

## REGIONAL FREIGHT TRANSPORT NETWORK PLAN

### *Motion*

**HON BRIAN ELLIS (Agricultural)** [11.35 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house commends the Barnett government on Western Australia's first regional freight transport network plan.

I decided to speak on this freight blueprint simply because there has not been a similar plan for more than 100 years; a comprehensive plan has not been undertaken for over 100 years. The Barnett government has delivered what no previous government has done. To do this effectively, the Department of Transport established an intergovernmental project steering committee, which brought together senior representatives from a number of departments—the Department of Regional Development and Lands, as well as the Departments of Treasury, Planning, State Development, Agriculture and Food, and Mines and Petroleum—the Western Australian Local Government Association and the WA Planning Commission. It was chaired by the Department of Regional Development and Lands and it consulted 80 local government and regional development organisations. It also consulted more than 70 major transport and logistics companies. Major infrastructure providers were also consulted, including Main Roads, the Public Transport Authority, Brookfield Rail and the state's port authorities. The result is a plan that looks out to 2031. It provides a clear direction, including strategic planning, policy, and capital project priorities across state roads, state-owned rail lines and port authorities.

I suppose we could say that given WA has survived for over 100 years without a plan, one would wonder why we would bother. I have to say that by 2031 the state's regional freight task will have doubled. The plan's executive summary states —

The volume of regional-based freight movements through the State's port authorities will be around 2.5 times what it is today

Western Australia's regional road freight task will be around 2 times what it was in 2010

The rail freight task serviced by the State's rail freight network, managed by Brookfield Rail, will be 2.25 times what it was in 2010

The road freight task will increase from around 20 billion tonne kilometres per annum to 40 billion tonne kilometres per annum by 2030. By 2030, the rail freight task will increase from around 50 million net tonnes per annum to more than 130 million net tonnes per annum, and trade through the state's port authorities will increase from 457 million tonnes per annum in 2012 to more than one billion tonnes per annum in 2030.

The planning project that was announced by the transport minister on 16 May this year took two and a half years to complete, so we can see that obviously a lot of work has gone into this from all areas of, and all stakeholders in, the transport industry. The plan provides an integrated set of short, medium and long-term strategic planning, policy and capital investment project priorities. Moreover, it emphasises the state government's role in developing an effective partnership with the private sector, particularly in relation to port and rail network development. Regions such as the great southern and the wheatbelt, where ageing infrastructure is an issue, will require a focus on network rejuvenation. But in areas such as the Pilbara and the south west, which are high freight growth areas, the focus will be mainly on capacity upgrades.

The plan uses new "Western Australia Tomorrow" forecasts for population and combined freight demands. The rate at which medium to long-term projects are delivered will depend on economic and population growth trends. A substantial proportion of regional freight movements will continue to concentrate on a relatively small number of major corridors. As the executive summary notes, these will do much of the heavy lifting in moving WA's freight task towards 2031. However, there will also be planning for heavy vehicle bypasses around regional centres. For example, there is a proposal from 2015 to construct the Geraldton outer bypass stage 1 and the Geraldton inner bypass stage 1. As stated in the summary, from 2020 it is proposed to construct the Northampton heavy vehicle bypass. Overall, the objectives of the plan are to reduce costs, underpin regional productivity and link regional goods with domestic and international marketplaces. The last point stated in this summary is very important: in 2010–11, WA accounted for 46 per cent, or \$121 billion worth, of Australia's merchandise exports, most of which took place in the regions.

With this national significance, there will need to be joint investment from both state and commonwealth governments. One project that has already been jointly funded is the straightening of the notorious Bindi Bindi bends, of which I have a lot of knowledge, particularly an 11-kilometre stretch of Great Northern Highway. This project has been on the agenda and been lobbied for possibly up to 20 years, going back to my time on the Shire of Moora council as deputy shire president. We were lobbying then because many accidents were occurring on

Hon Brian Ellis; Hon James Chown; Hon Ken Travers; Deputy President; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Paul Brown;  
Hon Simon O'Brien

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these notorious bends. We therefore look forward, with the combination of \$8 million from the state and \$32 million from the federal government, to finally having a brand-new stretch of road there that will, hopefully, save lives. The plan is comprehensive and covers all of regional WA. Other members want to refer to other parts of the plan when they speak about their own region, so I intend to concentrate on the roads, rail and ports in the Agricultural Region.

