

Division 38: Department of Transport, \$164 710 000 —

Mrs L.A. Munday, Chair.

Ms R. Saffioti, Minister for Transport.

Mr P. Woronzow, Director General.

Mr P. Parolo, Executive Director, Finance and Procurement Services.

Mr P. Seares, Managing Director, Westport.

Mr I. Cameron, Managing Director.

Mr P. Abromeit, Senior Policy Adviser.

Mr P. Laing, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with these details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall only be examined in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

I give the call to the member for Moore.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 74 of budget paper No 3 and motor vehicle taxes. The motor vehicle licence duty is expected to rise by \$46 million and motor vehicle licence fees are expected to contribute an extra \$50 million in the budget. Given the cost pressures on Western Australian families, did the government consider freezing these fees and charges for motorists?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I thank the member for that question. The Expenditure Review Committee, of which I am a member, considers all household fees and charges in its deliberations. As part of this year's budget, there was a new \$400 electricity subsidy. That means the total household fees and charges will fall this year. In the context of the household model, all the fees and charges were taken into consideration and that is why a very significant decision was made on the electricity rebate of \$400. As a result, the whole basket of fees and charges will fall.

As we know, the motor vehicle licence duty is hypothecated funds that go to road maintenance and road building. We use all those funds to improve our roads. I would like to point out our efforts on regional road spending, for example. I will just confirm this. In the 2021–22 estimate, about 57 per cent of the expenditure on roads by Main Roads was to be undertaken in regional Western Australia. That is an incredible figure, really. That is up from about 47 per cent under the previous Liberal–National government. We are spending far more on regional roads.

We understand that cost-of-living pressures are an issue for all Western Australians, and that is why, if we look at all the household charges together, there is a reduction in the household model this year.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Further to that statement that it is all spent on roads, can the minister explain the table on page 639? It is a different part of the *Budget statements* but it shows where Perth Metronet projects are getting their funding from. The table states that \$67.5 million or maybe \$68 million is coming from licence fees.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: As in Metronet?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Metronet is both rail infrastructure and road infrastructure. It may even include cycling infrastructure. As part of Metronet, not only public transport users, but also road users in general will benefit. They will benefit in two ways. The first is that if we get more people on public transport, it will be better for road users because the roads will be less congested. The second is that there are road improvements associated with our rail projects. The best example is probably the level crossing removal projects. For example, the Denny Avenue level crossing removal project not only makes it safer for the trains, but also saves road users a considerable amount of time. We built the Davis Road underpass. We reconfigured Albany Highway in that area, improved some turning pockets and improved the entire station forecourt. Metronet also delivers road improvements.

The motor vehicle licence account allows us under existing legislation to make improvements to roads. In many instances, as I said in relation to Metronet for example, level crossing removals are a clear example of when projects benefit road users. Another area would be, for example, when we have associated roadworks that are part of the Metronet package. That could include the Tonkin Highway works, like Broun Avenue, for example, and a lot of the road improvements for the Yanchep rail extension. Metronet is big in the sense that it covers rail users, but it also brings enormous benefits to cyclists, pedestrians and road users.

Mr R.S. LOVE: In terms some of projects the minister outlined, they are necessary only because of the Metronet program and the rail going in. We will not need the flyovers on the Yanchep line if we do not have the rail, obviously. I think it is a little bit of a stretch.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: No. I counter that strongly. With a level crossing removal, for example, although it is a rail project, other than the brand new stations rail users will get, a lot of the benefits are for road users, who will not be waiting at the level crossing for the boom gates to go up. Although a level crossing removal is very much a Metronet project and a rail project, as part of the benefit–cost ratio, on a strict transport analysis, a lot of the benefit is for road users. I would counter any idea that we should not be using these funds for these projects, because in many instances a lot of the benefit goes to road users.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The minister spoke about regional road funding. Has the minister driven on Albany Highway between Armadale and Williams in the last couple of months?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Not in the last couple of months.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am very concerned about the state of the roads and the new work that has been done over the last 12 or 18 months that is now being re-laid. Where it has been re-laid, within the space of a week or two, there seem to be various areas that need to be redone. How does it play out when a few kilometres of road that has been redone then has to be redone the following year? What is the interaction with the contractor and the like about who pays for it? How is the justification of the standard of work, or the lack of standard of work, worked through with Main Roads?

[1.10 pm]

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: A couple of things. First of all, much of that spending was through our regional road safety partnership with the federal government, to which it allocated funds on a use-it-or-lose-it basis. We were very keen to spend that money as fast as possible; otherwise, we would lose our allocation. The second thing is that we are always shocked about how much rain we get, but we do get a lot of rain, particularly in the great southern. Last winter that entire area was very, very wet and there was a lot of damage, and not only to roads. We inspected South Coast Highway; every time we went to inspect it, it was raining. There was a lot of significant rainfall, which impacted on our roadworks, particularly in that area. With regard to the contracts, I will ask Peter Woronzow to provide some comments. This seems to be a road question, but Peter Woronzow is happy to take it. We are currently on the Department of Transport. One of the things that people are excited about, and this is not a comment on any contractor, is bringing road maintenance work back into the agency. That is to facilitate continuous quality control and engage a lot more small contractors. I spoke to the current acting head of the Western Australian Local Government Association about road maintenance and how we can be more proactive in regional WA. If there is a small job that needs to be addressed, we can be more proactive in dealing with it and maybe prevent wider damage. That is one of the benefits of bringing long-term maintenance contracts in-house. This is a bit of a roads question, but I will ask Peter Woronzow to answer it.

Mr P. Woronzow: The work the member is referring to was delivered as part of the \$704 million regional road safety package, and I am pleased to say that we have delivered more than \$500 million of that and covered 50 per cent of the state’s high-speed road network. With regard to the specific question, that work is being delivered under our existing term network contracts. If there is any defective work, it is covered by the defects warranty period. We will make an assessment. When the contractor is doing the work, we will have people going through and assessing all the work that is done, and if it is defective, they will have to come back and reinstate it.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: We might pick this up under Main Roads, but I guess my question relates to the fact that I went through there last week at 5.30 in the morning and there was gravel and potholes and the like, and this was a road that had just been redone within the last 12 months. I understand that it is obviously preferable to do this work in the summertime. Is there any direction on trying to maximise summer work and minimise winter work?

