

Division 73: Commissioner of Main Roads — Service 7, Office of Road Safety, \$100 077 000 —

Mr P. Abetz, Chairman.

Mrs L.M. Harvey, Minister for Road Safety.

Ms L. Crackel, Acting Executive Director.

Mr P.A. D'Souza, Manager, Finance Services, Main Roads Western Australia.

Mr G. Hamley, Chief of Staff.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: We will move into questions on the Office of Road Safety and the first question is from the member for Midland.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I thank the minister for providing us with a document on the government's plan of action for road trauma in Western Australia, showing the road trauma trust account budget 2014–15 and out years. It refers to "out years" but I cannot see them. I note the independent Road Safety Council's recommended overall budget was \$141 890 000, yet cabinet has approved a budget of only \$100 077 351. I particularly note that dramatically less money has been provided for some business cases than was recommended by the Road Safety Council. For example, in business case 2, run-off crashes on regional roads, the Road Safety Council recommended an appropriation of \$91.12 million, but cabinet approved only \$35.45 million. Why is it that cabinet knows better how to spend the money than the independent Road Safety Council?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: The Road Safety Council is a collection of representatives of government; it is not independent. The chair is appointed by the minister and is independent of the government agencies. From time to time, the council will make recommendations to government and then through government processes we will review those recommendations and approve a different budget, which is what happened in this case. I refer to project 21108115, and the \$91 million recommended for regional and remote road improvements. That part of the budget is used often as a balancing item. The Road Safety Council in the past has recommended that any of the funding from the road trauma trust account that has not been allocated would by default be allocated to that fund. A budget of \$35 330 000 has been approved, which is a realistic amount of money that will be allocated to projects that can be extended in the next financial year.

[5.30 pm]

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: How much money is currently in the road trauma trust account and how much income is anticipated from speed and red-light camera infringements in the financial year 2014–15?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I might get Linley Crackel to give the estimate of revenue for the 2014–15 financial year.

Ms L. Crackel: Page 817 of the budget papers identifies an income line of ninety —

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: An amount of \$97 455 000 is the anticipated target for 2014–15. The member will note that last year we approved a budget of \$76 481 857. This year the approved budget is over \$100 million from the road trauma trust fund.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Yes, but the government did not spend all the money that was in the account.

The CHAIRMAN: Further questions?

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I am sorry; I have not actually had my question answered yet, Mr Chairman: how much money is currently in the road trauma trust account? I have not had that figure given to me at all. Also, the minister's adviser mentioned page 817 of the document. What document was the adviser referring to?

Ms L. Crackel: The Commissioner of Main Roads budget papers.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Page 817 of the budget papers was what Ms Crackel was referring to. The total cost of service less income is the anticipated target. The actual amount in the road trauma trust fund at present can be found in the controlled account on page 822 under the heading "Statement of Financial Position". Under "Current Assets" the current value of the estimated actual balance in the fund for 2013–14 is \$81 969 000.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: For clarification, I am looking at page 822, "Statement of Financial Position". Which heading on the page should I be looking under?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: It is under "Current Assets", the second line item "Restricted cash".

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Is the minister saying that the restricted cash is the RTTA?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Predominantly, yes.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The questions I want to ask are about the road trauma trust account, in which I have a particular interest. Does the minister concede that about \$105 million was in the fund last financial year, whereas only \$75 million or \$76 million has been spent out of that? The minister has said at different times that she wants to see where the money is best spent and that she herself is not convinced that the money is being spent in the right areas. One item on this page referred to by the minister today is for an increase in breath and drug testing by WA Police. The Road Safety Council gets its advice from experts throughout the world and Australia, not just simply from government ministers, or from the Premier who has his own mind. The council recommended that virtually \$12 million be spent on increased breath and drug testing. All that the minister and the Premier have allocated is \$4.6 million. Therefore, a hell of a lot of money could be spent to try to eradicate those people who drive through the suburbs blind drunk, who smash into vehicles and who could kill or critically injure somebody. Why has the minister not spent the money in that area when the legislation requires that 100 per cent of the money in the road trauma trust account be spent?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I thank the member for the question. He is right: we do have a problem. Back in 2011–12, the cash balance in the road trauma trust account had grown by just under \$42 million. That is when the account received two-thirds of the proceeds from speed and red-light camera infringements. However, expenditure did not grow from previous years to match that balance. We therefore have some catching up to do in expending the cash reserves that have been accumulating. They really started to accumulate in the 2011–12 financial year. Last year we approved a budget of \$3.821 million to increase breath and drug testing.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: That again was way below what the Road Safety Council recommended.