In recent years the midwest has experienced the exciting emergence of resource development with junior mining companies. Some roads are already built to a standard to support growth until 2031. However, other roads will require upgrading to improve safety and reliability and to add capacity. This includes some roads in the wheatbelt where much of the network is more than 50 years old. Great Northern Highway will continue to play an important role, and it is proposed that stage 2 of the upgrade between Muchea and Wubin will be undertaken from 2015. Coastal routes are also important, and it is proposed to duplicate the North West Coastal Highway within the City of Greater Geraldton.

The plan also notes the need to link emerging midwest resources to existing and future midwest ports, to manage the greater Geraldton area's increased freight task, and to improve the area's northern and southern freight access to support future regional development. The feasibility of a direct road connection between Goldfields Highway and Great Northern Highway will also be investigated. Road train operations on sections of Great Eastern Highway, North West Coastal Highway and several sections of Goldfields Highway will be reassessed. The plan also recognises that a more progressive approach to the state's existing high-wide load and restricted access vehicle regimes may be required. It notes, too, that the current configuration, condition and location of road train assembly yards may need to be reassessed.

I will move to rail now. The executive summary states that Brookfield Rail will need to invest substantial capital to create required capacity in the rail network. For example, Brookfield Rail expects freight growth in the midwest to increase exponentially to 2030, especially on the Morawa-Mullewa-Narngulu-Geraldton arc. As the executive summary states, the plan proposes to construct a potential dual-gauge extension to Brookfield Rail's southern midwest network. New rail links or the activation of historic corridors may be required due to the distribution of the resources sector and potential changes in supply chains in the south of WA. It is anticipated that these will be undertaken by the private sector. With iron ore demand forecast to increase from 20 per cent of total rail demand to more than 40 per cent of total demand by 2030, there will also be a need for intermodal solutions integrating road and rail networks to service heavy industrial estates. One of the policy priorities is to explore route options and the feasibility of a possible rail connection between midwest ports and the goldfields and Esperance regions.

In regard to regional ports, Australia's largest network of ports is in our state. There are eight port authority ports and nine non-port authority ports in WA. Policy priorities include rolling out the recommendations of the Western Australian ports review, which will consolidate regional ports into five regional port authorities; developing a state ports strategic plan; investigating long-term inbound freight requirements; identifying strategic land around regional ports; and investigating the concept of "inland ports" to form regional hubs. One of the priorities for my region is to extend several berths at Geraldton port, undertake harbour surge mitigation programs, install advanced mooring systems and upgrade two ship loaders.

Noting the time, I will move on to my conclusion. Firstly, I need to reinforce some of the executive summary statements by pointing out that by 2031 the freight transport task will be more than twice the size it is today. The Barnett government has done the planning and taken the action. As the Minister for Transport, Troy Buswell, said in his media statement announcing the initiative, the plan sets an enduring foundation to inform and build investor and industry confidence. It also creates a framework for developing the state's freight network. Industry has welcomed the Barnett government's initiative. The Western Australian Chamber of Minerals and Energy website has labelled the plan "a step in the right direction", and the chamber has urged the government to begin the vital process of fully implementing the plan. I join with those organisations as well.

**HON JIM CHOWN (Agricultural — Parliamentary Secretary)** [11.50 am]: I congratulate Hon Brian Ellis for bringing to the attention of this place the "Western Australian Regional Freight Transport Network Plan". I also commend the Minister for Transport, Hon Troy Buswell, for implementing this plan.

I am sure all members in this place understand that the freight task for this state going forward is immense. As has been stated by Hon Brian Ellis, 46 per cent of the nation's exports take place at our regional ports. That includes the ports of Fremantle, Bunbury, Albany and Esperance, and the ports in the north of the state. This state has a population of 2.5 million, compared with the population in the rest of the nation, which is 22 million or 23 million. Therefore, going forward, a plan for freight tasks out of this state is absolutely critical for not only Western Australia but the nation as a whole.

Hon Brian Ellis; Hon James Chown; Hon Ken Travers; Deputy President; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Paul Brown;  
Hon Simon O'Brien

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We need to understand that this state comprises one-third of Australia. I liken what happens to an hourglass. Materials are being brought out of the vast area of this state and funnelled into a narrow corridor, and those goods are then exported throughout the rest of the world. Of course that also takes place in the opposite direction, because materials imported from the rest of the world are funnelled into a narrow corridor and then distributed throughout this great state. So members can understand the challenges that lie ahead, particularly with the increased amount of freight that will be coming into and out of this state over the next 17 years, which is what this strategic plan is all about.