Mr P. Woronzow: That is a reasonable question. Throughout the state we have what is called “sealing seasons”, when there is a window of opportunity during which there is the optimal ambient temperature for laying bitumen. However, there are times when a project might start when the ambient temperature is satisfactory, but during the laying of the bitumen the weather might change and the temperature might drop. It might start raining. Those things catch people out from time to time, but we have surveillance officers on all the work that is done by Main Roads, and as the minister was describing, it is all done by contract. When that work does not come up to the appropriate standard—all the contracts have a standard—it has to be reinstated.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thanks. I will leave it at that for now.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 68 of budget paper No 3 and the reference there to road user charges for zero emission and low-emission vehicles. I understand a charge has been introduced of 2.5¢ for fully electric vehicles and 2¢ for the plug-in hybrids. How did the government go about selecting these as charges? Was it simply taken from the fact that that is what Victoria and other places have done?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I think this comes under Treasury, but I am able to comment. The basis of the charge was charges that had been announced in other states. It was considered that we should have a nationally consistent scheme. At one of my first transport ministers' meetings a number of years ago, these types of items were very much on the agenda; it was about three federal infrastructure ministers ago. It was thought that having a nationally consistent rate would be the smart thing to do. Unfortunately, the commonwealth government did not provide any leadership on this matter, but most states wanted to be in a situation of being able to offer subsidies and discounts for electric vehicles, while also being very transparent about the charges that would be levied. I watched the discussion and what happened with the feed-in solar tariff. Commitments were made on the rates people would be paid for the feed-in of their solar power to the system, but then that changed. That upset a lot of people, because they had made investment decisions based on a tariff regime that was then changed; I think the previous Barnett government reversed that decision. We wanted to make sure that that was very clear.

Talking to people, there is an awareness that when people drive on the roads, they are paying—without the recent temporary reduction—44¢ a litre on fuel excise. That is not transparent or clear in any way, and it is collected by the commonwealth government. The commonwealth government then uses that as part of what it gives back to the states to fund roads. In essence, people who are filling up their cars with petrol are paying for the roads they are driving on. Moving on, we need a replacement revenue source and an equitable way of levying it, and that is why most states have announced a new user charge. However, on all calculations, the impact of the user charge on people's budget will be around 50 per cent of what they currently pay in fuel excise. That is maybe not reflective of an even higher petrol price in the future, so that is a conservative view. I think it is a very good thing to be transparent and clear about the regime we are going to be operating under. Otherwise, there will be a lot of people who are paying for the roads and a lot of people who will not be, and I do not think that is fair.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is it not a fact though, minister, that the federal government is funding a component of the roads whichever way we cut the cookie in terms of the federal excise, and that this tax will not replace that but will be in addition to that contribution by the federal government?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I am not sure what the member is alluding to.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The federal government is still going to be providing some level of infrastructure in 2027. Does the minister expect the proportion of funding that we get from the excise to be radically different from what it is now?

[1.20 pm]

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I think this will be a challenge for the new Treasurer. As I said, there is probably a lot of unfinished business or projects that were put into the too-hard basket by the former Treasurer and the former federal government. It is clear that states will now have their own source of revenue through their motor vehicle levies, and the Department of Transport will be working with the Office of Digital Government to determine how that levy will be collected—in a sense, what technology we will be using to help monitor usage and, therefore, the levy payment.

Currently, the federal budget collects the excise. Even in 2027, we expect the excise to still be a significant amount. I do not know what the forecast figures are for the purchase of electric vehicles, but I know there is an issue of production and I know that there is probably going to be more of a supply than a demand issue over the next three to four years. Although people will purchase electric vehicles, a lot of people will not; they will still be paying the fuel excise, and that will go to the federal government. Currently, as I understand it—I might be corrected—the federal government does not reallocate all of that revenue back to the states; it reallocates a portion of that revenue back to the states. How it determines the impact on state revenue or state funding is probably a matter for future ministers and future Treasurers and infrastructure meetings. As I said, a more proactive federal government would probably have considered this issue over the past few years, but it did not, and it will need to be sorted. Ideally, a nationally consistent rate would be applied, but that has not happened.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have a further question on the road user charge. The minister said that the government has not yet determined how to levy that charge. When will these parameters be made known to the public? People are making decisions to buy cars today. They would probably like to know whether they will have a GPS following them around and some sort of app the government can plug in to see where they have been and how long they have been there, or whether it will be like the rather clumsy system in Victoria, whereby people send in a photograph of their odometers once a year, but, if they do not, they get a fine. When making these decisions, people would like to know how it will be applied.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I hope that the member turns off the location services on his phone!

Mr R.S. LOVE: I can assure the minister that Google knows an awful lot about where I go; I know it does, but I am not sharing that directly with her!

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I trust the state government more than Google! We want the rate and how it will be applied to be very transparent. That has been made transparent. As I said, we will be working with the Office of Digital Government on how we will collect the data and then how it will be levied. In my view, it would probably make a lot of sense to put it on the motor vehicle registration, but that will also have to be determined through legislation. Legislation will need to be brought in and that will make very clear how it will be applied. I know that Victoria has the photograph system. We will be investigating what is the best way of administering the new charge.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Does the minister expect that this will have any impact on the take-up of electric vehicles?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: No. I think there is enormous demand for electric vehicles. I think, in particular, anyone who is looking to purchase an electric vehicle is making the calculations, so they know that there will still be a 50 per cent saving in the road taxes that they will be paying. As I said—this is off the top of my head—the estimate is that people who drive 10 000 kilometres per annum currently pay a fuel excise of about \$500 or more. I have the figure of \$250 to \$500 in my head; that may be incorrect. We believe there will be a 50 per cent saving in the taxes that someone who purchases an electric vehicle will pay.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have one further point on the purchase of an electric vehicle. They are pretty expensive. Why limit it to \$70 000? There are not a lot of choices on the market.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: We have the list; there are quite a few and there are more coming onto the market. Hyundai has brought out a couple of very good vehicles. I think that the lower range Teslas are in that range, but the higher range Teslas are not. If we consider a \$100 000 Mercedes, there has to be a line drawn somewhere. I think that the level is \$65 000, and, like I said, there are Nissans, Hyundais and a number of vehicles within that range. I was recently with the Premier at the announcement at the Motor Trade Association of Western Australia in Osborne Park, and I was impressed by the vehicles there. Sorry; it is a value of up to \$70 000. I know there was some discussion of a value of between \$65 000 and \$70 000; it is up to \$70 000. There were a lot of new vehicles, and there is a range of vehicles on the market or coming onto the market, that cost under \$70 000.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have a further question on the current situation with electric vehicles. Would it be possible for the minister to provide me with information about how many electric vehicles are actually registered on the road in WA at the moment, and also perhaps plug-in hybrids, and an idea of how many the minister expects to be sold on an annual basis?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Yes, but by way of supplementary information.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes, that is fine.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: We do not have projections, sorry.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Okay; what about over the last four years?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Yes, okay—the number of motor vehicle registrations for plug-in hybrids.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes, and full electric vehicles.

