

Division 40: Public Transport Authority of Western Australia, \$1,563 329 000 —

Ms A.E. Kent, Chair.

Ms R. Saffioti, Minister for Transport.

Mr P. Woronzow, Director General, Department of Transport.

Mr M. Burgess, Managing Director.

Mr A. Vincent, Acting Managing Director, Metronet.

Mr L. Coci, Acting Managing Director, Office of Major Transport Infrastructure Delivery.

Ms R. Lamont, Acting Executive Director, Finance and Contracts.

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 625 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. The second point under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” mentions the disruption that will be caused by the closure of the Armadale line. How confident is the minister that the closure of the Armadale line will be contained to the promised 18 months?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: That is the plan. The clear expectation that we have given to the referred proponent is that it all needs to be done within 18 months.

Mr R.S. LOVE: What work was done to ascertain the cost to the economy of having those train services offline for that amount of time, not only in terms of the direct cost that the Public Transport Authority will have in its subsidies to other solutions, but also in disruption and traffic congestion et cetera?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: We are undertaking consultation with the users of the rail line to see what alternatives should be put in place. The feedback so far has been very positive. We have proposed some replacement bus services, which are very attractive to a lot of people who were consulted. We believe that we can shift people onto alternative bus services. We are working through that model at the moment, looking at how we can service all the key employment centres. As I said, the feedback so far, after some very intense consultation with the users of the Armadale rail line, has been positive, particularly their keenness to use the alternative bus services that have been proposed.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Can the minister explain the process of the decision? Was the minister approached by the PTA or the contractors and given options? Did the minister then go to the Premier? How did it work? When did it all kick off? When did the minister become aware?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: As part of the procurement process, which the PTA and Metronet run, the proponents put forward ideas on how it would manage the delivery of the project. I think with all our projects, proponents put forward ideas on how they will manage the delivery. Whether it is road or rail, they put forward how they believe they can deliver it. As part of that assessment and procurement process, the assessment team delved into what was being proposed. Discussions were had with the proponents and the preferred proponent was determined. As part of that, I was informed I suppose quite late in those discussions on what the proponents were proposing for the closure of the line. We always knew there would be some disruption. We cannot elevate kilometres of rail track and build four new rail stations without some disruption. In a sense, a proposal was put forward on which I sought advice and had discussions with colleagues, and then final decisions were made.

[3.40 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I did not really get an answer on the cost to the entire economy of the closure, but perhaps the minister could tell me what, if any, modelling has been —

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: What is the economic cost of never building the Ellenbrook rail line?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Sorry?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: What was the cost of the previous government not delivering the Ellenbrook rail line for eight years?

Mr R.S. LOVE: The minister is here to explain her budget; I am not here to explain decisions of previous governments.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: The member is using that logic. What was the economic cost of breaking the promise on MAX light rail?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Who knows? What I would like to know, because it is relevant to this inquiry, is: what change to travel times is expected for people to get to the city, and especially those further out who have longer commutes—from Armadale, for instance? What do we expect will be the difference in their travel time?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Again, we are working through all those details. In consulting with users, we put forward some options for bus services. We are looking at different types of bus services. There may be some that are all stops to one point and then will go direct with no stops. We are also looking at what infrastructure improvements can be made. For example, can we put some bus jumping lanes along Albany Highway at any point? It is pretty tight around Cannington, but we are investigating all those options. We cannot confirm the final details until we determine exactly which bus routes will run. That is now being worked on following the consultation. Also, what are the other small infrastructure improvements we can make along the way? That being said, if these infrastructure improvements mean that public transport buses do not need to mix with existing traffic at traffic lights, that might be something that we might want to retain longer term anyway. We are looking at what other methods we can undertake. There are also the routes, for example, along Albany Highway. Out of all the roads, Albany Highway in Cannington, as I have said a number of times, has some significant congestion so that is where we are really focusing on what we can do to make sure that there are not significant delays. There will be longer travel times, but the length of that will be determined by what bus routes we determine and the infrastructure improvements we can make.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is the minister and the authority concerned about pushing people basically into a situation in which they might choose to use cars and get used to travelling in ways other than public transport because of a lack of reasonable options? Is there a concern about the effect that might have on long-term commuter numbers when the line is finally reopened?

