

**GREYHOUND AUSTRALIA BUS SERVICE, PERTH–BROOME**

*Motion*

**HON KEN TRAVERS (North Metropolitan)** [10.14 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house calls on the Liberal–National government to take immediate action to ensure that the Greyhound bus service between Perth and Broome continues to operate on a regular basis to service the people living in the state's north west.

It is important that this issue is raised in the house today because this service provides the spine throughout the north of the state through which people can travel between towns across Western Australia. As background, Greyhound Australia buses have been in operation for some 104 years across Australia, providing an important linkage between our regional centres. The Western Australian routes have been an important part of its overall network. It employs people in Perth but also provides employment and supports employment across regional Western Australia. To date, Greyhound has done that without government subsidies. The route is probably one of the longest commercial routes in the world. It travels from Perth to Broome, and then a service goes on from Broome to Darwin, which I might add is not at risk at this stage due to the underpinning of an Australia Post contract.

Until about two years ago this route was a profitable service for Greyhound buses and it was able to operate it without any support. Greyhound had never sought support from government. But over the past couple of years there has been an increase in the number of people using aircraft to fly between many of the destinations along the route. That does not help everybody because there are people who live between the towns and cities that have airports and who need to get to those locations, and there are many people for whom, for one reason or another, whether it be a medical condition such as the risk of deep vein thrombosis or a fear of flying, flying is not an option, and for whom the bus service is their only means of getting from Perth to the regional centres and also of travelling between regional centres across the state of Western Australia.

The changes in the movement of passengers and freight over the past couple of years have put immense pressure on this service. Greyhound Australia has been running the service at a substantial loss of somewhere in the order of \$600 000 to \$800 000 per annum. I congratulate and support Greyhound for continuing to try to make this service operate. It is not ready to give up and walk away from the service. It wants to do whatever it can to maintain the service and to continue with this route.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! There are about half a dozen very audible conversations around the chamber. If it is absolutely urgent that members have a conversation of such audibility, I suggest that they use the corridor.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** As I was saying, Greyhound is not ready to walk away. It will do whatever it can to try to retain this service. However, as a public company, there is a point at which it can no longer sustain losses and maintain the service. Two years ago Greyhound was operating the service seven days a week. Since that time the service has been reduced to five days, and as of 27 March it was reduced to four days a week. Interestingly, that makes it logistically more difficult for the Greyhound service, because with a seven-day-a-week service, drivers can travel up on the bus overnight and then get the bus back in the other direction to return to where they are based. Once a service goes to four days a week, more drivers have to be carried on the buses, because the ability to go back and forth on a daily basis is removed. It makes it a difficult logistical exercise for the company, but Greyhound has not walked away, and has continued to try to maintain the service.

Some 18 months ago Greyhound went to the government and explained the problem it was facing and sought assistance from the government to try to maintain the service. At that stage, Greyhound representatives were not able to meet with the minister and were instructed to meet with bureaucrats from the department, at which point they were asked to hand over a range of confidential information to the department. Greyhound was reluctant to do that unless the department was prepared to sign a confidentiality agreement about the use of that data, because the company did not want to see that data used by the government to support another service, which I think is not an unreasonable position. The government was not prepared to sign a confidentiality agreement at that stage so there was no agreement. The service continued and Greyhound has continued to try to make the service work by reducing the number of days it was available over the past 18 months. We are now at the point whereby the service has been reduced to four days a week and if that measure is not successful, Greyhound will withdraw for economic reasons. It understands that once a company withdraws from a service like this, trying to get it re-established is very difficult. Like many things in life, if we can continue to have a service operate it is far easier to maintain it than it is to re-establish it from scratch and put in place all the infrastructure and underlying assistance required for a service of this nature.

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I am sure that some of my colleagues, if they get the opportunity, will emphasise how important this service is for many people across regional Western Australia. The backpacker market helps underpin the service, but unfortunately it is a very seasonal market from about April to September each year. It is a very important service for Indigenous people, medical passengers and is also used quite heavily by pensioners as part of their annual holidays. It is a very important service for people who travel between towns in regional Western Australia. In WA it is very easy to get flights from Perth to Broome, Karratha or Carnarvon, but it is a lot harder to move from Geraldton to Carnarvon, Shark Bay to Exmouth or Exmouth to Broome. There are some limited flight services across regional Western Australia but in many instances it might be a once-a-week service, say, from Exmouth to Broome—not a particularly efficient and effective service for people who want to travel. If people want to get from Broome to Port Hedland for medical assistance, they want to go down, get the medical assistance and go back within a couple of days; they do not want to be sitting around, even if there is an aircraft service, for a couple of weeks. As I say, for many people travelling for medical reasons, air travel is not possible. During the backpacker season, the bus service is heavily used by backpackers.

Is there a solution to this problem? Yes there is. The Queensland government provides support to its transport operators that provide similar services on the basis of a five per cent return on the cost of the service. A similar subsidy in Western Australia would cost about \$650 000 a year. That does not seem unreasonable to me and I think we should support this company with a \$650 000 subsidy because it has tried to stick in there and do the right thing by regional Western Australia and the people of the north west. I have heard National Party members—I hope they will support me on this motion—talk about it in relation to royalties for regions and compare it with public transport expenditure in the Perth metropolitan area. I am not sure whether the figures that the Nationals often quote are right, but the general principle is right; namely, that people in regional Western Australia should be entitled to subsidised public transport. It will be different from the sort of public transport we provide in the Perth metropolitan area; in regional Western Australia it is often about interregional services, as opposed to the commuter services we have in Perth. The major regional centres of Western Australia all have town bus services that are supported by the government.