This plan has been undertaken by not just the government and relevant government departments, but all the relevant industry bodies and main players in transport. This is a substantial plan that will require funding from both the state and commonwealth governments, and private enterprise. If we fail to plan, we plan to fail. That is what this plan is all about. This plan that the government has undertaken will benefit not only this state, but the nation. I am sure the opposition is more than happy to support the intentions of this plan, because it understands that this plan, implemented by this government through the Minister for Transport, is extremely important for this state and this nation, as I have stated.

In the next 17 years, up to 2030, up to one billion tonnes—two and a half times the current volume—of goods will go through our ports. That figure is very hard to comprehend. There will also be an increase from 20 billion tonne kilometres to 40 billion tonne kilometres—twice the current volume—in the volume of goods carried on our roads. As Western Australians, we understand that every commodity that we use on a daily basis, and everything that we export, comes to us on the back of a truck, eventually. So the road network is essential.

I cannot stop repeating this, so I will: this comprehensive transport plan, with its extensive multi-infrastructure, multi-regional and multi-stakeholder brief, needs to be commented upon by this place. As Hon Brian Ellis has stated, this is a plan that every member of this house needs to get their head around and understand and have input into, on both an electorate and a regional basis, and through the transport ministry, or whatever options they choose, to ensure that this state will go forward as the major exporting state in this nation.

This plan will deliver benefits for Western Australian industry and communities. The implementation of this plan will improve transport delivery throughout the state by enhancing productivity. We must always strive to enhance productivity. We hear a lot of talk in this place about the increasing cost of living. The increasing cost of living can be drawn back only by enhanced productivity. Transport forms a substantial part of our cost of living, because, as I have said, everything that comes onto our table, into our house or at our workplace arrives on the back of a truck. An effective freight network will reduce the cost of everyday goods and services for the community and lower the cost of doing business. It will also underpin the strength of export industries, because our export industries need to compete internationally. An effective transport network will link the regions to marketplaces not only locally in Perth and nationally, but also internationally. The outcome will be the generation of wealth for Western Australia and everyone who lives in this state.

This plan is about the efficient operation of the transport warehouse and logistics sector. This sector is a vital part of the Western Australian economy. I do not know whether members are aware of this fact, but around 60 000 people currently work in this sector, and it contributes \$11 billion to gross state product.

There is also an inextricable link between the strong performance of the Western Australian economy and the nation's prosperity. In 2011–12, this state accounted for 46 per cent, or \$121 billion, of Australia's merchandise exports. The majority of this comes from resources activity, most of which takes place in the regions. As we move forward from searching for the resources that we are most fortunate to have in this state, and developing those resources, and transition into exporting those resources, the tonnage of exports will increase. Therefore, it is most important that this plan be taken as seriously by future governments as it is by this government.

Many of the key findings in this plan are of a high-profile nature. High freight growth regions such as the Pilbara and the south west will require a focus on infrastructure capacity upgrades and road expansion projects, while regions in which ageing infrastructure is an issue, such as the great southern and wheatbelt, will require a focus on transport network rejuvenation. Some of that rejuvenation has already taken place, with this government's allocation of \$112 million to upgrade the road network in the tier 3 region. As stated during the election campaign, a fair bit of royalties for regions funding will be going into infrastructure requirements throughout this state.

In the Pilbara region, the current inbound freight task is largely carried by Great Northern Highway. In the future, the inbound task will reach a quantum that will also require ports to have significant inbound freight handling capacity. Hon Brian Ellis has mentioned a couple of the upgrades that are likely to take place around the port of Geraldton. The plan also proposes the sealing of Marble Bar Road from Newman to the Ripon Hills Road turnoff, the upgrading of North West Coastal Highway, the construction of the Karratha western bypass, and the completion of the missing link in the Karratha–Tom Price Road. In the south west region, freight

Hon Brian Ellis; Hon James Chown; Hon Ken Travers; Deputy President; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Paul Brown;  
Hon Simon O'Brien

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volumes are already substantial and will continue to grow significantly. Recent road investments in the region have been focused on Perth–Bunbury highway, and I have spoken previously on some of those investments, especially on Coalfields highway. With the increasing scale of the freight task from the Collie area, and the potential export of grain, which I have already spoken about, from the wheatbelt region around Collie to Bunbury port, the corridor will experience substantial growth and the investment for integrated port, rail and road planning will continue. That is stated in the plan. The plan proposes a long-term upgrade program for the Coalfields highway, completion of the Bunbury Outer Ring Road and unlocking further capacity at the port of Bunbury by diverting the Preston River. Although substantial freight growth is not forecast for the wheatbelt and great southern regions, a number of these regions' freight roads are more than 50 years old and require regeneration. The plan therefore proposes to roll out major road renewal programs in these regions to 2031.