The CHAIR: Can we just clarify what supplementary information you are going to provide?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I will provide the number of electric vehicles that are registered. We do not have transactions, but we have registrations for plug-in and electric vehicles over the last four years.

[Supplementary Information No A10.]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I turn to page 604 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the Perth parking levy is mentioned there. At the moment, I think that the levy is due to bring in \$58 million; is that right?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: That is the balance of the account.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is that in this budget year?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Sorry; yes, that is right.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Can the minister please tell us which account it sits in and how much is actually in that account?

[1.30 pm]

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I will just find it for the member. The estimated cash at the end of this financial year, as at June 2022, is \$166 million.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Could the minister explain who makes the decisions around the expenditure from that fund? Are those decisions made from the minister's department?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: It is a state government collection, so, yes, the decisions are made through my department. For example, we have made some significant commitments, such as the new purple CAT service to the University of Western Australia. That is funded from this fund. We also made a decision to expand the green and red CAT services—sorry, the blue and red CATs; there is no green CAT expansion. We also made a significant commitment for a new pedestrian–cycling bridge between Victoria Park and the city. We very much make those decisions. There are also a number of minor transport projects that are caught up in the Perth City Deal.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Could the minister provide, either now or by supplementary information, an outline of the nine projects over the last 12 months that the minister mentioned?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Yes. The initiatives are primarily, as I said, minor transport projects as part of the Perth City Deal. They include the allocation for the new Causeway pedestrian–cycling bridge. There is also the Roe Street enhancement project. That project has taken a bit longer than we thought. There is also the commitment to the new CAT services. Is the member seeking the new expenditure from this account?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes, if the minister has a list of the proposed projects.

The CHAIR: Can the minister outline what she will be providing?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: We will provide for 2022–23 the expenditure from the Perth parking levy on projects.

[*Supplementary Information No A11.*]

Mr R.S. LOVE: Has this parking levy ever funded events such as education festivals and so forth, or does it only fund infrastructure?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: It has not in the past. It is governed by legislation. There will be different interpretations of what the legislation allows, but it is broadly for initiatives to support activity and transport through the designated boundaries of the Perth parking levy area. The definition is quite broad. It supports, as I recall, transport activities. I suppose there could be a wide interpretation of that. More generally, in the past it has been very much focused on running transport services. I am not sure whether we have used it for traffic management at events. It is used for transport efficiency and congestion management. I do not think we have ever used it to fund events, but there might have been some allocations to events.

Mr R.S. LOVE: That is not being planned at the moment by the sound of it?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: No.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer now to the spending changes on page 588 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the line item for Westport feasibility studies. We are now leaving parking and moving to ports. We touched on this in the previous division. Can the minister give us an idea of exactly when the business case for the Westport project is expected to be finished and we will move towards the development of that project? What time line does the minister have for that project?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Does the member mean the Westport project more generally?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: As I said, we are going through the business case with the federal government and Infrastructure Australia. Stage 2 has been submitted. We are doing the rail corridor planning. We are moving into acquisition of property along Anketell Road. We expect this will lead to some significant activity in 2024 with some of the final investment decisions, and then moving to the start of the procurement project. I will say that the Westport project is multifaceted. There are a number of different work streams. There is the port itself, which is the one that I just referred to, but there are also other elements. We are trying to separate the different elements: the planning and development of the port, the planning and development of the road and rail infrastructure, the route definition, and the discussion with property owners about the acquisition of properties. As I said, that work is very much underway.

There is also supply chain logistics. Work is underway to identify the destination and source of containers, and to make sure that we develop an intermodal strategy to support that. We are also looking at how we can diversify more trade, particularly bulk trade, to the regional ports. It is my strong view that if we can move bulk trade through other ports, that will support what is happening at Kwinana. Work at Fremantle port and the two specifics studies on the relocation of livestock and vehicles is also very much underway. We are working as fast as we can. We also have the environmental processes with respect to those time frames. As I said, probably in 2024 we will be making some serious investment decisions.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Further to that, the minister mentioned the extensive amount of planning that is required around Westport. My understanding is that Westport will have carriage of a lot of things other than just the port and is also looking—as part of its project, not as a different project—at the transport corridors and perhaps some of the

industrial land around Kwinana that might support the port into the future. My understanding is that that will all be planned through the single body of Westport. Is that not the case?

[1.40 pm]

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: It is, but we are not planning the entire Kwinana strip through Westport. Westport will define the corridors in and out, and look at the logistics and intermodal implications. I will ask Patrick Seares to talk about that in a moment. But other work is being done through the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation and the Minister for State Development, Jobs and Trade on the entire strategy for Kwinana and the whole west coast trade strategy. It is fair to say that Patrick is very much linked into the discussions about what will happen in Kwinana more widely, but the overarching priority of the government is for the new port, and road and rail corridors to lead to that. Patrick is in charge of the road and rail corridor, what the new port will look like, how it will function, where the intermodals will be and where the logistics park will be developed. That said, Main Roads will design the road. Westport will not be designing the road, but it will be providing input. As I said, Patrick is very much linked in to all the processes of government so I will refer it to Patrick.