**Hon Col Holt:** How many people use this service?

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** It has been reducing, but I am happy to go through some of these towns and how many people over the past 12 months have got on and off those services. At the end of the day, I think the important thing is that if people want to get from a remote location in regional Western Australia to their nearest major centre, even if they then catch a flight, how else could they do it if they did not have this service? Therefore, if the member is asking whether there is a threshold at which point we provide this service, I guess the question is —

**Hon Col Holt** interjected.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Over the past 12 months it was something in the order of about 12 000 people, as I understand it, but I might stand corrected on that. As I say, that is after the usage dropped off heavily from what it used to be. However, I will come back to that point.

We have heard arguments in the past to justify the royalties for regions program. I do not necessarily think we should debate issues from the perspective of setting one section of our community up against another; I am more than happy to argue in support that people in regional Western Australia should have access to proper facilities. However, in light of comments National Party members have made in the past, I hope that they will be very supportive of funding for a service like this because it is essential transport infrastructure, as the public transport system in Perth is, as the school bus services that operate across Western Australia are and as the town bus services that operate in regional centres of Western Australia are. Therefore, there is a solution; namely, to apply the same sort of support to this service as that provided to maintain and operate bus services of this nature in Queensland. As I said, my view is that we should support Greyhound because it has done the right thing by regional Western Australians over the past couple of years when it was taking a loss but continued to provide this service.

I find it very sad that this company has for about two years sought to try to talk to this Western Australian state government about this service and to try to get its support and assistance to maintain this very, very important service for regional Western Australia. As I said, 18 months ago Greyhound was told that it could not meet with the minister but that it needed to meet with some departmental officers, but then it could not get agreement with the departmental officers to sign a confidentiality agreement. As things have become more problematic for the company in recent times, it has gone back to the government and again sought to meet with the Minister for Transport. When I got the letter from Greyhound about its circumstances, the Leader of the Opposition and I ensured that our offices were immediately in contact and we sought to meet with Greyhound, which we did via phone hook-up because its management is based in Queensland. We allowed Greyhound to put its case to us as

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an opposition and we listened to its concerns. Unfortunately, that is different from the response Greyhound received from the Minister for Transport's office on this matter when it approached the minister. In fairness to the company I think it approached the matter in the right way; it went to the government and asked for help and when it could not break the walls of the government, it came to the opposition and asked us for help to break down the walls of government to try to get some support for this important service. Greyhound was told by the Minister for Transport's office that there was no capacity in the minister's diary for a meeting. I cannot believe that the Minister for Transport has no capacity to meet with a company that for years has provided a service to Western Australia and for the past two years has provided a service that has cost it money to continue to do the right thing by regional Western Australians. That service is now in peril and likely to be disbanded, leaving people in many communities across regional Western Australia without any transport system out of those communities, yet the minister will not make time to meet with the company. I must say that is a disgrace. However, I hope that as a result of this motion and bringing this issue to the attention of members in this house, pressure will come to bear on the government to sit with this company and find a solution so that the people of regional Western Australia continue to have this important service.

I have a few minutes left so for the benefit of members I will go through some of the towns that have this service. I want members to imagine that they live in those communities and think about how they would get to medical appointments and visit other parts of the state if this service were disbanded. I will start in Broome and work my way back. The service stops at Roebuck Plains Roadhouse but has had only very limited patronage there. The Bidyadanga Aboriginal Community is about 200 kilometres south of Broome. Some 76 people have been picked up from there and 119 people have been dropped off there over the past 12 months. It is not a huge number of people but what alternative do they have? Sixty-four passengers were picked up and dropped off at Pardoo Roadhouse and 25 from Sandfire Roadhouse, which is 390 kilometres south of Broome. The figures to which I refer span an 11-month period. Keep in mind the 195 passengers from the Bidyadanga Aboriginal Community who head to Hedland, Broome or Perth. There are numerous other towns and communities along the way, including Roebourne, the Pannawonica turn-off, and Onslow. The bus route services that whole area. I congratulate Greyhound Australia on continuing to run and support services that pick up passengers from the highway and take them into communities such as Shark Bay and Onslow.

**Hon Col Holt:** Can you table that paper?

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** It was provided to me by the company. I am not sure that I want to table it, but I am happy to give the member a copy. I do not think that the company would have a problem with me providing it to members, but I am not sure that I would feel comfortable tabling it. I am happy for members to look at these figures and I do not believe that the company would have a problem with that because it highlights the importance of the service, which goes to places such as the Overlander Roadhouse and Billabong. It is important to provide a service to Shark Bay, Kalbarri, the Overlander Roadhouse and Onslow. I have it the wrong way around.

**Hon Norman Moore** interjected.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** All right. Greyhound has been making a loss on providing a pick-up service from the highway to go into a number of communities that sit off the highway in order to provide an integrated transport system. I hope that we can get complete agreement that this is an important service for regional Western Australians right through the agricultural and north west regions. If Western Australia were to lose this service, it would be an absolute disaster for the people who want to move between those communities and Perth. I hope that the government can come up with a solution that will maintain the system. We can look at the Queensland model. A five per cent return on the investment is not unreasonable. If Greyhound is making a loss in Western Australia but it can take its assets and get a five per cent return on its cost for the assets as opposed to a loss, what do members think it should do? No-one in this chamber who has run a private company would even question what they would do if it were their business. They would place the assets in Queensland where they would get a five per cent return on their costs. That is not an unreasonable return and would provide support to a company that has supported Western Australia. That is an appropriate course of action for the government. I hope that members will join with the opposition in calling on the government to do that. As a result of this debate, I hope that the minister will instruct his office to make time to meet with the company and to work through these issues. I would like to see it return to a seven-day-a-week service. It is not unreasonable to provide transportation for the people who live in those communities so that they can move between those communities on a daily basis. That would help provide some of the equity that I believe was the underpinning of the royalties for regions program, which was to provide equity across Western Australia regarding to access for services. This is an important underpinning of that. I hope that we can get unanimous agreement in the chamber that this is an important service that the government must support. Let us not let it drop off and try to re-establish it, because

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that will be harder to do. Let us be proactive and find the solution that is required to ensure that regional Western Australians have access between their communities and across the state.