My colleague has just told me that I have 41 seconds left, so I will sum up by saying that a number of implementation priorities articulated in the plan are being implemented by the Department of Transport, Main Roads WA, port authorities and Brookfield Rail. A few of the plan's priorities that are already underway or recently completed include: concurrent construction of the Bunbury Outer Ring Road and Bunbury port access road to facilitate development of Bunbury port and reduce congestion and pollution in the urban areas along the existing route; and realignment of Great Northern Highway between Port and South Hedland around Wedgefield industrial precinct to improve road safety and connectivity. The list goes on.

**HON KEN TRAVERS (North Metropolitan)** [12.01 pm]: I also welcome Hon Brian Ellis moving this motion. For the second week in a row I am looking forward to debating the issues that the government wants to put on the agenda, although I feel a bit like one of those Canadians clubbing seals on the Arctic Shelf.

One of the things that government members forgot was the memo from Dixie Marshall. This is one of those one-hit wonder policies; the government has put it out but then it does not bring it up again. It put it out to make out that it thinks it is doing something but it does not want too much scrutiny of it because if it does, people will see the hollowness of this plan that has been released. For plans to be good, they need to be funded and they need to have a government that is committed to implementing them. The overwhelming majority of this plan is still unfunded and uncosted going forward. A plan like this needs to be part of an overall budget plan for infrastructure in the state of Western Australia. Again, that is something that the Barnett government does not have so it constantly makes poor decisions to invest money in nice-to-have infrastructure rather than many of the projects listed in this document, which will be very important for the economy of Western Australia.

Let us look at the history of funding by the Liberal government in Western Australia, because it has been cut. One of the things it did to fund royalties for regions was to cut regional roads. I challenge members to look at the last state budget and see how much funding was allocated to metropolitan roads and how little was spent on regional roads in Western Australia. There were a few announcements during the election, no doubt to match the fact that Labor was making it a priority to fix dangerous country roads.

One of the other things that this government is very good at doing is trying to claim credit for other people's work. In the Minister for Transport's foreword to the plan on page 3, he states —

The State Government's commitment to upgrade and expand the regional freight transport network is demonstrated by key projects including ...

I will briefly point out the roads, which include: Dampier Highway, the Bunbury Outer Ring Road, the Bunbury port access project stage 2; Great Northern Highway around the Wedgefield industrial precinct, the Esperance port access corridor and the rollout of the investment program for the grain freight network. The minister also referred to a market sounding exercise for the Port of Esperance. I will come back to the Port of Esperance.

Let us have a quick look at those projects. Who is funding those projects that the minister referred to? The total expenditure on those projects is some \$750 million, with \$515 million coming from the commonwealth government. These figures are based on the original estimates of the commonwealth–state split because we do not have the exact final figure. Those roads are being funded by the federal Labor government. Do we see a single acknowledgement of that in this document? No, we do not. The government does not want to talk about the good news that comes out of the Gillard government because it invests in regional infrastructure.

Several members interjected.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Alanna Clohesy)**: Order, members! Hon Ken Travers has the call.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS**: Around 70 per cent of those roads are being funded with commonwealth government money and the state government tries to claim it as its own work.

**Hon Jim Chown**: Get your facts right.

Hon Brian Ellis; Hon James Chown; Hon Ken Travers; Deputy President; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Paul Brown;  
Hon Simon O'Brien

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**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Is the member challenging me on that figure of 70 per cent? He should go and check it. He will have to come back and eat humble pie because they are the facts. The roads that are listed in the plan, without a single mention of the commonwealth, are funded by the federal government. Members opposite should give credit where it is due.

Let us look at some of the other projects that are outlined as very important projects in this document and some of the history of them. Let us start with the Coongan gorge realignment.

**Hon Jim Chown:** You had eight years to implement a plan and did nothing.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** We can have a plan or we can have action. We acted; we built the Perth–Bunbury highway. We built the Geraldton southern access corridor when we were in government. I can go on with the projects we developed. Let us look at the Coongan gorge realignment that the government lists in this document as being an important project. What is the history of that realignment under the Liberal Party? Back in 2009 there was money in the budget for that road to go ahead. What did the Liberal Party do in the 2009–10 budget when it got into government? It stripped \$18.3 million out for the Coongan gorge project. It pushed it back. Everyone thought that the government would get on with it eventually. We noted in the 2012–13 budget that it did it again, just before the election. Coongan gorge is listed as part of a capital works project on page 209 of the *Economic and Fiscal Outlook*, budget paper No 3, of last year's budget.

