

PORT OF FREMANTLE - RAIL USAGE

430. Mr P. PAPALIA to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure:

Can the minister advise on the improvement in rail's performance into the Fremantle port since Labor has taken office?

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN replied:

I thank the member for the question. When we came into government, rail usage into the Fremantle port had declined to a quite appalling two per cent of the total number of boxes. We were down to one train a day, with a total of about 11 000 boxes going out on rail each year. Quite clearly, that was an unviable situation. At that rate the rail would have closed down within a few years and put that volume of rail traffic back onto road. We made a commitment to improve that. Whilst we recognise that a lot more work needs to be done and this is a work in progress, since 2002 we have been able to increase that usage. Close to 12 per cent of the boxes that are coming into Fremantle are now coming in on rail. That provides benefit in a raft of ways. It ensures that the rail infrastructure has critical mass that gives it the chance of surviving into the long term. It also reduces congestion on the roads and at Fremantle Ports. It has been a very significant achievement. To ensure that we reach the desired percentages for metropolitan freight, we have provided a subsidy to certain metropolitan freight to get it onto the rail. Last year that cost about \$650 000.

I can compare what the government has done with the opposition's plan for managing freight in and out of the port, which supposedly included a plan to build the Fremantle eastern bypass and Roe Highway stage 8. All it did was put lines on the metropolitan region scheme. It did not actually do anything to build it. The then Premier, Richard Court, was wont to say that the Liberals would build the Fremantle eastern bypass when there was community consensus. Basically, that meant that they were never going to build it. There was no effective plan. Even if the coalition intended to build the roads - it took no steps to do so in eight years - the total cost to build Roe Highway stage 8 and the Fremantle eastern bypass would have been \$360 million. In interest terms alone, that equates to about \$14 million each year to manage that freight task and provide a transport network that will be overtaken by 2015. This government has provided a very enlightened response. We have been able to ensure that the existing rail infrastructure in which the community has invested is functioning and making an increasing contribution to the management of traffic in and out of Fremantle Ports.