**HON HELEN BULLOCK (Mining and Pastoral)** [10.35 am]: I have suggested to people that if they want to go to Kalgoorlie, they should catch a bus there and take the train back. I just found out this morning that the bus service to Kalgoorlie was cancelled two years ago. I think it was a good decision to keep the train because it provides a good service. I am sure that the bus service was the same and also was comfortable. The scenery is different when travelling by bus than it is when travelling by train. I am sure that members are sick of seeing miles and miles of grape vines and would like to see something different for a change, such as red earth. Members should not think about it in that way; they should think about the iron ore or the gold. If they are lucky, members might see golden nuggets glittering in the sunlight in the far distance beyond their reach. I am very lucky that I can catch the train to Kalgoorlie, which I did, and that I can also fly to Kalgoorlie. Hon Ken Baston, who unfortunately is not here, will soon not have the option to catch the bus to Broome.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** It is a pity that he is not here to tell us if he regularly catches the 34-hour bus ride from Broome to Perth.

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** I am sure that he has enjoyed the ride before. I am sure that it is much cheaper to catch the bus to Broome compared with flying.

Perhaps Hon Ken Baston could be an advocate for Greyhound to keep the bus service going. He is not the only person in a position to advocate on this issue. The National Party should also be an advocate to help keep these bus services running to Broome.

**Hon Max Trenorden:** We have been doing that for 20 years. Who got the *AvonLink* going?

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** I think it is a great opportunity for the National Party to take a lead on this issue. How much does it cost to subsidise the Greyhound bus service from Perth to Broome? Is it about \$500 000, \$1 million or \$2 million? I have a good idea. Members recently received an email from the National Party about the forthcoming auction of the 80 precious plastic cows for CowParade. The total cost of those cows—the President is in the Chair and therefore cannot say anything!—is about \$200 000. It is estimated that they will fetch at least \$2 million at the auction. What will the National Party do with that \$2 million? It should make good use of it and subsidise the Greyhound bus line. It does not even need \$2 million. It needs only \$500 000 or \$1 million.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, members! One person at a time, please!

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** The National Party might even be able to negotiate with the Greyhound bus suppliers and ask them to put a “Royalties for Regions” logo on their buses! I am sure that if the National Party were to contribute to Greyhound all of the \$2 million that it expects to generate from the auction, Greyhound would not mind changing its name! Think about it! An amount of \$2 million is a really good price to pay for a change of name. The government spent \$40 million on changing the name of the telecentres that operate across the regions in Western Australia. What has been achieved by that change of name?

**Hon Max Trenorden:** Tell us about what you did to Western Power!

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** Hon Max Trenorden should just listen.

**Hon Max Trenorden:** You destroyed it! That’s what you did!

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** I say to the Minister for Transport that this is just an idea for this year’s funding. I have an even better idea for future funding. I reckon one of us should retire from this chamber and set up a business to manufacture plastic cows! So long as there is one National Party member in this chamber, the success of that business will be guaranteed. He will not even have to go out and find orders. The orders will be there, if he can negotiate with the National Party members, because they have plenty of money to throw around, I am sure!

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** There are plenty of bull producers on that side already. We do not need cow producers as well.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! I am reading this motion, and I note that it refers to the Greyhound bus service.

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** It is about the Greyhound bus service, Mr President. We are talking about subsidies. We are talking about funding for the Greyhound bus service. I am sure that Hon Ken Travers will be able to think of a new name, just in case the National Party does want to change the name. What about putting the logo “Disloyalty for Regions” on those Greyhound buses? That would be great!

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We are talking about funding. It may appear that I am changing the subject, but I am not. I will come back to the Greyhound bus service in a moment, if the President will give me a few minutes to talk about another matter. In the past few months, I have travelled to some of the regional towns in my electorate. The places that I have visited the most have been the telecentres. The National Party has put a lot of funding into those centres. That funding is from the royalties for regions program. These telecentres provide conference facilities, and internet and fax facilities. Sometimes they also provide training programs on how to use computers. That is great. At one of the telecentres I was told that, in the past year, its videoconference room has been used only once. I was told also that the income that was generated by one particular centre in one particular week was only \$27. It generated only a miserable \$27 in income in a week. How much did the National Party spend to set up those facilities? It spent, on average, \$100 000 to set up each centre. There are more than 100 telecentres across regional Western Australia. In some of these regional towns there are only 1 500 people, but they have a fantastic telecentre, with a videoconference room and internet and fax facilities. Hon Linda Savage's computer is out of date. She should see the computers that are provided in these telecentres. They are the most up-to-date computers that are available. Yet the income that was generated by one of the centres that I visited was only \$27 in one particular week.

I am running out of time. There are a lot of things that I want to say, but I will continue at some other time, perhaps tonight during the time set aside for members' statements. Hon Wendy Duncan asked how many people use the Greyhound bus service. What I want to know is: what is the cost and benefit calculation for supporting these telecentres?

**HON LJILJANNA RAVLICH (East Metropolitan)** [10.45 am]: Mr President —

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! If the Minister for Transport wishes to respond, I will give the minister the call. But I have to take account of members who stand in their place and seek the call. I try to be as fair and even-handed as I can be. If the minister genuinely wants to respond, I will give him the call and then come back to Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** Mr President, I want to give every member the chance to raise points with me so that I can respond to members' concerns.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Thank you, Mr President. I congratulate my learned colleague Hon Ken Travers for bringing this motion to this place, because he has raised a very important issue. This is an important issue not just in economic terms but also because of the range of areas that it impacts upon. Certainly in my shadow portfolio of tourism, transport is critical. We may have the best tourism places in the world, but if we cannot provide the means to get people to those places, the simple fact is that we will not have a tourism industry.

