47 minutes, I am keen to go home tonight and read *Hansard*, line by line, to see even one positive sentence of contribution towards this project.

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I will check *Hansard*. I am willing to check *Hansard* because all I heard was negativity and negativity about the project and all the complaints. I am not sure whether the Deputy Leader of the Opposition is

an astrologer and is predicting that the project will not be completed, people will be unhappy and we will be in trouble before the next election.

Recently, I read an article that stated that one passenger train helps to remove 500 cars from the roads. It is obvious that this government, under the current transport minister, who has delivered many projects and who is keen on delivering more projects for the next generation, has introduced this bill to invest in the transformation of the 129-year-old Armadale line through three significant Metronet projects. What are the three projects? The first is the Victoria Park–Canning level crossing removal project; the second is the Byford rail extension; and the third is the Thornlie–Cockburn Link project. Let us consider them one by one.

First, I will address the Victoria Park–Canning level crossing removal project. In summary, this project will remove five level crossings. What does it mean to remove a level crossing? It improves the transport efficiency of people using that road. It improves the travel time for people crossing without hurdles and gates. More importantly, for pedestrians and cyclists, it improves their safety to a different level. That is what this government is investing in. That is what this bill is about. The five level crossings that will be removed in the Victoria Park–Canning level crossing project are Mint Street, Oats Street, Welshpool Road, Hamilton Street and Wharf Street. People are looking forward to these level crossings being removed to make their transport more efficient and improve their safety on the roads. There will be four new elevated stations under this project—namely, Carlisle, Oats Street, Queens Park and Cannington. In this process, Welshpool station will be closed due to its close proximity to the Oats Street station. Another benefit to the community of this project is that those elevated stations will create an expanse of about six hectares for public common use.

The second project is the Byford rail extension. I can relate to this personally because my first move to Australia was from London to Byford. The kids had to change school, I had to change jobs and we had to move countries. Amidst all those changes, another major change was that I did not own a car when I was in London; I relied on public transport. However, that was not a possibility when I came to Byford. I had to rely on private transport, and that put pressure on the family to quickly save up to buy a car. I am very pleased that one of the projects under this bill is the Byford rail extension. Part of the project will be a modern, elevated train station in Armadale—an investment for the future. Another part of the project is that a further three level crossings will be removed, at Armadale Road, Forrest Road and Church Avenue. That rail extension will go for about eight kilometres to Byford, with a brand new train station in Byford.

I can remember the days I was commuting in busy traffic around five o'clock from Byford to the CBD to participate in the teaching program I was engaged in. I remember finishing the class between 8.30 pm and 9.00 pm and travelling back to Byford. Both during traffic and without traffic, the time taken to commute between Byford and the CBD was, on average, an hour to an hour and a half. With this direct Byford extension, the residents of Byford are going to benefit by being able to reach the CBD in approximately 42 minutes. What a big blessing! What a big development! What a big investment into the future! There is no doubt that we should be carrying on with many more projects like this.

Coming to the third project dealt with by this bill, the Thornlie–Cockburn Link will be the first east–west rail connection. Significant works are going to be undertaken on the Kenwick tunnel and the duplication of the rail line between Beckenham Junction and Thornlie stations. This project is anticipated to be operational by the end of 2024. We are very confident that the McGowan government and the current Minister for Transport will deliver the project on time for the benefit of the people. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition was predicting, even before the project has started, what is going to happen in 2024—that it is not going to be completed and people are going to be unhappy. There is a lot of negativity rather than being optimistic about the project being completed. The people of Western Australia know which government is delivering for them. The people of Western Australia know what the benefits are going to be for them in the future.

On the shutdown, I am aware that there were two options: one was to go for an 18-month shutdown to complete the project and the other was to have shorter shutdowns, leading to a longer duration to complete the project. Passenger surveys and community consultation were done and the preferred option was to go for the 18-month shutdown to complete the project so that everyone can plan how to run things for those 18 months rather than having a two-month shutdown and then a two-and-a-half-month shutdown and the project time being elongated for five or six years. Alternative modes of transport have been carefully considered. This has been done much earlier than the commencement of the project so that people and families can plan their transport options.

The other important reason for the consideration of a one-time shutdown is so that the construction workers will have a greenfield area to work on, which is a much safer option compared with the second option. Careful consideration was given to replacement services, focusing particularly on schoolkids getting to school without much interruption. Bus services are planned between Armadale and Cannington and between Cannington and the CBD, and new services will be added to link the Armadale and Mandurah lines and to connect to Cockburn station and the airport line.

