

GRAIN FREIGHT RAIL LINE — BROOKTON STRATEGY

**350. Hon KEN TRAVERS to the Minister for Transport:**

I refer to the grain freight rail line.

- (1) Does the minister agree with his parliamentary secretary, who stated that the Liberal–National government is committed to the Brookton strategy?
- (2) If yes, what does the minister believe is involved in implementing the Brookton strategy?

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN replied:**

I thank the member for his interest in this matter.

- (1)–(2) I do not know where my parliamentary secretary said this. How is the member aware of the remark, which I have not seen?

**Hon Ken Travers:** I am aware of it. He said it in a number of places, I believe. He said it the other week in the other place, I believe, during estimates. That is just one place I know of.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** I see; so the member is relying on a proceeding of this session of Parliament that occurred in the other place.

**Hon Ken Travers:** No. That was not my question. My question did not say that at all, minister.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** No, you just said it then. I am just trying to work out where the member is coming from.

**Hon Ken Travers:** Do you agree with the statement or not?

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** I do not know. It is a bit —

**Hon Ken Travers:** Do you agree with the Brookton strategy?

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** If the member wants to ask me a question, why does he not ask me a question, and not one about what someone else might have said?

**Hon Ken Travers:** It does not matter where he said it; it is whether or not you agree with it, minister.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Let the minister answer the question that has been asked.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** It would be a bit like me, for example, if I wanted to digress, referring to the comments attributed to the member's colleague Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm in an article in the *Hills Gazette* of Saturday, 29 May headed "Grain rail cash hailed". It reports that Labor MP Matt Benson-Lidholm, a South West MLC, said that the money—he is referring to our transitional assistance payments—would help keep grain off the road. The member might take issue with his colleague about that, but I am not going to ask whether the member agrees with what he is reported to have said. Now the member is asking me whether I agree with something that some member in another place may have said.

Several members interjected.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** It is obvious that we have reached the end of question time and the member needed to think of something.

The strategic grain network review that I set up—it is something that needed to be done that had not been done—drew together all the players in this important issue, and one of their key recommendations was for the implementation of what is called the Brookton strategy. We have done a lot of other things. Already \$80 million has been invested by the state and federal governments, and there will be more to come.

**Hon Ken Travers:** Don't forget WestNet's contribution.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** WestNet Rail is a party to it and Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd also will be making investments in some significant infrastructure in due course, but that has not been announced yet. All the actions that we have taken are consistent with the implementation in due course of the Brookton strategy, if that is ultimately the way that we go. Further actions may be taken, but my view is that, at the minimum, the Brookton strategy—certainly, at least, the broad principle of it—needs to be implemented. The member did not give me any notice of the question, so I do not have it in front of me, but I think he asked me to advise the house of what my understanding of the Brookton strategy —

**Hon Ken Travers:** What will be involved in implementing the Brookton strategy?

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** It is a bit peculiar that a minister who has carriage of and responsibility for a strategy that he commissioned to be developed is being tested, as it were, to see whether he knows what the member is

talking about. Is that the best that Hon Ken Travers can do to use up this valuable opposition time? I will try to be as brief as I can, Mr President. It is a very important matter.

Of the four ports that are responsible for grain exports in Western Australia, the pre-eminent port for overall volume is the port of Fremantle, because the vast majority of Western Australia's grain exports are shipped through the Kwinana CBH terminal. For the purposes of the strategic grain network review, the zones from which that grain is drawn are generally described as Kwinana north and Kwinana south. In the Kwinana south zone, as a result of examining the current economics that apply to the transport of grain per tonne by road versus by rail, there is a triangle formed basically between Narrogin, Brookton and Merredin. Clearly, at the moment and in the future, it is unlikely that the cost per tonne of shipping grain by rail will be cheaper than shipping it by road. That gives us a problem, because that means that in a deregulated wheat environment, which is something the federal government recently bequeathed upon us, the practices of transporting bulk grain throughout that area have been turned on their head. The question of how that grain will be transported in the future is very much in the balance, as CBH goes out, as it should, on behalf of its clients to seek the best price. If we do not act, as this government has done, to try to equalise the playing field through our TA payments, a lot of that grain—we estimate one million tonnes—will be transported in the next season by road rather than by rail. We think that that is not in the interests of the community of Western Australia and other road users. The Brookton strategy is about capturing that grain from the hinterland that I have mentioned to make sure that, by the time it gets as far west as Brookton, it has been captured through new facilities that transfer it to rail. That is a thumbnail sketch of a very complicated situation.

**Hon Ken Travers:** It also includes the closure of the tier 3 lines. Don't forget that part of it. That is what it says in your report.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** Again, I am sure that if the honourable member stands again in a moment, he will get the call and he can ask me about the T3 lines and we can talk about the ill-informed way that he has been making unfortunate public comments that appear to have no purpose other than to try to shake the confidence of people in the Wheatbelt.

**Hon Ken Travers:** Rubbish! It is to support them, minister, which you're not doing because you're closing the lines.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** That is what this government, unlike the previous government —

**Hon Ken Travers:** That is what the Brookton strategy is about—closing the tier 3 lines. It is in black and white in your report, minister.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** Unlike the previous government, we are taking positive action —

**Hon Ken Travers:** You haven't put a dollar into the tier 3 lines and you're closing them if you're implementing Brookton.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** No, I am not. If that interjection was picked up, that is wrong and the member ought to stop going out and telling porkies and just listen —

**Hon Ken Travers:** When are you going to put some money into repairing them?

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** Mr President, the people of that area that I have described can have confidence in what we are doing to make sure that the bulk of the grain freight task, to the greatest extent possible, is retained on rail.