

**MAIN ROADS WESTERN AUSTRALIA — ROADWORKS**

*Statement*

**HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan)** [9.58 pm]: Sometimes it takes a while to achieve progress in matters. It was probably over a year ago now that I brought a matter by motion to the notice of this house. That matter enjoyed some constructive bipartisan input, and it then spilled into the public domain via the airwaves and so on. Hon Ken Travers will remember participating in those engagements.

**Hon Ken Travers:** I think I said some nice things about you on the Paul Murray show.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** Yes, the member did, and I am waiting for it to come out on DVD or something so that I can at least get the audio of it.

**Hon Ken Travers:** You did at least use big words, if I can remember correctly.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** Okay. The challenge is to keep it going, because we are almost there. This is what I want the house to know and what I want others to take notice of. I might have mentioned previously that in late 2000, we had the fatality of a school student who had crossed a road at the wrong place. That was a tragic event, and as members do on such occasions, we pulled together with others to form an action group to ameliorate the roadscape in that area to try to avoid a future fatality, and we succeeded in doing so. I think I have recalled to the house in times gone past the key points of that, which illustrate the point that I want to raise again now. At the first meeting I said to the then acting head of Main Roads, "What you need is a fence up the middle of the median strip to stop kids trying to cut across this busy four-lane road where they're not meant to cross. The second thing you need is a 40 kph limit like other schools have got on this busy road, and to make sure people know there's a 40 kph limit. You don't only put up signs; you write '40' on the roadway in big yellow letters with a circle around it." Apparently we could not do any of those things then, but if members were to go to that location now, they would see them all in place. It is possible to put a 40 kph school zone on a road zoned 70 kph. If drivers are led by the nose with big numbers written on the road, it all comes together.

I have already alluded to a debate—a very constructive, bipartisan debate it was, too, and I enjoyed it; I think other members did as well—in which we talked about achieving some good results in relieving road congestion, or, to put it another way, getting a heck of a lot more value out of our roads without spending squillions of dollars on infrastructure solutions and without getting big sticks and hitting people because drivers are causing congestion and obviously have to be photographed and punished. No, it was not about that; it was about inculcating good habits in drivers, which is shorthand for saying learn how to merge. It came about, members may recall, that I made a suggestion—others agreed, and we had public debates on it—about what used to be called merging lanes on our freeways. There would be two lanes with a broken line between them as a lane demarcation, and where the lanes were meant to merge, the broken line stopped and the road narrowed. Our hopeless drivers here in Western Australia were expected somehow to merge. Do members know what has happened over generations? They could not, they would not and they did not. We then have people braking and we get that stop-start symptom of traffic and that, as my friend opposite knows, is the way we end up with dysfunction and congestion in the roads, because the stop-start becomes exaggerated as more and more vehicles participate in that process. The trick to any freeway system avoiding congestion or low levels of serviceability is to make sure everyone keeps moving. It does not matter even if they slow down to a very slow speed, as long as everyone knows to keep moving and to allow all the other motorists around to keep moving. That is when we achieve real reductions in congestion without spending a zack on bridges and flyovers, no matter how good they might be. My invitation to the Gateway WA project is probably still in the mail, I think!

**Hon Ken Travers** interjected.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** I spent a couple of years as a minister working on it with Anthony Albanese. But anyway, let us not digress, because that is a good project also, and it is all about keeping traffic moving.

I do not want to detain the house unnecessarily, but I appreciate the interjections on this occasion. During our recent debate we spoke about a number of things, and my suggestion on the day was, "You don't do that. What you do is make sure you have one lane that terminates and you get a regular dotted line with frequent dots showing the demarcation, and that goes to a vanishing point, so that there is clearly a lane that terminates and therefore the traffic in that lane has to move." That creates an impetus for them to move. But we also need some big arrows showing that a lane is about to terminate, like having big numbers written on the road, and making it easy for people who are driving on a freeway. Perhaps people are not used to driving on freeways, so let us make it easy for them to understand what they need to do through simple signage that anyone can understand. The response to that, of course, was, "No, you can't do that. You can't do the frequent dotted line with the terminating lane, and you certainly can't have big arrows; that would confuse things." I am delighted, Mr President, to advise that the Manning Road on-ramp to the freeway north got the treatment of the dotted lines

that showed a terminating lane. It had started to work, and then most recently the big white arrows were added. In the last couple of weeks, as I joined that road, as I do many times in the course of a week, guess what happened? The traffic kept moving. Even in the peak of the peak hour, it actually did not physically stop, at least while I was going through it. It was very, very crowded but it did not get to that low level of serviceability. Even though it has been established that if I say I reckon I have a good idea, it means that people will have to say, “No, we couldn’t possibly do that”, they might then turn around and say, “Hang on, maybe it is a good idea.” I did not invent it. I have observed it working in other jurisdictions. The only thing I would suggest before the introduction of white arrows finishes—I think a number of members have seen them—is that they need to be made a bit bigger. The tip of the arrow, the pointy bit, has to go into the continuing lane on the right so it shows all vehicles that that is where cars have to come from and where they have to go to.

**Hon Adele Farina:** Why don’t we give them driverless cars and the cars just know what to do?

**Hon SIMON O’BRIEN:** That is another alternative. Now Hon Adele Farina is trying to be ahead of her time and it is still my shot to do that. That is why I am raising this matter tonight.

At least someone out there is listening. Perhaps they felt that if Parliament seems to agree that this is a good idea, maybe it is something we need to examine. Of course the road engineers know how to make these things work. Perhaps we helped to give them the encouragement to make it happen. Let us hope it continues that way and we actually achieve something for everyone that we have been looking to achieve for a very long time indeed.

*House adjourned at 10.07 pm*