The CHAIRMAN: Member, the minister has the floor.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I thank the member for his interjection but I will finish that statement. In 2013–14, \$3 821 000 was approved for increased breath and drug testing. We have increased that to \$4 621 211 in 2014–15. The component of the Road Safety Council recommendation of nearly \$12 million relates in the main part to an increase in full-time equivalent staff to police, which will be sourced from our growth program. I think Ms Crackel has some other information on this area. We have started to see a decline in KSI crashes—that is, crashes in which someone is killed or seriously injured.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Not recently; we have not. We have seen a load in Subiaco.

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Hillarys, the minister has the floor.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Ms Crackel has some further information on fatal and serious injury crashes that are linked to alcohol.

Ms L. Crackel: Members are advised that the relationship between traffic enforcement and crashes is obviously well understood. The research that Mr Johnson refers to establishes that gains can be made if additional effort is put into enforcement. Obviously, though, there are diminishing marginal returns. The more enforcement hours added in does not produce the same level of returns. In 2013 the number of breath tests that WA Police performed was around 1.1 million per annum, or about one test per 1.6 drivers, which is the highest it has been for a number of years. We have certainly seen a reduction in the number of killed or seriously injured people related to drivers or riders with an illegal blood alcohol content. That percentage in 2012 was the lowest since 1999. Also in 2013 the WA drink-driving fatality rate had fallen to 1.5 deaths per 100 000 head of population, while back in the mid-1990s it was at a high of 5.2. We have therefore seen a definite decrease in the last couple of years in drink-driving road trauma, and that is certainly on the back of the additional 20 FTEs and the effort that police have put in over the last couple of years.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: To follow on from that, the point I am trying to make is that unspent money is sitting in the road trauma trust account, and if the minister spent that money as the Road Safety Council recommends, based on its international and Australian advice, the number of people killed or seriously injured by drink-drivers would reduce even more. The only acceptable number is zero. I will not accept anything above zero. I have a serious concern with the government and with the minister; and with the Premier who I know has a hand in this matter and who is not prepared to spend that money in the areas that could save lives. This government will end up with blood on its hands if it is not careful.

[5.40 pm]

The CHAIRMAN: You need to ask a question. That was more of a statement.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The question is: why does the minister not spend the money? She has it there; in legislation terms, she is supposed to spend the money.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Mr Chairman, I am happy to respond to that. As I said, when I came to this job, a balance of \$42 million from 2011–12 was unspent. In addition to that, last year I commissioned a review into the road safety governance structure. We are all well aware that the government made the commitment that 100 per cent

of the money from speed and red-light camera infringements would go into the road trauma trust fund. What did not happen was a review of the governance structure and the capacity of the Office of Road Safety and the Road Safety Council to administer a significantly bigger fund. So last year, as I have said, we did not spend the entire amount because I was waiting for the review of the road safety governance structure and also a review of the effectiveness of our media campaigns in achieving the outcomes we want in the community. This year I am really pleased to have a budget in excess of \$100 million approved from the road trauma trust account, which is the biggest ever expenditure from the account. Once I have the report into the road safety governance structure and I have looked at its recommendations, we will ramp up the expenditure from this account to help us achieve our Towards Zero strategy.

Mr M.J. COWPER: I note on page 817 of the budget papers that the 2013–14 estimated actual for the total cost of service is \$81 million and the target next year is \$100 million. It is a fairly significant jump. I suspect that that is to do with additional cameras and the like. It means that the government will have a windfall of an additional \$20-odd million, less expenses. I also refer to the asset investment program outlined on the same page, which states —

Road improvements are aimed at increasing the efficiency of the existing road network ...

I want to home in on the 20 people who are killed or maimed on an annual basis in off-road crashes in Western Australia, particularly in regional Western Australia. I note that some work has been done on improving the formation of Gibb River Road, but I just wonder what other projects are funded in relation to the use of off-road motorcycles on unsealed roads and the like.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: We deal with people who are killed and seriously injured on gazetted roads and a lot of the off-road crashes that the member has referred to occur on roads that are not gazetted.

Mr M.J. COWPER: I am talking about the unsealed roads that people are killed on.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: There is \$20.1 million in the program for road improvements relating to metropolitan intersection crashes and \$35.45 million for road improvements relating to run-off-road crashes and so on. I am not quite sure about specific projects around sealing roads.