**Hon Jim Chown:** So what's your point?

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** The government is saying that it is an important project but it consistently pushes it back. It was going to be built by the previous Labor government—the money was in the budget to do it—but this government keeps pushing it back.

**Hon Jim Chown:** Like Albany Hospital and Indian Ocean Drive.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I say to the member that it is not about plans; it is about action. The government pushed that project back. But there is more. This is better than the steak knives. I can refer to the Esperance port upgrade, again mentioned in the plan as one of the projects committed to by the government. Again, the government stripped significant money out of the 2009–10 budget to push back the Esperance port access road. It is now underway with federal government money but it was deferred and delayed by the Barnett government. We can look at the Wiluna to Meekatharra Goldfields Highway, the connection that the government keeps talking about. That is another road that was deferred back in 2009. It took \$24 million out over the forward estimates in the 2009–10 budget. We can look at the Coalfields highway. The government took money out, put it back in, took it out again and put it back in. It did the hokey-pokey. I will not do the full dance like the federal Liberal members would do.

We could talk about the Kununurra bypass; let us instead talk about South Western Highway. That is a beautiful one. During the 2008–09 election, Labor had the funding to re-establish that railroad. The Liberal government promised to invest more money to ensure that that railway was reopened. It got into government and stripped the money out of that project. It said, "Don't worry; we are going to fund an upgrade of the South Western Highway", a project that is now listed in its plan. In the last budget, it took the money out and pushed it back. It deferred the upgrade of that highway as well. This is the government's record on regional roads in Western Australia. Government members come into this place—one-hit wonders—trying to look like they are doing something with the plan but the history of their commitment and funding of roads is very different. It is all there on page 209 of last year's budget paper No 3. Members should look at it. It refers to the South Western Highway from Donnybrook to Greenbushes. That project has had money taken out of it as part of a capital works review.

The Kununurra heavy vehicle bypass was not part of the government's submission to Infrastructure Australia. Labor commenced the planning design work and environmental approvals. They have now been completed. The government lists that as one of its projects it wants to get done in the future but I suspect, given the time frame of this government, that it will not have even started the work by the time that approval runs out.

I turn to the Great Northern Highway. This is the one that I am interested in. Has the Liberal government committed to funding those projects that the federal Labor government put into the recent budget? I refer to the upgrade of the North West Coastal Highway or the upgrade of the Great Northern Highway. Does the government have a commitment from Tony Abbott that he will continue to keep that funding in the budget because without it, it will be a waste of time? There are also the bypasses. Where is the money for the Narrogin bypass that the Minister for Transport promised to the Mayor of Narrogin at the Western Australian Local Government Association conference last year? It never turned up. New Norcia and Toodyay are not listed.

Hon Brian Ellis; Hon James Chown; Hon Ken Travers; Deputy President; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Paul Brown;  
Hon Simon O'Brien

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If the government is serious about having a plan for regional freight, it has to be part of a long-term infrastructure plan with a 10-year capital works program. Under the Barnett government, the 10-year capital works program for Main Roads has virtually been made redundant. It does not operate on a 10-year planning cycle and it does not have a state infrastructure strategy. Until we get those, plans such as this will mean very little. They will be worth only the paper they are written on in the same way that the "Roads to Export" document produced by the South West Development Commission, which called for all the investment, was a waste of paper because none of the issues have been properly addressed. Many issues need to be addressed. We need to invest in regional roads, but we need more than just a plan. We need a government committed to putting in the money. One of the ways to deal with the freight task in Western Australia is more coastal shipping, and not enough effort has been made to look at coastal shipping in this plan. I wish I had more time.

**HON ADELE FARINA (South West)** [12.15 pm]: I would very much like to support this plan that has been much anticipated in the south west. However, unfortunately, it falls well short of expectations. The "Western Australian Regional Freight Transport Network Plan" is not what the community and industry were led to believe that it would be. In the south west the community and industry expected a real plan that identified lead agencies, detailed project priorities, set a real time for delivering the projects and identified project costs and how the projects would be funded. That detail is not in this plan. This document is full of motherhood statements with very little detail. The size of the document has a lot more to do with repetition than with actual substance.