The CHAIR: Is that a question? Can the member just be very clear about what the question is?

Mr R.S. LOVE: It is the same question. We are talking about the modelling around the change to the Armadale line.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Not really, because of our two-zone fare. The two-zone fare cap is very much targeted at those living in the Kelmscott–Armadale area. They are the ones who benefit most significantly from the two-zone fare cap. I will say a couple of things. As part of this project we are picking up a new catchment of Byford and all the people who live around there; there will be a new train station in Armadale and all that comes with that, which is improved amenity and better connections; and there is the two-zone cap. I think that will create a lot of attractiveness. It is tricky because we are still in a COVID world with people isolating, but we are trying to see exactly what is happening with our numbers in the outer zones, because these are the zones that have seen a significant reduction in their fare price. We are seeing a very strong bounce back in use in those areas that receive the most benefit from the two-zone discount. For example, our patronage numbers at Warnbro station are 81 per cent of the 2021 figure. Across other parts of the network it is a bit lower than that. I think we are seeing a bigger percentage of people using the stations where they are getting the most financial benefit. I think all those things indicate that we will get a bigger bounce back after the closure.

The other thing is that part of our Metronet precinct planning is about making sure that station precincts are more attractive places to be. One of the issues the Armadale line currently suffers from is that the stations are a bit old and tired. People are not that keen to be around those stations for a long time. As part of the work, we are also improving the safety, security and activity around Kelmscott station. Armadale will have a new station and Byford will have a new station in the town centre. Now that the federal government has changed, we will be doing a new station in Beckenham, too. That is another new station. I think this idea that if we shut the line, people will never come back to public transport is false. People love new infrastructure, particularly in that corridor where they have not seen a lot of new infrastructure. When we build new infrastructure, they will very much use it.

Mrs J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI: I would like to expand on that with a follow-up question. I refer to the same page, and in particular paragraph 7. Can the minister provide an update on patronage across the network and the effect that the two-zone fare cut is having on rider numbers, and not just on the line we were speaking about?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: We are seeing that stations at which passengers benefit from the two-zone fare cap are up 11 per cent on the network average, notwithstanding the COVID impacts. For example, at Kwinana station, patronage is six per cent above the network average; Wellard is eight per cent above the network average; at Warnbro, Butler and Kelmscott, patronage is nine per cent above the network average; and at Armadale, patronage is 11 per cent above the network average. We have seen a big move into public transport at those stations since the introduction of the two-zone cap. As I said, I expect the vast majority of people who currently use train services across the

Armadale–Kelmscott region will continue to use public transport services during the shutdown. I suspect that with the Byford rail line coming online, a new train station in Armadale and improved amenity around Kelmscott station, we will see a significant increase in patronage from those areas.

The CHAIR: Before I give the next question to the member for Roe, I am just conscious that we have divisions 43 and 44 to go in the next 10 to 12 minutes. I ask members to be mindful of that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 624 and the line item three lines from the bottom, “Public Transport Services for the 2021 AFL Grand Final”, with an estimate of \$1.305 million. I was under the understanding that normal football matches have a public transport cost of around \$400 000, of which I thought the home club involved paid about half. Obviously, this was the figure that was allocated. Can the minister confirm why it appears to be three times as much as normal?

[3.50 pm]

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: That was part of the negotiations to hold the AFL grand final here. It is similar to what we do for significant international events such as European and English football matches. Normally, Tourism negotiates with the promoter of those events to assist with public transport costs. It is a public transport stadium, so public transport is seen as a big factor in negotiating these outcomes. The amount of \$1.3 million that was negotiated included all the public transport. It could also include some of the other finals that were played here. There were two. Did the member go?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: There were a couple of other finals on Friday night or whatever.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: We will provide that by way of supplementary information, because the amount is bigger than I anticipated.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That will be appreciated. From memory, there may have been three finals.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: That figures makes sense then.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I will be curious to learn about that.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: It was not that long ago, but I cannot remember.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: There were two Friday night events.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: That is right. The Western Bulldogs were here. I will provide a breakdown of the \$1.3 million for the AFL grand final.