Mr P. Seares: The member is absolutely right. The Westport design is looking at the full supply chain between Gage Roads and where the containers will be fully unpacked. We need to make sure that the whole network is optimised and that it is not just an efficient port with an inefficient road and rail network behind it. We will be doing the planning and design, with consideration of the environment, obviously, particularly in Cockburn Sound—that is, the definition of how the terminal will work, and considering the land that will be required behind the terminal for the Australian Border Force, logistics, empty container parks, all road and rail, and where the future intermodal marine terminals need to be. The location of the distribution centres might need to change as well. That will lead to potential changes in the planning system to accommodate those things in the future. That will allow us to put in planning control areas through the Western Australian Planning Commission, at this stage, to protect that land so that when the port is constructed, the land will be there; it will not be developed through urban development and other things.

Obviously, there will be substantial changes to Kwinana and the corridor between the terminal and the major transport links—that is, Anketell Road and the existing freight rail network, which may require upgrades. But, as the minister said, Roger Cook is leading the task force on the global advanced industry hub, which is looking at the full make-up of how the Western Trade Coast and Kwinana industrial area will evolve with more advanced manufacturing and other industry processes. We are trying to make sure that Westport is done in a way that will enable and leverage growth. A lot can be built on top of a substantial infrastructure project like this, so we are looking at how to design that into the Western Trade Coast's future.

Mr R.S. LOVE: We have heard about getting in and out of the corridors; that has been part of the discussion. For the record, I went out to Anketell Road and spoke to some of the owners of those nine houses that will be affected. I spoke to the father of one lady who had just built a house. She had just had the carpets put in but had cancelled the brick paving people that day because they had just been told about the control area. I think there has been a lack of direct communication, for whatever reason, with some of those people, especially her, which is unfortunate. However, I agree that the best course of action is to put planning control over that area rather than to do what happened to the residents in Oakajee who had their land sterilised for 30 years.

With that little aside, it was put to me by some people in the industry that a rail corridor should be built along Anketell Road as well. Has that ever been considered? Are there any constraints on the existing rail freight corridor going out of Kwinana, which I understand goes through some fairly urbanised areas and risks being subject to curfews et cetera?

[Mr S.J. Price took the chair.]

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: The rail alignment, or the investment in rail, is very much part of this planning. We are looking at making the Anketell corridor a freight corridor and at what options are available. The upgrades that will need to be undertaken for a rail alignment will very much be driven by the style of port and the role of the intermodals and logistics, because it all needs to work together. We need to start with the style of the port and how the containers will be moved from ships and then on from there. That will determine the inland requirements. All of that is being considered. Everything is on the table and everything is being assessed and looked at. Building a port is not simply a matter of looking at what happens in the water; it is all about the land side, which is far more complicated. It is about the relationship between the existing roads and rail, what needs to be upgraded, where the containers will go, and how to reduce the distance that is travelled.

An interesting emerging factor that needs to be considered is the continued role of direct shipping. Over the past year there has been a significant increase, from a very low base, in direct shipping into the Pilbara. We have seen further developments in the Kimberley and the Pilbara, like the Dampier wharf, together with Lumsden Point and

the things that are happening in Broome. That is more direct shipping. All those things need to be factored in for the direct shipping of containers into the north.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a further question on that matter. A minute ago the minister spoke about the livestock trade. I remember when the Premier and the minister announced a \$2 million package for the relocation of livestock. Does the minister have any initial thoughts about where that may be relocated to?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: No, not really. I think we need to have a discussion with industry to see who will benefit, particularly on transport costs. There are differing views: one is that we head north and the other is that we head south. There are two very divergent views on where livestock could be traded from. We are at a very early assessment stage and I would rather consult the industry before we make those decisions so that it does not create unnecessary concern.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Given the federal election results of the weekend, it appears that the minister and the Premier proactively support the industry through its budget allocation in this area, in comparison with their federal colleagues. Is the minister confident about the ongoing future of the live export industry?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I think the Premier made the position pretty clear. That is why we will continue to work on an alternative port for the livestock trade.

Ms E.J. KELSBIE: I refer to page 109 of budget paper No 2 and the sixth point under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”. Can the minister outline, please, what the McGowan government is doing to make regional airfares more affordable, including for the people in the great southern?

[1.50 pm]

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Yes. The regional airfare cap initiative—probably the first of its kind in Australia—is modelled on the two-zone cap for public transport. It is aiming to further deliver on the government’s policy of increased affordability and accessibility of air travel. From 1 July 2022, airfares from regional towns to the city will be capped for residents of regional towns. Residents departing from an airport more than 1 000 kilometres from Perth will pay no more than \$299, and those less than 1 000 kilometres from Perth will pay no more than \$199 for a one-way flight. As I said, this is the result of a lot of work that has been undertaken. A parliamentary inquiry undertaken in 2017 made a number of recommendations to improve the transparency of what happens with regional airfares. Tourism agencies have always negotiated some seasonal discounts and so forth, but this is very much targeted to regional residents because we know that a big factor in living in regional WA is transport costs. Guaranteeing a price cap will support regional residents who are facing cost-of-living pressures, but also make it far easier for them to travel to the city for medical appointments, to visit family for special occasions or for whatever reason. When we ask or encourage people to move to regional WA, I think the availability of this type of fare will make it far more attractive because people will know that they can get back to the city for those occasions at an affordable rate.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I thank the member for Warren–Blackwood for that segue into my next question. I have been contacted by a former constituent of mine from Kalbarri who inquired whether Kalbarri could at some point have an air passenger service reinstated. He referenced an article in *The Geraldton Guardian* of 20 May that pooh-pooed the idea, but he would certainly like to put it forward.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Who pooh-pooed the idea?