For the south west, the plan provides nothing more than a rewrite of the "Roads to Export" document, which I have talked about many times in this place and which was produced by the South West Development Commission, the Bunbury Port Authority, the Bunbury Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Bunbury Wellington Economic Alliance four years ago. There is nothing new in this document than what was presented in that document by those agencies. The "Roads to Export" document, however, provided more detail and greater analysis than what is presented in this document and included costings.

Over the past four years I have been asking the minister for each Roads to Export project: when will the government fund these critical infrastructure projects and when will they be delivered? On each occasion the minister assured me that lots of work was being done in the background to get these projects shovel-ready so that they could be included in the state's submission for Infrastructure Australia funding. This plan paints a very, very different picture. Very little, if anything, has been done over the past four years. The foreword in the plan states —

This ... *Plan* articulates the Western Australian Government's planning, policy and project priorities to ensure the regional transport network continues to perform effectively. By providing clear strategic direction for the development of the transport network over the next two decades, this Plan provides an enduring foundation to inform and build investor and industry confidence and a framework for developing the State's freight network well into the future.

When we turn to the page headed "Decision Making Framework", we learn that there are another two stages before anything in the plan could be endorsed or funded. Detailed options, analysis and planning, costing and evaluation are needed for all projects. We have a plan, but the analysis and the planning is yet to be done. It is not really much of a plan. Contrary to the minister's assurances that work was being done in the background to get those Roads to Export projects funded, the report makes clear that this work is yet to be done by the government. While purporting to be a plan to 2031, it provides three time frames: 2012-plus, 2015-plus and 2020-plus. For the south west, the plan identifies the upgrade of the Collie-Brunswick Junction rail line and the duplication of the rail line between Brunswick Junction and Bunbury inner harbour as 2012-plus projects. I assume the focus is very much on the "plus" in this analysis, because there is no funding for these projects and we are already in 2013. Also, it is intended that these projects will be funded by the private sector. It is a bit fanciful for the government to put them into a plan for 2012-plus when we are in 2013, no funding has been allocated and the timing will very much depend on when the private sector wants to deliver them. The plan also states that the Preston River diversion is proposed for 2015-plus. However, this priority is heavily qualified; it is subject to the decision-making framework. We know from the minister's answers to my questions about the Preston River diversion that the design and engineering report has been delayed and will not be completed until sometime in 2015. Once completed, the project will be subject to the usual environmental planning approval processes, which could take 12 to 24 months. Then the project is still subject to a positive funding decision. The focus is very much on the "plus" and not the 2015 time frame proposed in the document. This does not provide much comfort to industries in the south west, which have been calling on the government to make these projects a priority because existing infrastructure is at capacity, which places the future economic development of the region at risk. Other critically needed Roads to Export projects will not be funded until 2020-plus, at best. Again the focus is very much on the "plus". I suspect that with the sort of performance we have seen so far with this government, the likelihood of those projects being delivered before 2031 is highly unlikely.

Hon Brian Ellis; Hon James Chown; Hon Ken Travers; Deputy President; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Paul Brown;  
Hon Simon O'Brien

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“Direction 9: Priorities” in the plan on roads identifies only two south west roads—upgrades to the Coalfields highway and to the South Western Highway. Both these projects are already funded and underway. “Direction 10: Priorities” identifies two other south west roads—the Bunbury port access road stage 2 and the Bunbury outer ring-road stage 1. These projects not only were approved and funded by the previous Labor government, but also are underway, nearing completion or completed. It is not much of a plan for future directions when it largely relies on projects that are already funded, underway or nearing completion. Other projects listed as “Direction 11: Priorities” and “Direction 12: Priorities” either rely on private sector funding or have no indicated time frame for delivery at all.

If the government were proud of this plan, it would have released it before the election, rather than sitting on it and waiting until after the election. I am confident that if this plan had been released before the election, the results in the south west would have been very, very different. This plan falls very short of what was expected and certainly does not deliver for the region.

**HON PAUL BROWN (Agricultural)** [12.18 pm]: I thank Hon Brian Ellis for his motion, and welcome Minister for Transport Troy Buswell’s interest in regional freight infrastructure and the announcement of the release of the “Western Australian Regional Freight Transport Network Plan”. As Western Australia’s population and economy continue to grow, it is vitally important to have a flexible and robust transport framework that we as a state are able to fully utilise to continue to develop economically. I notice with considerable interest the minister’s blueprint for developing the state’s regional road, rail and port networks, in particular the development of public and private sector investment.