It is totally unrealistic to think that if the Greyhound bus service is not available, people will catch taxis to get around this huge state of Western Australia.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** There is no suggestion that people will be catching taxis.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** People might catch a taxi when they get to their destination, but, frankly, if we get rid of the Greyhound bus service, there is no way that people will be using taxis to travel such long distances.

One of the reasons that the Greyhound bus service is at risk and needs the support of the government is purely and simply that it has had to compete over time with low-cost airlines. Air fares are now cheaper than they have ever been. Consequently, it is more difficult for the bus transport system to compete. The buses are being priced out of work. However, even though the airlines provide a good service, they have a major drawback. That is that an aircraft can take a person only from the point of boarding to the point of destination. It does not stop in between those points. If the only form of travel in many parts of our state was by air, that would mean that in towns such as Gingin, Cataby, Leeman and Dongara, people would not be able to get off a bus and go into the roadhouse and buy the goods that are available from that roadhouse, and they would not buy an overnight stay so that they can visit those towns. This is a very concerning situation that is emerging, and it desperately requires government action. I am really concerned about the fact that the Minister for Transport was approached by the Greyhound people —

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** How do you know that?

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** I know that because I know lots of things. That is just one of the things I happen to know!

I am a bit disappointed that the Minister for Transport did not take the opportunity to meet with representatives from Greyhound, because the impact that this will have on the tourism sector is particularly concerning. I want

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to provide the house with an overview of how hard it is in the tourism sector at the moment. That will bring into sharp focus the importance of ensuring that a Greyhound service operates and that it operates well.

I refer members to Tourism Western Australia's data on intrastate visitor estimates. It states—

The intrastate estimates are showing the expected pattern of downturn, given the difficulties many tourism operators are experiencing in WA and the fact that the intrastate market is the largest for Western Australian tourism industry. While not all measures show the same pattern of decline ... it should be noted that the intrastate market is also predominantly self-drive, which is less easy to measure within the State.

In the last 12 months intrastate visitors travelling within WA has declined at a higher rate than the national average.

That is probably because Western Australia is a big state. I am sure that that is one of the contributing factors. The data continues —

Looking at the long term trends, WA intrastate travel is following the same pattern as nationally—a general decline in visitor numbers and after some growth in spend across 2007 and 2008, we see a recent decline.

When Western Australia's percentage change yield earnings for the year ending December 2008 are compared with those for the year ending December 2009, in terms of the spend in millions of dollars—I will give the percentage spend, because it is easier to comprehend—we see that there has been a 15 per cent reduction. Between December 2008 and December 2009 there was a decline of 11.3 per cent in visitor numbers. There has also been a 15.3 per cent decline in the number of visitor nights. That is very concerning. The tourism industry is an amalgam of small and medium-sized—and sometimes larger—businesses that together provide the services required by tourists when they reach their destinations. They generate the flow of money or income within regional communities, which are a part of the state community and, broadly—if we take it to a larger scale—contribute to the gross state product. Quite frankly, with those sorts of trends, we can only be concerned. Greyhound buses are the key means by which tourists are transported around the state and to regional destinations. There is no doubt that regional communities will be adversely impacted by a decision by Greyhound to withdraw the service that it currently provides. To provide an idea of the route from Perth to Broome, Greyhound buses travel through Geraldton, Kalbarri, Monkey Mia, Carnarvon, Coral Bay, Exmouth and Port Hedland. Quite clearly each of those communities, and the smaller communities on the way, receives a major economic benefit when Greyhound buses bring tourists to their towns. The withdrawal of such services will have a significant economic impact on regional communities. There could also be a loss of jobs in those communities. There is no doubt in my mind that the latest publicly available figures on tourism numbers and intrastate tourism, which makes up the biggest part of the tourism sector, reveal that Western Australian tourism is in trouble. We are constantly told that tourism in Western Australia is doing brilliantly. However, if we compare the percentage of Western Australia's spend with the percentage of national spend, we are considerably worse off. For example, the national spend is minus 7.1 per cent. Western Australia's spend has declined to minus 15 per cent. Nationally there has been a decline of 6.4 per cent in visitor numbers. In Western Australia, the number of intrastate visitors is down by 11.3 per cent. The figure for the number of nights stayed has declined by 5.8 per cent nationally compared with 15.3 per cent in Western Australia. One does not have to be a rocket scientist to know that Western Australia is in trouble.

**HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan — Minister for Transport)** [10.57 am]: The house is considering a motion that relates to Greyhound Australia, which runs a coastal bus route between Perth and Broome, calling into many centres along the way. The Labor Party is calling on the Liberal-National government to take immediate action to ensure that that service continues to operate on a regular basis. Its proposal is that we acquiesce to a request for funding by way of a subsidy. In his opening remarks the mover of the motion, Hon Ken Travers, indicated that Greyhound had never asked for a subsidy for the route. However, later in his speech he indicated that it had and that it had been knocked back. The facts of the matter are these: two years ago, during the time of the Labor government, Greyhound sought assistance to maintain a daily service. That support was not forthcoming. Its service was reduced from seven to five days a week. On 24 March 2010, I received a letter at my ministerial office from Greyhound Australia's chief executive officer, Mr Robert Thomas, from Eagle Farm in Queensland. I presume that that is the headquarters of Greyhound Australia. The letter informed me that patronage of the service had fallen by 14 per cent and that Greyhound would reduce the service to four days a week unless it received a subsidy from the government. It also indicated that it would monitor the situation and that it may withdraw services by 30 June 2010. The letter indicates that Greyhound wants a subsidy of \$650 000 a year from the government. It also seeks an urgent meeting with me to discuss the Perth to Broome service. The following action has been taken: upon receipt of the letter, my office sought to