Mr R.S. LOVE: It was raised by Peter Stewart. I think he may have contacted the minister’s office recently. I put to the minister that it would be an excellent idea to re-examine that service for the town of Kalbarri. It was dropped in about 2005 or 2006—something like that—but there is quite a good airstrip up there and plenty of potential, as the minister would know, with the skywalk and investments in that area. On behalf of my constituent, I ask: would the minister consider an approach to reinstate an air service to Kalbarri?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: People who know me know that I will consider everything! That is my view of life. I think I consider everything; maybe that is one criticism of me. My view is that there are many more improvements that we could make with regional air travel in WA. My view is about volume. We want to make intra-regional travel more accessible and more affordable so that more people do it. Air travel is one area that might require government intervention early and then it will gain its own momentum. We have seen that in the other states. In talking to some of the airlines, sometimes air routes gain their own momentum and can then support themselves. My view is that we will continue to look at opportunities to support further routes, bigger planes and more frequency. Probably one of my biggest priorities is to have so many people who want to travel in Western Australia that the airlines respond. We have a number of good airlines in WA. There have been some criticisms about some of the planes that they fly—I can think of one in particular—but I have always had very good relationships with all of them, even airlines like REX. I have had a very good relationship with them, particularly when COVID hit, and we supported them over some tough periods. I will continue to support proposals. Aviair came to us with a proposal and we very much went into bat for that and got supported. My view is that airlines can come forward with ideas, and when we believe that we can support them and there is a future, we will back them and support them. Normally, we hear from

the airlines themselves. That is the system, because they are the ones that approach us with ideas. As I said, if I could double the number of people flying in Western Australia tomorrow, I would do it. When people talk about tourism in regional WA, the reality is that some people love driving—they love two or three days of driving—and camping, but a lot of people like it to be a bit easier. One of our issues in the past has been that we have thought that everyone loves the full-on adventure, whereas a lot of people like the niceties of air travel and good places to stay, too, and I think we need to cater for everybody.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Going back to an old theme, I refer to page 601 of the *Budget statements*. We were talking before about the ports down around Westport and Fremantle et cetera. There is a table headed “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies”. The line item I am referring to is on the Fremantle container rail subsidy. It had \$5.57 million and then the budgeted amount was \$8.3 million, which was quite a significant increase on the year before. It is \$8.5 million this year. We do not have a full case yet for Westport. Will this subsidy continue for the entire time until a Kwinana solution is built? What other solutions need to be found in terms of interim expenditure on roads et cetera to ensure that freight can still move in and out of the inner harbour while we wait for the construction of the outer harbour?

[Ms A.E. Kent took the chair.]

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Will the subsidy continue? I hope so. That is my plan—again, subject to future budget processes. One of the important points about this is that it has worked. We reached an all-time high for the total volume going onto rail in March this year, at 24.3 per cent. Our target was 20 per cent. Before we won government, it was below 15 per cent and had dropped to 11 per cent. If we think about that, the number of trucks we have taken off roads just through this subsidy is incredible. We removed approximately 110 480—that is very precise for an approximate number!—one-way truck movements from arterial port roads. That is quite incredible. I believe that freight on rail has a cost benefit. For the size of the subsidy, the number of trucks we are removing off roads is incredible. That has been a priority.

In relation to further road enhancements, there is planning for the Fremantle Traffic Bridge. In a sense, this is a road project that will expand the ability to move more freight onto rail because we are building a new rail bridge. We are hoping to get to well over 30 per cent when we build that new rail bridge. That is in its final design stages and will happen over the next three to four years. Again, that will take that next leap when we are looking at the number of containers on rail. It had bottomed out at about 11 per cent or 15 per cent. We came into government and moved it to 20 per cent and 24 per cent. This will be the next leap to take trucks off roads.

In relation to road improvements, we have finished some of the changes that have been made over the past two years to some of the intersections along Leach Highway. I think a couple of smaller road improvements are being undertaken as part of some election commitments.

We also committed to the High Street project, which is finished too. The roundabout and noise walls are quite significant. If anyone wants to see a modern noise wall, they can go down there and check those out; they are quite big. That has improved safety for local residents and at the netball centre. We will continue with minor road improvements, but the big policy is freight on rail. The government has achieved an all-time record 24 per cent of freight going onto rail. We will continue to work with stevedoring companies to make sure that what we do at the port facilitates more freight on rail.

[2.00 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have a further question on the freight issue. The minister just said the government will lift the percentage to 30 per cent, but there will still be an awful lot of traffic in that area. I do not know, because I do not travel down there very often, but it is often reported to me that Leach Highway and roads like that are often clogged, and it is not a very pleasant place to drive. Is there nothing that will be done in the interim to improve road movements in that area, apart from moving freight from roads?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: As I said, minor road improvements will be undertaken. I do not have the figures on congestion and other monitoring of the network with me, but some changes have already been made to light synchronisation and turning pockets. In a sense, we see a stabilisation in and, in some instances, an improvement on efficiency indicators for the Leach Highway network. I do not have those figures with me, but I can provide some information on the improvements in traffic movement on Leach Highway. I do not doubt that a lot of people have made that point to the member, but when comparing both accidents and congestion figures across the network, there has been a stabilisation of congestion and an improvement in efficiency. We can provide that by way of supplementary information. The big factor is getting trucks off the roads. That is the main issue, and that is what freight on rail is doing. By way of supplementary information, I will provide some efficiency indicators on how Leach Highway is currently performing.

[*Supplementary Information No A12.*]

Mr R.S. LOVE: Still on something that is coastal in nature, but somewhat different. I refer the minister to page 589 under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” the last point is climate change, and paragraph 13 states —

The Department is supporting Government initiatives to address climate change ... and continues to partner with local governments to provide expertise and administer funding for coastal protection.