The development of transport infrastructure throughout regional WA is exactly what the Nationals’ Vision for Agriculture policy highlighted during the recent election campaign. It was part of our comprehensive \$300 million agriculture policy. I acknowledge the Minister for Agriculture and Food, Hon Ken Baston, for his favourable views on implementing the Nationals’ policy. The Nationals identified a need to carefully look at the existing regional transport infrastructure, identify any bottlenecks and constraints within the transport network and throughout the agriculture and food industry supply chain, and allocate funding for us to better transport and deliver our state’s valuable resources. To that end, in our Vision for Agriculture policy, the Nationals allocated \$2 million towards a statewide infrastructure audit. After that audit identified any bottlenecks or constraints within the network, we allocated another \$75 million to an infrastructure investment fund to begin tackling those constraints, including adding more berth space in ports and key road and rail upgrades.

I also noticed, with even keener interest, that the transport minister’s blueprint highlights the need to partner private sector investment with public sector funding. In the Nationals’ Vision for Agriculture policy, we highlighted a need for the state to direct investment into areas that will better benefit the state and our industries. Whether it is investment by Australian or international companies, we welcome the opportunity for Australian companies to partner with other investment streams to better achieve greater market access for all Western Australian produce and commodities. The Nationals’ “WA: Open for Business” initiative that is part of that vision would be headed by a trade commissioner in charge of an office of inward investment; a first point of contact, if you will, for investors to be partnered with public or private opportunities within the state. I think that it can only benefit the state to have a range of projects—I see that many have already begun—that focus on regional transport infrastructure development. The Department of Regional Development and Lands has been in charge of steering the committee that has been addressing the complex and significant planning required to achieve this.

I also commend the blueprint for highlighting the need to continue to roll out an investment program for our grain freight network. The Nationals (WA) are cognisant that there has already been significant investment by both state and federal governments in the tier 1, 2 and 3 road and rail networks for grain freight. We look forward to continued investment in this area. We have been advocating for that for a considerable time and right through the recent election campaign. We have also advocated for prudent identification of need and spending that targets and alleviates that need.

In my electorate of Agricultural Region, some local areas certainly need highlighting, particularly Bindoon and New Norcia. A large number of oversize and heavy loads go up Great Northern Highway and both Bindoon and New Norcia are cut off continually; the roads through those towns are so small and the loads are so wide that the infrastructure is unable to accommodate the increase in that sort of traffic. I recommend that as part of the blueprint we look at bypasses around Bindoon and New Norcia to help those two communities alleviate the problem of being cut off on a daily basis. Businesses are affected by this traffic and these loads go past schools and shopping precincts. We also need to look at these things as part of the blueprint. It is about not only commodities and industries but also communities. We need to make sure that these two communities, along with many others, are not disadvantaged by a policy of this sort.

Hon Brian Ellis; Hon James Chown; Hon Ken Travers; Deputy President; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Paul Brown;  
Hon Simon O'Brien

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We have already invested \$175 million in the tier 1, 2 and 3 road and rail networks, so I look forward with considerable interest to that continuing to be part of our policy going forward. Once again, I thank Hon Brian Ellis for his motion. The Nationals and I will watch keenly what happens in the future.

**HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan)** [12.24 pm]: I support Hon Brian Ellis's motion and the sentiment behind it that he expressed in his argument. I want to offer a few perspectives from the point of view of a former Minister for Transport. When we came to government, I became the first Liberal Minister for Transport since heaven knows when! Most members in this place will not recall who the previous Liberal Minister for Transport was; some of them were not even born then. Off the top of my head, I think it was Hon Cyril Rushton.

It was a great privilege to take on that task. One of the things that I wanted to do was establish a transport planning regimen for Western Australia. As has already been observed in the course of this debate today, Western Australia is a jurisdiction whose prosperity and economic solvency relies very significantly on how it addresses the freight transport task in all its manifestations. It concerned me when I became the first Liberal Minister for Transport since 2001 that we did not have plans available for the state at a time when our growth most certainly required a high degree of planning. The Department for Planning and Infrastructure had combined a range of government agencies and functions. One of the outcomes of that was that a school of planners who were specifically concerned with transport planning had been subsumed into the greater planning and infrastructure monolith. This caused a sharp decline in the resources and attention of government applied to strategic planning. Therefore, one of the things that I wanted to do, and did do, was to set about re-creating a Department of Transport. I think that exercise worked well in combining under a common CEO the various agencies or enterprises, such as the Public Transport Authority, Main Roads Western Australia and the other transport instrumentalities in the Department for Planning and Infrastructure, so that they could work in greater harmony and with a greater sense of strategic purpose. Having established the Department of Transport and having sought to set about the rebuilding of specific strategic planning expertise, the other matter that I wanted to give emphasis to was to produce some documents to guide Western Australian governments into the future on what our transport needs were likely to be. In that way, we might establish real long-term planning and, hopefully, an intergovernmental and cross-generational, if you like, sense of purpose of what our priorities need to be.