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arrange a meeting with Greyhound. It has not responded to our contact. I have further requested that the Public Transport Authority make contact with Greyhound. The PTA has undertaken to do that to seek the necessary information to enable a request for subsidy support to be properly assessed. That information would include monthly average passenger point-to-point statistics, fare structure, kilometres travelled, drivers' hourly rate and the monthly average profit or loss per trip. That is because the Public Transport Authority is not in the habit of handing out subsidies to service providers. Those are a consideration for government. However, if the PTA is going to advise us about whether we should invest taxpayers' money in a private operation—we do, in many, all the time—we need to do so on the basis of proper assessment, not because someone demands it.

The service provided by Greyhound is a valuable service to the coastal communities that have been referred to. That is not a point that needs to be stressed by the opposition to the government. That is recognised. The government would like Greyhound and, indeed, other service providers to continue to provide the services that they do, wherever it may be, that are to the benefit and for the convenience of the people of Western Australia. That is what the government is all about. That is why we take this matter seriously, and that is why we have sought to respond directly to Greyhound, but it is Greyhound that simply will not talk to us.

We have already heard from Hon Ken Travers that in a previous meeting between Greyhound and the PTA seeking a similar outcome, Greyhound in fact declined to provide the basic information that is provided by other subsidy applicants or recipients. Yes, it is commercial information, but it is the sort of information that is provided by airlines that receive subsidies and airlines which do not receive subsidies but which have a licence to fly regular passenger transport routes. It is information that is provided by a coastal shipping operator. It is sensitive, detailed, commercial information. Why? Because it is taxpayers' money and the government has a responsibility to ensure that there is a proper assessment of value when taxpayers' money is given out as subsidies.

Having clarified that, I will place a few other items on the record for the interest of members. Firstly, in view of my remarks just now, if any opposition members want to persist in the suggestion that I or the government do not appreciate, on behalf of the people of Western Australia, companies such as Greyhound that provide their services, I urge them to think again. That is not the case. If there is any suggestion in the air that we do not care about the interests that have been spoken of, let me put that to bed now. We do care.

What is my own form on this matter? As I have already indicated, two years ago this same company went to the then Labor government about this same route, asking for subsidies or they would reduce services, and it was knocked back. This company has now come to me, and we have sought to engage, but it seems to prefer to not respond to us and to not have contact with me or my office, but, instead, to have phone hook-ups from Queensland with the opposition and to encourage the submissions that I have received from a number of people, either private individuals or people involved in tourism in some of the coastal locations. A lot of the communications are dated 19 April, I might add, so it is obviously a synchronised thing. It does not need to do that. I am making myself available to Greyhound, and we have been available since 24 March when we received that letter. Therefore, if Greyhound wants to come in and talk to me, or talk to my officers or talk to my agency, the door is open, and there we have it. That is the end of that. We will consider a subsidy, and that is in contrast with what Greyhound got from the previous government.

However, I have other form on this matter. Members may know that there is another service that runs from Perth to Port Hedland, up along the inland route.

**Hon Ljiljana Ravlich:** That's Transwa.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** No, it is not Transwa. I will tell the member something about Transwa in a minute because I know she is interested. However, that central route is not a key tourism route. There may be some hop-on and hop-off tourism, but it is for people who do not have access to air services, such as some of the people on the route that the member is talking about.

**Hon Ken Travers:** It fulfils a similar purpose to this route.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** It does indeed. It is not about people catching a bus from Perth to Port Hedland, by and large, although some do; it is more about people having movement between some of the intermediate points.

**Hon Ken Travers:** People go to Port Hedland and jump on this bus to Broome.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** That might be the case. However, when there was a suggestion that the Perth to Port Hedland inland bus service be withdrawn, I received hard-headed advice from my agency that basically was discouraging of trying to resuscitate that route. I said no, that route is essential; it must continue. We cannot make a very solid business case for it. There is no profit in it, and it is heavily subsidised, but it is necessary, and

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that is why that service continues. That is my record when it comes to this sort of bus service that connects remote areas in Western Australia.

I will deal with a couple of other matters that were raised. I did wait to speak about this, because I wanted to hear the submissions and the concerns of members opposite so that I could then use my one opportunity to speak to respond to them. I largely have, but there were a couple of other points raised that I will now briefly mention. I think Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich said that the removal of this service would mean that people cannot go to Gingin or Dongara. The fact is that my agency, through Transwa, does run coach services to those locations, and we could talk about some others that are on the itinerary. That is not really what we are talking about today, but I just mention that to the shadow Minister for Tourism. Perhaps the shadow spokesperson for tourism, the shadow spokesman for transport and Hon Helen Bullock, who also contributed to the debate, should put their imprint where their mouth is and go on these bus services from Perth to Port Hedland, or go on the bus service from Perth to Broome, to show their solidarity—I think “solidarity” is the word they use. That might show a bit more sincerity.

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich** interjected.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** As the honourable member now interjecting was just out of the house on urgent parliamentary business, she might like to take some of Transwa's services to some of the regional centres that she has mentioned.