Could the minister give me some idea of how the department achieves this? What technical expertise does the department provide to individual local governments that might be facing some issues with coastal protection?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Coastal erosion and coastal protection cross two agencies. The CoastWA program comprises four parts: the coastal grants programs; Department of Transport data collection—its technical investigations—community engagement; and program management and technical expertise. It involves two parts. The agency supports local governments, sometimes by jointly funding engineering studies to understand the impact of coastal erosion and what infrastructure is required to support those hot spots; and it provides its own qualified engineers—I have met a few—who are very good at what they do. Sometimes this helps councils to understand what questions to ask, as well as to find the answers. The department provides in-kind support and a lot of grants that help councils develop studies and get engineering assessments and make sure the infrastructure solution is the correct solution. As noted in the previous discussion, every time I go up and down the coast, I am told that an area is an erosion hot spot because someone put a jetty there or a breakwater here. It occurs everywhere. As soon as something like that is done, it disturbs the flow of sand. In many instances, it is sand nourishment to help support the ongoing existence of a beach. We undertake a variety of different projects. I think that councils very much support this team. I know there is massive demand for grants. If I had my way, I would have a lot more grant money to give. We approached the former federal government on coastal erosion. It is in a sense part of the climate change discussion. I will not put pressure on this new government yet—I will let them be sworn in. The new federal government may like to partner with us on this. More generally, we are doing what we can. We enhanced our grants programs over the past couple of years. We are spending a record amount on this, but I accept there is a lot of demand along the coast. I ask Iain Cameron to provide some further comments.

Mr I. Cameron: The minister covered it pretty well. A coastal management advisory group is chaired by the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage and the Department of Transport partners in that. Our role is to provide technical expertise. That is on existing erosion hot spots—the existing high risk areas. As the minister said, the WA coast is basically characterised as dynamic; the coast is moving all the time. We have technical expertise in Fremantle, and we partner with local governments. We have a lot of data and analysis on what has happened and what can happen.

As the minister said, the program will fund a study and we will work with the local government on a particular problem. We might provide our expertise and technical assistance on wave buoys or we might look at current action and the rest of it. On significant projects, we can do current and wave modelling and all those sorts of things. Our role is to partner with local governments. The funding for a study would come through the program, and then we are able to provide expertise and make data available too. We are very much partnering with local government across the state. As the minister referred, there are identified and known priorities and hot spots, and other issues that come up. Of course, we do other things such as dredging. We partner with local government and provide our technical expertise. We are very proud of the expertise we have in Fremantle. We have some very talented and experienced people there.

[2.10 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: What I hear from local governments on the ground is that there is a lot of friendly advice but very little help in dealing with the issues they are facing. There is the occasional grant, but there is no real coordinated approach from the government to deal with those issues.

The CHAIR: Can you direct your question, please, member for Moore?

Mr R.S. LOVE: We have already talked about that. It is a further question.

The CHAIR: It is not a question, though.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I turn now to what the government can do to lead this discussion. The minister’s department is the only department, apparently, with the technical expertise to design or even approve some of the proposals put forward, and if the government seeks advice about whether something can be done, it will seek it from the minister’s department. In her role as Minister for Transport, and also wearing her planning hat, can the minister see, with that expertise, some extra assistance going to the local governments that are battling, such as Gingin and others, including those in the metropolitan area as well? They are crying out for help at the moment.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: As I said, I do not doubt the demand. A lot of that has been driven by the decisions that were made in the past about where to invest in infrastructure and some has been driven by where that maritime infrastructure has been placed in the past. Again, that is no-one’s fault; it is just that at that time we were probably

not quite as aware of some of the long-term impacts of that infrastructure provision as we are today. We have increased funding in this area across both agencies.

On the prioritisation and the strategic approach, I think the hotspot analysis was a good start to identify the 50 hotspots across the state and to work on those in a systematic way. Of course, if a project is number six or seven on that list, it probably has not yet been attended to, but we are trying to work through that list in the same way that we prioritise funding for other programs such as the black spot program. Recently, the team has been supplemented with some new engineers. However, more generally, as I said, we have funded a number of different projects, including at Port Beach, which is a land sale and sand nourishment project, and at Quinns Beach, Rockingham, the City of Greater Geraldton and throughout regional Western Australia. We will continue to do what we can, but I would say it is one of those situations of demand outstripping supply. I suspect that as part of the climate change discussions we will probably seek a long-term partnership with the federal government to help support all the work in this area over the next 20 years because I think this is one of those long-term projects that state and federal governments will have to work together on. I note that in the other states some homes have fallen into the water, so the need is very high there, too.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I would like to ask another question on this same issue, but from a different angle, if I could. It is probably a new question.

The CHAIR: The member for Moore with a new question.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to the line item “Coastal Projects and Zone Management” on page 601 in the “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies” table. Last year, funding for that project peaked. The government budget for \$6.8 million and \$6.7 million was expended. This year, it has declined to \$3 million and the funding further declines throughout the forward estimates. Is that figure indicative of the government’s support for local governments that are facing this situation, or will the government use other funding mechanisms to address those issues?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: The change from one year to the next was the result of some specific projects that were funded through the recovery plan, which inflated the 2021–22 figure. As the member can see, the baseline is around the \$2 million or \$3 million mark. The usual funding is around \$2 million and some additional funding was provided through the COVID recovery plan.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Thank you for that, minister. I have a different question on that same table. The recreational boat facilities funding seems to remain quite static, but my understanding is that the registration fees are increasing. Is there a reason why they are not being disbursed back into a grant scheme?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: This is part of what we do for boating facilities. That funding does not include all the other investments we have made in other harbours and marinas, which is listed under the asset investment program. This is simply the grants program. The revenue to fund the scheme has been consistent since 1998. It comprises a certain percentage of recreational boat registration fees and charges. We have also approved a couple of specific initiatives that have flowed through, which helped inflate the numbers for a little bit. That included the boat facilities upgrades in Broome, which were used for the Town Beach public toilets and for trailer parking at the Catalina boat ramp.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I want to go back to the provision of maritime facilities, which I think is on page 594, or perhaps it comes under the provision for planning, building and managing new and existing land and water-based facilities for maritime users. I want to ask a question about two facilities that I have asked about before in this place. I refer to the Port Gregory jetty, which is, shall we say, landlocked, due to the movement of sand. No action has been taken to address that. I raised that as a grievance with the minister and she said she would go up there and talk to the people concerned. I do not know whether the minister did that; perhaps she will do so during the next school holidays. Also, the Jurien Bay marina has been a matter of some toing and froing between us. Now that there has been a change of government in Canberra, will the minister address her federal colleagues in the Labor Party to ensure that funding will be provided to address the Jurien Bay marina’s problems in the near future?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Absolutely. One of the issues from the federal government’s perspective was that there were not many avenues through which it could fund these types of projects, but it is definitely something I will raise as part of any midyear review. I heard there might be a new budget in October, but I am not sure whether that is the case. As I said, and, again, not to put too much pressure on a government that has barely been sworn in, or is not yet fully sworn in, we will raise this issue. I understand the need for it and I understand that this has been an issue for many, many years. I will try to be successful and secure funding for it. As a minister, I do not win all the time and secure funding for projects, but I will keep trying to secure funding for that project.