**Hon Ken Travers:** Are you going to tell us about your planned expansion of the Esperance port that never happened, which was going to open this year?

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** Madam Deputy President (Hon Adele Farina), my friend needs to understand that I know what I am talking about on this matter because of my history. I know where the bodies are buried on my side and on the opposition's side! I can contribute to this debate by providing a unique perspective on what this is all about. I think there are probably 30 or so members, in addition to my friend, who understand that if they want to derive any benefit for themselves or the state in connection with this debate, the best thing that they can do now is shut up and listen, and they might learn something, because pointless little interjections will not elicit anything useful for them.

The sort of strategic planning instruments required in this state for transport networks address the questions of moving people and goods. Evidence of that, for example, is the public transport blueprint I commissioned, based on data obtained away from the glare of publicity and rhetoric by experts in the field, to be put forward to the government, and indeed successive governments, for consideration. For years no government provided a strategic plan for the way major public transport infrastructure is to be built and what priority it should be given, apart from those who had some political purposes.

**Hon Ken Travers:** Are you saying this plan will go down the same pathway?

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Adele Farina):** Order, members! Hon Simon O'Brien has the call.

*Point of Order*

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** In the last term of Parliament it was a convention during these Thursday morning debates, which have very limited time, to minimise the number of interjections. In a normal debate a little more freedom is allowed. But Hon Ken Travers has continuously interjected on Hon Simon O'Brien, and I ask you, Madam Deputy President, to direct him to cease that activity.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** There is no point of order because I had already given that direction prior to the member making that point of order.

*Debate Resumed*

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** Thanks, Madam Deputy President.

Hon Brian Ellis; Hon James Chown; Hon Ken Travers; Deputy President; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Paul Brown;  
Hon Simon O'Brien

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The absence of long-term strategic plans in both metropolitan public transport and the regional freight task for Western Australia were things that we did not have the capacity to address in 2008. I set out to initiate a process to make sure that we would have the capability of addressing them in due course. Whether commentators appreciate the significance of those requirements is clearly something for them. But it is important for the state that we have strategic transport planning. That is something that Hon Brian Ellis, as the mover of the motion, understands, and that is what I congratulate him for. In the brief time I have available, I caution members that they must understand that strategic planning is just that. It is not about reducing the debate to a shopping list of what roads are built where and when and that sort of thing. It is sometimes irresistible for elected members to attempt to do that. I hope enough members will keep their heads about them to understand that bigger plans need to be addressed rather than just trying to reduce it to the next unruly interjection.

The regional freight transport network plan, therefore, is a useful development. However, I would like to see it further developed. This document does tend to err on the side of being a summary of projects rather than a broad vision—that is still to come. I hope it will come as part of the process. We need to tackle, in this place and elsewhere broad, issues about where our future major transport links will go. I refer, for example, to links between the eastern goldfields and the Pilbara. Why does every container that comes into the state destined for the Pilbara have to go to the Perth metropolitan area? That is where we need to be smart. Similarly, we need to have the courage to contemplate what the next century's freight routes will look like in and around our metropolitan area, because they have to change from what has previously been accepted as somehow remaining there and working forever. I hope the opposition spokespeople—I appreciate those who had the courtesy to listen in silence—will develop the maturity to understand what the debate needs to be about rather than a temporary point-scoring exercise. I congratulate Hon Brian Ellis for recognising at least a step in the right direction—that is, the production of an initial transport plan.

**HON BRIAN ELLIS (Agricultural)** [12.35 pm] — in reply: Western Australia is growing up. We need to plan for the future, and that is what this plan will do. It is the first plan introduced by a government. I will summarise quickly some of the comments from industry, which is what I was trying to do at the end of my speech. The WA Chamber of Minerals and Energy website refers to the document as a step in the right direction. It also states that it is beginning the vital process of fully implementing the plan. The Civil Engineers Association says the plan contains a wealth of information for the civil construction industry and would assist contractors with its strategic plan. I join with them in congratulating the Barnett government.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.