The other question of cost has also arisen. Again, I accept, as I have accepted in the past and as I have demonstrated with other decisions such as the Perth to Port Hedland decision, that public transport options are important to everyone in Western Australia. I have demonstrated, through my actions and public statements, that I understand that for many people, for example, in regional and remote Western Australia, aviation is an essential form of public transport, just as much as catching the local bus might be for someone in metropolitan Perth, as a way to connect them with the essential services that they need, be that in health, education, work, family reunions or whatever it might be. We understand that. I also understand that public transport, by definition, has to be subsidised front up. That is the truism that is found all over the world. Members in this place have heard me say before that the one part of the public transport system that we have in this state that almost gets to the stage of paying for itself is the South Perth ferry. That is the one that comes closest to breaking even, but all the others are heavily subsidised, whether it is metropolitan, country, remote or regional services, or, indeed, through subsidy to privately operated services. I understand that, and I have demonstrated my understanding of it.

The government's position on this matter is not that we will say, “Hang on; we can't justify the cost of some potential subsidy of this service.” No; that is not the case at all, and all of our form indicates that that position is genuine. We will persist in leaving the door open, with an invitation to Greyhound to come and see us. I do not know what happened. We have been told, third-hand, by Hon Ken Travers that it tried to contact my office and was told, “Sorry, his diary is too full; you can't have an appointment.” I do not know what the circumstances were. Perhaps Mr Thomas from Queensland was saying, “Look, I'm in town at a particular date; can I come and see the minister about something that's very important to me?”, and he might have been told, “Sorry, the minister is not available that morning.” I do not know, but that might have been the case. The point is, we were written to and we responded, and we will continue to respond.

But Greyhound has to do its bit as well. It has to talk with the Public Transport Authority so that my professional public transport operatives can assess the merits of its claim before I hand out taxpayers' money. That is our position on it, and I suggest that it is a reasonable position. I hope that those remarks allay the concerns—I accept that they are legitimate concerns—of the mover of the motion, the people in coastal communities who have written to me, and Greyhound itself. We understand what is being said and we will be very reasonable about finding a way forward.

**HON WENDY DUNCAN (Mining and Pastoral — Parliamentary Secretary)** [11.11 am]: I thank Hon Ken Travers for raising this issue, which is of great importance to regional Western Australia. What a thrill it is for us in the National Party to discover that the Labor Party has a newfound love of regional Western Australia! It is the born-again Labor Party!

Several members interjected.

**Hon WENDY DUNCAN:** In spite of the fact that most of its members of Parliament are in the city, it has discovered that government cannot be won in this state if the Darling Scarp is not looked beyond and regional Western Australia is not taken care of. I am just thrilled to bits to see that the Labor Party has now discovered that for this state to operate effectively and well, it needs to take care of regional Western Australia.

Several members interjected.



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**Hon WENDY DUNCAN:** The Nationals will not be supporting this motion, mainly because, as the minister has said, members cannot stand and ask the government to support a particular private company that provides a service. No doubt that service is essential, and I am sure that the government will be looking at it closely. I think this is a good opportunity to raise the issue of public transport services in regional Western Australia. Just last week I went out to the Eyre Highway; I was at Eucla. I dropped in to all the service stations all the way down the Eyre Highway. One issue that was raised with me—as well as the lack of mobile phone coverage, which, hopefully, we will be able to do something about in the very near future—was the lack of public transport. Where was the Labor Party in 2005 when the Greyhound bus service stopped servicing the Eyre Highway?

That happened in October 2005, and an article in *The West Australian* dated 12 October 2005 stated that the then Labor government had been asked for a \$500 000 subsidy to keep that bus service going. That service was absolutely essential to service not only the Eyre Highway operators, but also the tourism and public transport side of things, and it was absolutely essential for staff to go out to the service stations on the Nullarbor, for people to have medical transfers, and for people to get their children into education. Where was the Labor Party when it was asked to pay \$500 000 to subsidise that transport system? It said that it was uneconomical and it would not pay for it. In fact, Hon Adele Farina is reported in *Hansard* of Wednesday, 19 October 2005 as stating just that in response to a question in Parliament. It really is a case of the pot calling the kettle black. Hon Adele Farina said that the service “is not economical”.

**Hon Ken Travers:** Careful; I might make you table your laptop!

**Hon WENDY DUNCAN:** I would be lost without it!

Hon Adele Farina said that it was not economical to subsidise that transport system on the Eyre Highway, which had exactly the same reasons for being as this service to Broome.

I think Hon Helen Bullock must have had an attack of bovine spongiform encephalitis—in layman’s terms, mad cow disease! What has the CowParade at Margaret River got to do with transport?

*Withdrawal of Remark*

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** I think that is a personal attack! I presume standing order whatever it is—99—has been raised. It was a personal attack! I have never done that. I suggest that nobody in the chamber should do that.

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich:** Just say sorry!

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** It is standing order 97; sorry.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Max Trenorden):** Both members can remain seated. It is a point of order, but I make the point that this chamber—as I came from the more robust place—has a culture of being less aggressive. I ask members to take that into account. If Hon Helen Bullock is happy with that, we will continue with the debate.

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** Robust debate does not necessarily mean that individuals have to be attacked. It is standing order 97.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Mr Deputy President, I am not sure I understand your ruling—whether you accept the comments the member has taken offence to and are allowing them to stand, or whether you are asking the member to withdraw. I ask that you be clear about your ruling, and, in doing so, I would certainly urge you to look at the ruling of former President Griffiths on a member taking offence. If a member took offence at a comment made by another member, as a general rule, former President Griffiths would then ask that member to withdraw the comment. I am someone, like you, who lives by the rules of the Shamrock Hotel, which rules provide for a far more robust debate. I have had plenty of remarks thrown at me by members on the other side, and most of the time I take them because the remarks say more about them than they do about me. When members take offence to comments, they should be withdrawn!

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich:** Absolutely! Bring it on!

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Hon Helen Bullock can be seated. I will ask Hon Wendy Duncan to withdraw her remarks, and hopefully we can then continue with the debate.