[2.20 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I would like to turn to some other aspects on the road system again. I refer to page 589 and significant issues impacting the agency. Paragraph 11 refers to reform of the towing industry. Can the minister give me an understanding of where those matters are at and what work is being done?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: The towing industry reform has been outlined in two parts. The first part involves the Department of Transport in relation to—sorry, I have new glasses and I thought I did not need multifocals, but I think I do; I could be in a bit of bother for the next few weeks as I try to work out how to read without glasses! The reform is in two parts. The first part deals with vehicle regulation. The Department of Transport is in the process of getting the regulations drafted. I will refer that to Iain. That will be all about the roadworthiness of the vehicles, making sure that they have dedicated numberplates and the operation of the vehicle itself.

The second part deals with, in a sense, the conduct and checking of the owners of the tow truck companies and their drivers. That was in the commerce portfolio, but we were keen to take it over, so we did. We took it over maybe six weeks ago and the responsibility for working on that was transferred to us. As part of that, we are drafting legislation to include maximum charges for towing services, an occupational authorisation scheme covering tow truck drivers, drivers' assistance, and a scheme to register the storage yards of tow truck businesses. We also want to make sure that the costs are made very clear for drivers who need to use a tow truck.

As I said, this reform has two parts. We were working on the first part and we have now picked up the second part, which is all about setting a maximum price for towing services and, in a sense, creating a regulated industry. The report or study that was undertaken assessed our level of regulation compared with other states and territories. I think we were the least regulated of those jurisdictions. Victoria had the highest level of the regulation—its model is quite interesting—and the other states had hybrid levels of regulation. The industry and community feedback was very clear. They want more regulation of this industry and far greater transparency, and they do not want vulnerable people to be taken advantage of. We have all heard pretty bad stories about when a person has had an accident. They are scared and vulnerable and they want to be out of there as soon as possible, and a lot of these people have been taken advantage of. The broader issue is the impact of all these drivers on our freeways and the Main Roads Western Australia network, too. We need to explore more generally the impact that that might have on the surrounding traffic as well.

Mr R.S. LOVE: There were some terrible situations in which people were caught between the insurance company and the tow truck operator as well. All sorts of bad things have happened.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Some of the direct feedback from insurance companies has been pretty strong about some of the charges levied to release a vehicle from the storage yards and also the charges levied for towing a vehicle a few kilometres. To be honest, it is amazing that this area has not been regulated. There has been some questionable behaviour by some questionable people because of a lack of regulation.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is the minister willing to put a time line on when she might have some legislation to introduce?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: As soon as possible. I hate to put time frames on the Parliamentary Counsel's Office because it does not like that, but as soon as we can, member. The parliamentary draftspersons have been very busy through the COVID pandemic and they also have limited resources. We will try to get it drafted as soon as we can.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 589 of budget paper No 2, volume 2 and paragraphs 9 and 10 under "On-demand Transport". I note the transport levy that commenced in April 2019 has already recouped the amount of money that, apparently, the department was looking for. It states that the funding would initially be collected by April 2023, but it is now forecast to be completed by June 2022. Can the minister confirm that she will complete that levy collection at the end of June 2022?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: We released a statement about this on 10 May. This has been hard because we are trying to estimate when the revenue will come in to match the expenditure to date. A decision was made that we will cease collecting the levy from 31 May. We announced this on 10 May to give people in the industry some certainty because they have to change their systems. We anticipate that we will be very close to the amount of money that is required, but regardless of that, we have announced that we will cease the collection from 31 May.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Will that tidy up the voluntary taxi plate buyback scheme or the amount of money that the department needs to complete that scheme?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: The buyback has ended. It was a time-limited buyback and all those plates have been bought back.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a further question. Have there been any other developments in the world of regional taxis?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: As part of this budget, we have increased the subsidies for wheelchair-accessible taxis. We announced an increase of the existing grant from \$15 000 to \$20 000 for the modification of vehicles to facilitate providing a wheelchair service. We have increased the existing grant and we have introduced a new grant that will provide \$45 000 to existing companies that need to purchase a new vehicle to expand their existing services, or \$65 000—this is just off the top of my head. I have finally got the information. The current modification grant of \$15 000 will increase to \$20 000. We are also creating a new grant that will help a company to establish a new regional taxi service using wheelchair-accessible vehicles. This new program will encourage people to either establish a wheelchair-accessible vehicle taxi service or to continue their service. In that latter case, it may be that their existing vehicle is too old and they need to purchase a new vehicle. When there is no existing wheelchair-accessible

vehicle taxi service, we will provide a \$65 000 grant. When there is an existing service, we will provide a \$45 000 grant to replace an ageing wheelchair-accessible vehicle or to purchase an additional vehicle.

I am really happy that we got to do that. Wheelchair-accessible vehicle taxis are a significant issue in regional WA. When I was in the Kimberley, the local member Divina D'Anna raised the matter. She said that she had had some issues transporting her mother-in-law because of a lack of wheelchair-accessible vehicles. Hopefully, these grants will be a big incentive to those people who hope to create a new service or to expand an existing service.

[2.30 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: The minister mentioned that the money was available for companies. Was that just a misnomer? Is it available to any business that might want to purchase? Does it have to be a company?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: It is available to proprietary limited companies and the self-employed—whatever.

Mr R.S. LOVE: It is not strict and it has to be to a company?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: No, sorry. I was loose with my language—or maybe too tight with my language!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: There are concerns that regional groups in places such as Albany, Esperance and the like were, I guess, left out of the picture with any of those schemes. Have there been any other developments at all with those regional taxi companies or owners?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I think this was part of some COVID legislation about two years ago. Peter was not in the office and he is looking at me shocked. Does he remember? He was not doing taxis. Does Iain remember that we did the regional program? In 2020 we brought in that legislation to facilitate some payments to the regional taxi services. That was done as part of the COVID impact. We did that at the end of 2020 when we had specific grants for taxi operators. Of course, there were discussions about it not being enough, but we had a specific regional compensation program in April 2020.

