

GREYHOUND AUSTRALIA BUS SERVICE, PERTH–BROOME

234. Hon KEN TRAVERS to the Minister for Transport:

I refer to the minister's undertaking, given on 22 April 2010, that he and his department would work with Greyhound as a matter of priority to maintain a Perth–Broome bus service.

- (1) What is the Public Transport Authority's current progress on finding a solution for this issue?
- (2) What is the current time line to make a final decision on this issue?
- (3) Is the minister aware of Greyhound's intention to further reduce services on this route unless government assistance is urgently provided? I understand that Greyhound means "urgent".
- (4) Does the minister agree that any cancellation of this service will be a disaster for communities along this route?

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN replied:

I thank the honourable member for notice of his question. Firstly, I am not sure if, frankly, my response to the motion on 22 April was accurately conveyed in the preamble to his question just now—but no matter. I provide the following information.

- (1) As I have previously advised the house, the Public Transport Authority is seeking to work constructively with Greyhound Australia to analyse the information provided by it. The Public Transport Authority has now analysed the data provided by Greyhound services and has made a recommendation to government for its consideration. This data indicates that if Greyhound were to offer a three-day-a-week service to Broome, and taking into account reduced fleet requirements and the subsequent reductions in charges that would eventuate, with no loss of patronage, the service would be profitable. That is, they do not need to hold a gun at our heads with a demand for \$650 000, aided and abetted by the Australian Labor Party.

Greyhound services approached the former government with a similar request, and Hon Ken Travers was possibly the parliamentary secretary at that time. In any case, the previous government also did not accede to the provision of subsidies.

- (2) Given the information I have provided, the government is not prepared to use taxpayers' money to subsidise Greyhound services' operational costs.
- (3) Yes; initially Greyhound wrote, on 19 March 2010, that it was reducing the number of services it operates on its Perth–Broome route from five days a week to four days a week, with effect from March 2010. Greyhound also advised that over the next three months—which I would have thought would have taken it through to June—it would assess the demand for the revised service, and unless it was shown to be viable it may have to terminate the service altogether. It was then that Greyhound requested government assistance of \$650 000 per annum to avert this outcome.

I understand that on 11 May 2010, Greyhound services wrote to the government via the internet address wa-government@dpc.gov.au, and addressed the email to me. It advised that unless the government indicated that it would provide funding support by 19 May 2010, it would suspend services altogether. That is what I mean by Greyhound trying to hold a gun to our heads.

Hon Ken Travers: Hang on! It's a private company! It's not a gun; they're just telling you what they're going to do; and are you going to respond?

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: That is exactly what is happening.

Hon Ken Travers: The answer is: you don't care about the regions!

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: That is exactly what is happening, Mr President. It is part of a campaign that, I think, shows quite extraordinary behaviour on the behalf of Greyhound services, which has purported to write to this minister —

Hon Ken Travers: What an outrageous attack on a private company!

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon Sue Ellery: Let him finish!

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: — when in fact it has refused to respond to the repeated attempts by my ministerial office to respond and engage in conversation.

Hon Ken Travers: You wouldn't even meet with them!

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: A letter was sent to the PTA on 28 April 2010—to the PTA, Mr President, not to me—that was also CC-ed to Hon Ken Travers, MLC. Interestingly, Greyhound services did not provide me with the same courtesy of a CC-ed copy advising me that blackmail was being attempted upon us.

Hon Sue Ellery: My goodness me!

Hon Ken Travers: Say that outside the chamber!

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: All efforts by my ministerial office to make contact with Mr Robert Thomas, chief executive officer of Greyhound services, have gone unheeded, as, I understand, have attempts by the office of Hon Ken Baston, MLC, in Broome. There is plenty more to this situation if the honourable member wants to continue to pursue this quite unlikely course of action that he has proposed. I will conclude my answer.

- (4) The importance of the service is acknowledged. In the event that Greyhound makes a business decision to withdraw this service, the government will examine alternative service provision. To this end, any delivery of service would be tendered out under State Supply Commission Act requirements.