There is a contingency plan. There is adequate notice for the people. The people are aware that this is an investment into the future for the next generation. There will be many added benefits to it. I seek the support of every member in this house for the bill. I commend the bill to the house. I thank you for the opportunity, Madam Acting Speaker.

MR S.A. MILLMAN (Mount Lawley — Parliamentary Secretary) [12.44 pm]: I rise to make a brief contribution in the time before lunch in support of the excellent Railway (METRONET) Amendment Bill 2022. I start my contribution by thanking the Deputy Leader of the Opposition for expressing the opposition's support for this bill. Have I got that right? Deputy Leader of the Opposition, is the opposition supporting this bill?

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: I am happy to take the interjection, just as a point of clarity.

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: The opposition is not opposing it—excellent. I just wanted to get that right —

A member interjected.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: I was surprised at the contribution from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition about the opposition not opposing the bill. He made the point in his contribution that the commonwealth coalition government has made significant contributions.

A member interjected.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: It is running ads on Metronet! I thought: if only our local Liberal and National Parties had the same enthusiasm for these nation-building projects that the commonwealth government has, we would not have a situation in which we have a halfway house with the WA state opposition saying, “We don't really want to commit; we're fearful of committing. We don't want to get up there and say that this is a fantastic project and we recognise that there is going to be disruption and that there is going to be a whole lot of hard work, but, in the long run, these are sacrifices that we need to make.” A bit of hard work is its own reward. It is a sentiment that I thought would be supported by members on the opposition benches.

A member interjected.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: This is the problem, minister. When we look at the inquiry into the Liberal Party after the last state election, we find that it did no hard work. It seems as though the hard work that these politicians do not want to do is the same hard work that they do not want the government to do. They do not want us to do the hard and necessary work to deliver twenty-first century public transport infrastructure that will benefit the entire community.

A member interjected.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: You are never going to get the reward unless you put in the hard work.

People might be interested to see me, as the member for Mount Lawley, making a contribution on a bill that will affect predominantly people throughout the southern suburbs. I have a couple of detractors in my community who say to me that Mount Lawley will not benefit from any Metronet projects because nothing is being built in the electorate of Mount Lawley.

A member interjected.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: Member, we are ideally located close to the CBD.

A member interjected.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: Member, no. The situation is that there is already extremely effective public transport infrastructure within the seat of Mount Lawley. This is where I am different from the “MetroNats” and the sectarian National Party, which always wants to set up a divide between regional and metropolitan members of the community. I say that the whole of Western Australia should benefit from the sort of outstanding public transport system that we have in Mount Lawley. As a Mount Lawley resident, from the outside looking in, I can see exactly what sort of benefit this legislation and this particular project will deliver. The member for Riverton has already gone through in some great detail the particular aspects of the legislation that will deliver those elements of the project.

I want to take issue with the point that is raised by the detractors in the electorate of Mount Lawley about us having no beneficial Metronet projects. Picture, if you will, the geography of metropolitan Perth and those suburbs along Wanneroo Road up towards Yanchep and Gnangara and the northern coastal suburbs and then imagine an arc that stretches from those suburbs all the way around past the Gnangara pine plantation, Ellenbrook and Midland and out to Giddegannup. A vehicle commuter driving to the CBD from any one of those suburbs in the whole north-eastern spectrum of the compass will be clogging up and congesting the streets of the Mount Lawley electorate. Whether they are driving along Wanneroo Road, Alexander Drive or Beaufort Street, or along Great Eastern Highway, Great Northern Highway and Guildford Road, this is traffic that is coming into the CBD. Then what happens is that we get problems like we have at Swan Street in Yokine, where drivers who are coming off Wanneroo Road and Morley Drive seek to rat run through the streets in our local neighbourhood. While parents are trying to get kids

to school safely and senior citizens are trying to get to the community centre, we have people flying through because there is such accentuated congestion in Mount Lawley.

I say to those detractors in Mount Lawley that numerous Metronet projects will deliver benefits for the people of Mount Lawley. By taking cars off the road and extending the train line to Yanchep —

Several members interjected.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: The trouble with the Nats is they do not know whether they support or oppose this.

Several members interjected.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: They know the western suburbs. That is why the minister's new CAT bus service is such a revelation for them, servicing all those western suburbs.

Metronet will take cars off the road from Wanneroo Road to Yanchep and all the way around to Gidgegannup; that is a massive arc that I am sure captures a significant proportion of the member for Moore's electorate. We have the extension of the railway line to Ellenbrook. Thousands of commuters at the moment, exactly as the member for Riverton said, have no other option.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 1113.]