**Hon WENDY DUNCAN:** I withdraw those remarks.

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** Do I have a right to ask for an apology?

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** No, you do not, member.

*Debate Resumed*

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**Hon WENDY DUNCAN:** My point was that Hon Helen Bullock went off on a complete tangent in her contribution to the debate and started talking about the CowParade in Margaret River and telecentres, which have absolutely nothing to do with this motion. She gave the wrong impression to Parliament that \$40 million was being spent on rebadging telecentres, which is a ridiculous assertion that needs to be corrected. In fact, only \$5 000 was paid to each telecentre for a change of registration, signage, stationery, and web design. The rest of the funding went towards upgrading telecentres that had been scandalously neglected by the opposition while it was in power; funding had not been increased during the whole time that Labor was in power. By the end of 2010, nine new telecentres will have been established to enable videoconferencing, and satellite communications, and they will be the shopfront of government in regional Western Australia, which is sorely needed.

The Nationals will not be supporting this motion; however, we appreciate that transport in regional Western Australia has been brought to the attention of government, and I trust there will be closer scrutiny of the needs of regional Western Australia.

**HON MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM (Agricultural) [11.20 am]:** I rise to speak briefly, because I realise there are other members who wish to speak, including Hon Ken Travers who wants a right of reply. As a member of the Agricultural Region who is very concerned with the issues associated with communication and transportation in the bush, I certainly acknowledge and commend Hon Ken Travers for bringing this issue to the attention of the house. I am very happy to hear that the Minister for Transport is quite prepared, as he says, to leave the door open. That is very comforting for country-based members. I also take on board and note the point that he made that the company itself probably needs to get back to him; but that does not mean to say that through his department there should not be some concerted effort to follow up because of the seriousness of this issue. That is why I commend the motion that Hon Ken Travers has put before the house. I say to the minister that it is a good idea to leave the door open, but more needs to be done.

As I said, I will speak for only a short time, but I just want to put on the public record some comments on these issues. Transwa provides an important service, I think basically to Geraldton, but I believe it might also provide a service to Northampton and Kalbarri. I am not absolutely sure about that.

**Hon Ken Travers:** They certainly do not go to Northampton.

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** In that respect then Transwa looks after areas to the South West, the Great Southern, the Goldfields and the Wheatbelt. As a consequence, a private company such as Greyhound Australia needs to fill a very important void for all the important reasons that members, including government members, would acknowledge.

I would like to put a few issues on notice, one of which is the access and equity issue. The transport options for people living in the Perth metropolitan area or nearby are such that people can hop on a bus or a train with relative ease. As members have indicated, transport issues associated with health, education, families, funerals, work and sporting commitments and the like are all very important for people in a particular part of the state, especially the northern coastal region that we are talking about. Those people are looked after by the state of Western Australia to a certain extent. Certainly in my capacity as a former educator and someone who has been involved with rural, remote and regional education, let me tell members that issues stemming from people having kids at boarding schools and living in towns away from where they are domiciled are, to my way of thinking at least, a compelling reason that this particular service somehow needs to have more than just the ear of the government.

As has been discussed widely in political and other circles over recent years, Western Australia has had unprecedented economic growth and development, but many people, as all members would imagine, have missed out on this. These are the very people that we need to bear in mind. Unless the financial issues referred to by Hon Ken Travers can be addressed, regional and rural Western Australians living north of Geraldton are certainly going to be left high and dry if the services provided by Greyhound Australia are not maintained. I know, and members again would acknowledge, that the royalties for regions fund has been mentioned, but I am led to believe that in excess of \$100 million is yet to be allocated in this year. I am sure that Hon Ken Travers, if he has not already mentioned that, will certainly indicate that to the house before the remaining 10 minutes of debate are up.

These are the sorts of things that the government perhaps needs to take on board. I urge the government to take the issue seriously. I take heart again from what the minister said, that the door is still open, but I think that the government needs to be a little more proactive because if this service were to fall over for lack of communication, we would have done an enormous disservice to the people living north of Geraldton.

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**HON NORMAN MOORE (Mining and Pastoral — Leader of the House)** [11.24 am]: I want to speak today in my capacity as a member for the Mining and Pastoral Region, which is what this is all about. I find it quite extraordinary that the mover of this motion was part of a government that completely ignored a previous request for this assistance. Indeed, Hon Wendy Duncan also told us about the previous request for assistance for the Eyre Highway, neither of which was provided by the previous government, and yet in opposition Labor members now come in here and say that this government should be doing what they were not prepared to do in government themselves. The hypocrisy of the Labor Party on these issues is absolutely astounding. Its members are hypocrites of monumental proportion when it comes to these sorts of issues. However, that is beside the point.

I think it is nice that we are having a debate about an issue such as this, because it is actually very important. I have always had a very strong view that people in my electorate, particularly in the north, in the Kimberley and the Pilbara, have been disadvantaged compared with people in other parts of regional Australia when it comes to public transport. We subsidise very heavily public transport in the south west of Western Australia, and have done so for many years, through Transwa, the *Prospector* service, the *AvonLink* and the whole lot. They are all heavily subsidised by the taxpayer. However, there has been virtually no subsidy to people living in the north west of Western Australia ever. I have argued in the forums of my party that we should be providing subsidies where air transport, for example, is not available at a reasonable price. Indeed, that has been the case in respect of the number of air services throughout regional Western Australia for a long time. There are still some being subsidised—I think between Broom and Kununurra, through Fitzroy and Halls Creek. Therefore, I have a strong view that there is a very good argument for there to be a subsidy for public transport for the people of my electorate, particularly that part of my electorate that is the Pilbara, Kimberley and Gascoyne where there are no other services such as Transwa and those rail services that are available to some communities. The Minister for Transport has said that he is waiting to discuss with these people from Greyhound Australia what sort of future they might be able to provide for this part of Western Australia.