[*Supplementary Information No A15.*]

Mr G. BAKER: I refer to paragraph 5 on page 631 of budget paper No 2 regarding the Canning Bridge bus interchange. It is a very exciting line for South Perth. Can the minister outline what this will mean for South Perth and surrounding communities?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Sure. As the member has raised with me, that is an area of significant congestion. It is a significant intermodal area, in a sense, with people moving between train and bus services. As we know, it is a pretty tight configuration. It is now being used more and more, in particular, because the Canning Bridge activity centre precinct on both the Melville and Perth sides of the river will see greater use of this interchange. Initially, \$75 million was allocated in the 2020–21 budget to the Public Transport Authority business case to upgrade the interchange. This was increased to \$100 million, and the state has matched that. We are going through the design of that project. As I said, it will include a far better interchange, allow more passengers to move from bus to rail and improve road capacity along Canning Highway in that area. We are starting the preliminary design. Talking about complex projects to deliver, this one will be a beauty; in fact, it will be operating on Canning Highway and the Kwinana Freeway, and on top of a rail line! It will be a pretty tough project to deliver, but it is very much needed. Again, it is about making public transport use attractive by having better station development and amenity.

Mr G. BAKER: Fantastic, thank you.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 626 and service 1, metropolitan and regional passenger services, which has an amount of \$1.4 billion. Does this money subsidise, or has any of this money ever subsidised, the bus service to Collie? I believe an approach was made for such a service after a commercial operator closed earlier this year. Was such an approach made? Were subsidies discussed? Were they denied?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: With respect to the bus service to Collie, we are currently undertaking community consultation in Collie and working with the local member down there on community views and aspirations for services in that region.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is nothing concrete being done at the moment to resolve the situation and provide that bus service?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: We are talking to the community about it right now.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 631 of budget paper No 2 and the Forrestfield–Airport Link. The budget papers list \$143.4 million in 2022–23 for post-completion works. What will that money deliver and what date will the Forrestfield–Airport Link become operational?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: We are testing the line at the moment—signalling and all the other testing that comes with it—and will soon be able to make a firm announcement about the commencement of the rail line. The money allocated for 2022–23 will be the end-of-contract payments—once we get the keys, as I like to describe it. Once we get possession of the line, payments are normally made as part of the contract. Those contracts can go over time. That amount involves the last payments that are obligated under the contract.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Why was the project delayed for so long?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: First of all, tunnelling through soft sand, water and gravel on clay was pretty difficult. I think there were eight kilometres of tunnels and there was a number of challenges along the way. The most significant challenge occurred at the time of the preliminary final or the grand final in 2018. Anyway, in September 2018, there was a significant disturbance to the tunnelling, which had an impact on the time frame. The other issue, which was raised by the member’s side of politics in this place, was the concerns about safety onsite. The government made a clear decision that safety was the number one priority and, as a result, there were extensions to time frames early in 2018–19. Subsequent to that, the project was hit with many of the challenges faced when building a house in the suburbs such as impacts on the supply of vital equipment. A classic example was the rectification steelwork. The only company in the world that does rectification of the steel rings was shut by COVID for a number of months. The project has been impacted by COVID, labour shortages and general supply chain disruptions. However, the team has done a great job. It is an outstanding project. When people see these train stations, they will be blown away by what has been produced. The WA community understands that it has been tricky to deliver projects during the COVID pandemic because they have been affected by massive world supply issues. As I said, I am very proud of this project and when it opens, I am sure that people will enjoy the travel.

The CHAIR: We have time for one more question. You can decide among yourselves. It needs to be a quick question and a quick answer, please.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Has the minister done modelling on the expected number of passengers on that service? An airport service needs to get to the airport pretty early in the morning, so what impact will that have on the rest of the PTA network to ensure that people can use the service fully? What cost implications will that have on the PTA subsidy?

The CHAIR: That is not a quick question, member for Moore.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: The patronage numbers were contained in the business case established under the member’s government that it never gave us access to because it was a cabinet-in-confidence document. I think the boarding numbers are out there. I will quickly grab them. The current program services will cater for between 80 and 85 per cent of all flights leaving Perth Airport. It is an incredible project. It will be a very affordable fare. We will not have a special airport fare like other parts of the world. It will be very affordable and people will be very impressed with what is delivered.

The appropriation was recommended.