Mr M.J. COWPER: There was the death of a young girl on a gazetted unsealed road in my electorate. Obviously, that statistic is added to the number of people killed annually. I am saying that about 20 people per annum are killed. There are no statistics in and around whether those deaths occur on or off road. They are somewhat arbitrary numbers on average. The real issue is whether any money is being funnelled towards dealing with the issue of people who are killed on unsealed roads, particularly those on registered trail bikes.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: The short answer is: no, not in this budget. This budget is aimed at some key priority areas, including areas where metropolitan intersection crashes occur and areas where run-off-road crashes, impaired driving crashes and excess and inappropriate speed crashes occur, and also at some education campaigns on vehicle safety for occupants. I acknowledge that it is very tragic when anyone loses their life. We have an issue with the use of off-road vehicles on unsealed roads, but that is not an issue that will be addressed as part of this budget. A committee that is overseen by the Minister for Local Government is looking at better facilities for off-road motorbike riders, but it is not covered in this budget. However, if the member has a specific issue with a gazetted road that is unsealed and there is a road safety component to it, I would very much appreciate it if he could write to me, and we could certainly consider that with Main Roads or the local government, depending on who has responsibility for it, to see whether we could get a good outcome for his community and prevent further death and injury on that road.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: For each of the departments and agencies that are part of this estimates hearing process, there is a column that shows the budget for 2013–14 and there is a column next to it that has the estimated actual for 2013–14 and then there is the 2013–14 budget. What is missing from the piece of paper that the minister has given us today is the estimated actual for 2013–14. For example, the similar piece of paper that we were given last year listed the cabinet-approved budget for 2013–14 as a total of \$76 481 857. The piece of paper that the minister has given us today accords with that, but she has not given us the estimated actual. That is what every other minister and every other agency generally provides. Is the minister able to provide me with the estimated actual for all those items listed in her plan of action to reduce road trauma in Western Australia?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: The estimated actual for the total cost of service is on page 817 of the budget papers.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I am asking for it line by line for each of those items. I want to know whether the money has been expended on each of those items. There are 47 items listed this year. Was the money spent for each of those items?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I can provide that via supplementary information. I will provide the estimated actual expenditure from the road trauma trust account for the projects that were approved as part of last year's budget cycle.

[Supplementary Information No B17.]

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Can the minister supply by way of supplementary information details of all the works at metropolitan intersections that are being funded under the \$20 million in the approved budget?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I can. For the 2014–15 financial year, the initial allocation is \$20 million. It is proposed that the works to be undertaken in 2014–15 will include constructing some additional lanes and turning pockets and installing traffic signals at the Reid Highway–Lord Street intersection in the City of Swan, with construction by the City of Swan to be completed soon; improving the intersection geometry, pedestrian facilities and signal phasing at the Albany Highway–Liege Street intersection in the City of Canning; installing overhead mast arms, providing two left-turn lanes and removing a right-turn filter at the Ennis Avenue–Grange Drive–Elanora Drive intersection in the City of Rockingham; and converting three intersections into one and installing traffic signals at the Ennis Avenue–Port Kennedy Drive intersection in the City of Rockingham, which is currently in the project development phase.

[5.50 pm]

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Can the minister advise whether they were recommended by the Road Safety Council as priority areas to be improved, or did it simply come from Main Roads?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: The individual allocations are not recommended by the Road Safety Council. Main Roads prioritises its metropolitan intersection upgrades and the Road Safety Council approves and makes recommendations for an allocation to treat them with the priority that is put to us by Main Roads.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The point I am trying to make is that the minister has allocated \$20 million. The Road Safety Council recommended only \$8 million. Are we funding \$12 million simply to satisfy Main Roads by doing work Main Roads would normally fund under its own budget areas?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: As part of our metropolitan intersection program, we are prioritising upgrades and improvements to the metropolitan intersections that have a history of serious injury or fatal crashes. That is entirely consistent with the road trauma trust account expenditure.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: But it has not been recommended by the Road Safety Council.

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Hillarys, the minister has the call.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: The expenditure is there to ensure that we are prioritising improvements to intersections where we know there is a history of KSI—killed or seriously injured—crashes, and that is what this program is doing this year. The amount of \$20 million will go towards that and Main Roads prioritised that according to criteria in the assessment of the road safety priority of those intersection improvements.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: With respect, minister, Main Roads is not the expert in road safety. The Road Safety Council gathers information, as I say, internationally and throughout the whole of Australia. It gets input from Main Roads, but it also gets input from police, local authorities and many other areas of expertise. Why did the minister not take the Road Safety Council's recommendation and allocate \$20 million, which I think will help Main Roads? Only \$35 million has been allocated, which I find extraordinary, for the regional and remote road improvements where too many people die on our country roads, when the Road Safety Council recommended \$91 million. Why does the minister think she knows better than the Road Safety Council and is prepared to spend only \$35 million on regional roads when people are losing their lives and being critically injured? Can the minister give us a breakdown of the roads she is funding and what will be done to them?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I did address that issue. With regard to the Road Safety Council recommendation of \$91.12 million to go into the regional run-off road crashes, the council recommended that the balance of the fund go into that line item as an expenditure item. It is not allocated according to individual programs; it is not consistent with the ability to even expend that amount. It is an accounting entry to allocate the remainder of the fund to a project, and that is where it has been put. We are spending \$35.33 million on regional and remote road improvements. We know we can complete those improvements in the budget cycle time frame. The amount of \$35 million is an increase of just over \$3.2 million on last year.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I think it was the same story last year when the Road Safety Council recommended more expenditure and the minister and the Premier decided they would not spend the amount the council recommended.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I refer to the minister's plan of action item 23 on the electronic sign project.