Mr R.S. LOVE: When the minister determined the \$20 000 grant to fit-out a taxi, was that intended to cover the full cost of the fit-out? What was the intention there? Does the minister have any idea how much it costs to modify and fit-out a vehicle? I have heard it costs more like \$25 000 to \$28 000 for the modification, plus another \$5 000 to fully fit it out. That is \$33 000. Was the government trying to cover the full cost or just help out?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: It went from \$15 000, so it was a 33 per cent increase. We went from \$15 000 to \$20 000, which reflects higher costs. It has always been a reflection of a contribution to the cost of the additional equipment and a significant contribution to that.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have a further question on the situation for those operators who are already using these things. I understand there is something called a lift fee as part of the operation of picking people up. It has been reported that the payment system is very laggard in keeping up to date and some operators have some quite substantial back payments due to that. I am not sure whether it is a problem with the system they use at their level or the department's level to record what is going on, but it has been reported across the state that there is an issue with that.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: In relation to the taxi user subsidy scheme in general, it is true to say that it is outdated technology in that there is no technology! It is outdated in the fact that it is paper. We are very committed to changing that. As part of this budget, I am not sure that it is explicit anywhere, but we have some funds to modernise the TUS scheme. This is a sigh of relief for everybody, I think, both the users of the TUS scheme and the providers, because I get a lot of feedback and there are others who make claims about who is doing what in relation to that scheme. We will be developing the technology to get a more modern scheme. I would say modernise, but I suspect going from paper to any form of technology is probably more than modernising; it is revolutionising the scheme.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is there any time line on that?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Yes. We have the funding allocated for this year. The funding is there, but as with all information technology procurement, we will do it as fast as we can. I am not sure about this, but there might already be some systems. I quote former Treasurer Eric Ripper in that off-the-shelf is really good when we come into IT systems. There might be an existing system over east that we could try to pick up rather than creating bespoke systems all the time.

Mr R.S. LOVE: While we are talking about modernising, the minister was asked while representing the Minister for Local Government yesterday about the off-road vehicle fee collection service. Is that moving towards modernisation? At the moment I think it is still paper based.

The CHAIR: Is this a line item?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes, it is actually.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I can provide that by way of supplementary information, because looking around I do not see a lot of confidence in anyone answering that question!

The CHAIR: Is that a question on notice or supplementary?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: It is a supplementary on the collection process for off-road vehicle registration and any moves to modernise it.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes, which I understand is happening.

[*Supplementary Information No A13.*]

Mr R.S. LOVE: Moving towards the driver licensing services, practical driving assessments and so forth on page 593 of budget paper No 2 under “Explanation of Significant Movements”, it states —

... an increase in FTE costs in order to address the waiting time for booking of practical driving assessments.

How much additional resource has been applied to reduce the waiting time? What has the result been in the reduction of waiting times?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I will start with regional first, because that is where some particular concerns have been raised. In the south west, for example, we have allocated an additional assessor position. There had been a temporary position allocated; we have now made that a permanent position. We have increased the number of assessors in the south west. We have also changed the administrative practices in Bunbury and the south west to make sure that locals are given a priority in the allocation of time slots, because that again was a bit of an issue raised with us. We have changed the administration process. Locals having access seems to be going well now. At the other end of the state in the north west and the Kimberley, we have doubled the assessment teams both in the Kimberley and the Pilbara. In the Kimberley we went from two to four; in the Pilbara, two to four; and I think in Geraldton we also doubled, but it went from one to two. Off the top of my head, in the midwest, Kimberley and Pilbara, we have increased the number of assessors and assessment teams. That is all about trying to improve people’s access to the driving test.

In the metropolitan area we, like the rest of the workforce, have become more recently impacted by the COVID-19 isolation requirements. It has been difficult because of the cancellation of some of those tests because of COVID-19. When we had the lockdowns in 2020 and 2021, we set up temporary resources at Welshpool, for example, to get through the backlog. There is no doubt that the requirement to reduce face-to-face contact and isolation requirements have impacted driving assessor availability.

[2.40 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have one final question in the transport division, and it is a similar issue. I refer to page 601, “Driving Access and Equity for Learner Drivers”. This might sound like a Dorothy Dixier because I know that the minister introduced the program because learner drivers in certain districts were finding it hard to get their hours up, get access to vehicles et cetera. Can the minister explain whether there has been any consideration of funding beyond the current year—I think it finishes this year—and give us an idea how many people have been successfully trained through the program?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: We started this program through the Kimberley and the north west. Over the past 12 months, \$3.5 million has been granted to organisations in the Kimberley and Pilbara. The grants have been made but they may stretch over a number of years. It is not as though the grants are made for one year. Organisations have indicated that they will be working with more than 1 000 disadvantaged learners, which should result in 550 provisional driver’s licences and employment opportunities. Noting that some of the grants have not been activated—the grants have been determined but organisations are still getting started—since January 2020, an additional 130 driving assessments within the five additional remote service offices have occurred, resulting in licences for more than 70 people. That has already happened, primarily through the Kimberley. We have also increased the number of driving instructors. For example, there are an additional eight driving instructors in the Kimberley. A few weeks ago, I met a couple of them who were finishing their course. We will continue the rollout of training driving instructors. In many instances, we will be training Aboriginal driving instructors, which, again, will encourage more local young Aboriginal people to get their licence. That system will also be rolled out through Port Hedland. Another \$5.5 million has been allocated to the program to make sure that we continue some of the current initiatives and to consider whether we roll out the program further. We are doing the sums on how far we can stretch the additional \$5.5 million. It has worked very well because the program has seen a lot of different restrictions in the past. This is really flexible. In many instances, the program gives learner drivers access to a driving instructor or a car. Getting those required hours of supervised driving is an issue for a lot of people, but it is particularly an issue in some regional towns where adults are not around to provide that supervision. We believe that this is a really good program.

The appropriation was recommended.