There is an interesting scenario, where the people in Western Australia who pay the most for their transport are the ones who get the least support from government. If people want to come from Kununurra, Broome or Port Hedland to Perth, they have to pay the airfares that are going around at the time. Fortunately, with some competition on some of those routes, there are some reasonable fares, but a lot of places have very high fares because there is only one airline. Yet there is no support from the taxpayer for those people using those services. For many people in regional Western Australia, and in the north particularly, their public transport system is the airline system. When we think about how long it takes to travel by bus from Broome to Perth compared with how long it takes to travel by plane, we can understand why people would much prefer to travel by plane. It is a very long journey. I can remember taking the bus once myself from Carnarvon to Perth overnight. It was not something that I much appreciated at the time, and I do not make a habit of doing it if I can help it.

**Hon Ken Travers:** Which was more enjoyable—the bus trip or sitting in Parliament?

**Hon NORMAN MOORE:** The bus trip by a mile. It was far and away more enjoyable. The interesting thing is that on both occasions people were asleep! It was an overnight trip.

I just wanted to make the point that I will be discussing this and have already discussed this with the Minister for Transport. Whether the government is prepared to simply subsidise Greyhound Australia to the extent that Greyhound wants it to is a matter for serious consideration. However, what one does when subsidies to companies are being considered is go out to tender; one does not simply say that a company wanted X number of dollars and give the money to it. One looks at going out to tender to see whether there are alternative suppliers of that service. I will be discussing that with the Minister for Transport if he is of a mind to look at the proposals being put forward by Greyhound Australia. It is a necessary service. It is the sort of service that the government provides for the south west of Western Australia. I suggest to the shadow Minister for Tourism that she get on the Transwa bus to Gingin, and look at how important that service is.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** Do not tell her there is a return service!

**Hon NORMAN MOORE:** A one-way trip would be preferable to what she might otherwise choose to take!

**Hon Ken Travers:** If you go with her, I will buy your ticket!

**Hon NORMAN MOORE:** Come on! There is only so much one can put up with in this life; and a one-way trip to Gingin with Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich is something that is not high on my list of priorities.

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich:** You would love to sit on a bus next to me for 20 hours; you know it! It is probably a fantasy!

**Hon NORMAN MOORE:** Every time Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich gets up to speak in this house, I think to myself that I should retire.

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**Hon Ken Travers:** Keep talking, Ljil!

**Hon NORMAN MOORE:** I would not usually say that because that would normally provoke her to stand up and talk, but no matter what I said or did, it would not stop her talking. She has that affliction that requires her mouth to be open more than it is ever shut! I do not know what this is called.

The Minister for Transport is handling this in the way that is most appropriate. He will respond to that company when it puts forward a submission to him and comes to see him. I have no doubt that it will get a very sympathetic hearing. In respect of my own constituency, I will be representing the company's interests in this matter. As I said, I believe that it is appropriate for governments to subsidise public transport for all Western Australians, not just for those who happen to be lucky enough to have a rail service or a Transwa service in the south west. There is a good argument for this to be extended to the north west, and I hope that the minister will sort out this issue in due course.

**HON KEN TRAVERS (North Metropolitan)** [11.31 am] — in reply: I welcome the indication of support from members on the other side of the house. I am not sure why they could not then support the motion, which simply calls on the Liberal–National government to take immediate action to ensure that the Greyhound Australia bus service between Perth and Broome continues to operate on a regular basis to service the people living in the state's north west. It sounds to me that we have agreement around the house and it is now about getting on and making that happen.

**Hon Norman Moore:** You might explain why you didn't do it when you were in government.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I am happy to go through all the points if the Leader of the House would give me time, but I only have two minutes. I will make a couple of points first, and then I will be happy to address all the points raised in debate.

The key point I want to get across is that it is clear there is support around the house on the importance of, and need to maintain, of this service. I appreciate that. There seems to be some dispute about the approach to the minister's office for his support.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** There's no dispute. You have got it wrong.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Max Trenorden):** There are two minutes left in the debate. Let us hear the rest of the debate in relative silence.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** The approach was made some two years ago. There was a process put in place at that time by the then Labor government to proceed with it.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** What? That is absolute rubbish!

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** There was. The minister acknowledges that there was an agreement that the company would go away and talk to the Public Transport Authority. That fell down. It is interesting that this government seems to think there is not continuity in government, and that, when it comes into government, it has to pick up the issues of government. We were not able to see it out as a government because it continued beyond our time in government.

Several government members interjected.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I normally do not mind interjections, but in view of the time remaining I ask that I be given some protection to try to make my points.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Hon Ken Travers' request is fair. I ask members to be silent in the remaining one minute of this debate.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Actions were put in place by the Labor government—it was then the responsibility of the current government to pick those up. It is interesting that this minister thinks some sort of time line exists in government in that one issue stops at the change of government; and, if that issue was not completed by that time line, the minister has no responsibility and non-completion was the previous government's fault! This minister has failed to pick up issues in a whole range of other areas that required continuity in government. I am glad there is a willingness on this issue. I commit to go to Greyhound Australia and say that the minister's door is open, and, even if there has been some miscommunication, the advice from the minister to the house is that he is now prepared to meet with the company. I hope that that is the case.

What I look for from the minister is some time lines for his office and department to respond to these issues.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** We already have.

**Extract from *Hansard***  
[COUNCIL - Thursday, 22 April 2010]  
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**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** We need a time line to complete it, minister! The one thing we know about this minister is that he does not complete things on time. We need to keep the minister under pressure on time lines. The minister delays and defers for days and days.

It is great that the opposition has support for this important service.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to temporary orders.