The CHAIRMAN: What page are we on?

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: We are on the plan of action, which is the supplementary page circulated by the minister. It states that Main Roads WA has an approved budget of \$12 million for the electronic school sign project when the Road Safety Council recommended only \$2.5 million. Is the minister playing politics with road safety money by allocating nearly \$10 million extra to a project that the Road Safety Council recommended? If she is not playing politics with the issue, why does she continually have promotional opportunities with Liberal and National members in their electorates and advise them ahead of time and promote that to local community newspapers? Why does she not provide the same advice to Labor members? Why does she use Liberal upper house members in Labor lower house electorates to promote those electronic signs in a political way to buy votes, win advantage and promote the Liberal Party?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I am very proud as minister to have the electronic school zone sign project funded from the road trauma trust account. This program highlights that when the 40-kilometre-an-hour school zones are in operation, those zones operate around schools and children as pedestrians in school zones, one of our most vulnerable road-user groups. This electronic school zone sign project is absolutely, unashamedly funded from the road trauma trust account. We intend to roll this out to 1 072 schools across the state. As of 30 June 2013, only 171 have been installed, but we have a very ambitious implementation program. During the election we committed to an additional \$36 million to fund this program for every school zone over the next four years. This budget allocation is to not only fulfil that commitment but also provide a warning to motorists when the school zones are in operation. Not everyone driving on our roads is aware of when school is in and school is out. They are not aware of when children might be going to and from school. These signs give motorists who may not have a clock in the car or may not have school-aged children an even chance of knowing when the school zones are in operation. It also ensures that motorists slow down in those zones so that they can stop in good time if children run in front vehicles. I think it is a great program. Local members, upper house members, community members, school parents and citizens associations and motorists love this program because it is a great road safety initiative.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Why does the Road Safety Council, made up of very senior people and I believe independently minded people, not support the minister in this? Why does she continue to use it to seek political advantage, and why does she not involve and include Labor members if she is not politicising the issue of road safety?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I reject the member's assertion that the Road Safety Council —

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS interjected.

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Midland!

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: — is not supportive of this program. If members of the Road Safety Council do not believe that creating better awareness and improving the safety of our school children pedestrians —

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: They clearly believe the money needs to be spent on regional roads.

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Midland.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: — is not good expenditure of this fund, they should write to me about it. I reject the premise that the Road Safety Council does not approve or support this program.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: How many fatalities have there been in school zones in the last 10 years?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I understand that since this program has been in operation, there have been none.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: No; how many fatalities in the last 10 years? That is the question.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I have to take that on notice and provide an answer by way of supplementary information.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I can tell the minister that the answer is none. There have been no fatalities. That is why the Road Safety Council does not recommend it. The council thinks it should be done by Main Roads, like any other road signs. The minister is abusing the road trauma trust account.

The CHAIRMAN: It is question time, not statement time.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: In response to that, I have not received advice from the Road Safety Council —

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I have a point of order. The minister offered to provide information by way of supplementary information, so I ask you to allocate a number to that, Mr Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN: Are you prepared to provide that?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I will provide by way of supplementary information the number of serious injuries or fatalities in school zones across the state for the past 10 years, if that is available.

[*Supplementary Information No B18.*]

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: The minister has based a whole project on it; she should have it available.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I was going to respond to the member for Hillarys' question in that I have not received any advice from the Road Safety Council that this electronic school zone signage is not appropriately funded from the road trauma trust account.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: An amount of \$2.5 million was recommended.

The CHAIRMAN: Members, please seek the call through the Chair.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Surely, minister, these sorts of funds should be spent by Main Roads because they are road signs. I am more than happy for the road trauma trust account to supplement that. I accept what the member for Midland said and I think the minister should agree—does she agree?—that this is being politicised. Is she politicising road safety, particularly at school zones where children are involved?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: No; I am not. The installation of those signs is to provide a safer environment for our children as they go to and from school, and greater awareness for motorists.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: So why do you not treat Liberal and Labor members equally?

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 6.00 to 7.00 pm