

REGIONAL TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Motion

HON COLIN TINCKNELL (South West) [10.03 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house —

- (1) recognises that regional towns and land areas of Western Australia are an amazingly diverse, culturally rich and economically significant powerhouse of Western Australia, which are not given the attention or funding they deserve. This is particularly true of the regional transport and rail networks and infrastructure required to service such an important part of our state; and
- (2) calls on the government to acknowledge that this must be addressed through strategic planning that better includes regional requirements.

To start off with, I would like to profess that I am no expert in this subject, but that I see this matter and the debate that we will have today as very important to the livelihood of this state in many ways. I will explain why as I go along. The most important thing for me to consider now is that regional areas have a very important role to play in the wealth and prosperity of this state, particularly in times of economic downturn that are influenced heavily by the resources sector. The mining industry is not the only important industry to this state. It is very important that we fully debate this subject and do something about it in the next few years because it is so important to the future and the economic viability of this state and it can safeguard us against the ups and downs of booms in mining. Although the mining sector is the primary sector and has brought in up to \$72 billion of gross state product, the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector has added \$6.8 billion in 2016–17. Members can see that that is a substantial amount. It is important to understand that the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector's cost value has added a real GSP in 2016–17 of 24 per cent. This is much higher than the previous year and is on par with the mining sector. Those are percentages, not dollar figures that I am talking about, so members can see how important this is. This is a timely reminder that the regional areas of this state have an important role to play in the welcome prosperity of this state. This is never more true than in times of economic downturn.

Members may remember that early in this government's tenure, after some toing and froing, it cut road funding to shires. That was in the first few months of this government. I will not talk about that anymore; I just wanted to make note of that.

We are on the cusp of economic growth and it is important to understand that we cannot reap the full benefit of this economic growth, unless we have proper road and transport infrastructure right across the state. Nowhere is this more important right now than in the wheatbelt and agricultural regions. As I mentioned before, we are more than just a mining state; agriculture is very important to us. We will never gain the full benefits of that agricultural profit, unless we provide the right road and transport infrastructure. An article in *The West Australian* states —

The WA economy has turned for the better, according to Reserve Bank boss Philip Lowe, but he has cautioned that the state cannot ... ride on the coat-tails of the mining sector ...

The experts on economic development are saying exactly what I am talking about to members today. It continues —

Dr Lowe, speaking in Perth to the American Chamber of Commerce, conceded that the State had endured a difficult few years but said there were solid signs of improvement across most key sectors.

The tourism and agricultural sectors are two major sources of income for this state and should be nurtured, but not just when the mining boom ends. It needs to be well planned and that takes quite a few years. We are now debating something that needs to happen in not only this term of government, but also the term of whichever government is next in place. I will not be part of one of those governments, but hopefully I will be around during that time to remind the governments of their responsibility and the importance of this subject.

Infrastructure Australia forecasts that Perth's population growth will reach 4.4 million—we have heard these predictions—and suggested that to effectively capitalise on these opportunities, public transport development and tax incentives for private enterprises are essential to encourage the movement of jobs to strategic urban centres, with transport needed to link people with jobs. This is not me saying this; once again, it is Infrastructure Australia. These are important things.

I turn to an important issue in Western Australia this year. The Grain Industry Association of Western Australia recently predicted a high chance of a near-record grain harvest of around 15 million tonnes, with plenty of upside because the rains may continue. The record of 16.5 million tonnes was set in 2016. With much better prices now, it looks like it could be a \$6 billion crop, but that will place an enormous amount of responsibility on the industry, the transport network and the roads and infrastructure, which is why I am here today talking about these issues. This raises the question of the capability of a crumbling road network in the wheatbelt—I will later explain why

Extract from Hansard

[COUNCIL — Thursday, 30 August 2018]

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Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon James Chown; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Colin Holt; Hon Dr Steve Thomas

I say that—which has to handle 350 000 truck movements from farms to Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd bin sites over a three-month period and 100 000 road train loads to the port. That is an enormous amount of transport wear and tear on the roads. I will go back to those issues a bit later.

I will talk about one example of it not being done right—we have it wrong at this stage. We have had many discussions about soil, and Hon Alannah MacTiernan has put together a committee to discuss the soil situation in this state. Soil acidification is costing the state billions in lost grain production every year. Here is a good example of our road network holding us up. Most of the lime is available in Lancelin but the road network to Lancelin is a bit of a shambles and this needs to change. This adds to the cost of lime, and we know that a lot of farmers are not using lime even though they should be. I will get back to those figures a bit later.

I turn to the very important area of road safety. We cannot expect to keep people safe on bad roads. I do not think people understand the sort of damage that these giant six, 10 or 12-axle semitrailers can cause. I want to talk about road safety, mainly looking at the wheatbelt. The “International road safety comparisons 2015” report ranked Australia fourteenth worst in the world, with 5.5 deaths per 100 000 people. The 2015 figure for the wheatbelt was 30.9 per cent. Last year’s figure was 39.1 per cent, which is miles different compared with the figures for the rest of Australia. That should be a warning sign or signal to this government and the next government to do something about this issue, because fixing it will take time. The report clearly identifies that the WA wheatbelt road network is now the most dangerous road network in Australia. That is not a figure that we in this house can be proud of. It is up to us and members in the other place to debate these issues and do something about it. These are serious issues that need to be addressed. If I wanted to be harsh, I could say that, indirectly, government policies over the last few years have caused the deaths of many Western Australians in the wheatbelt.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: Over which period would you be saying that that happened?

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: I quoted those periods earlier. I was quoting figures from 2015.

An RAC report from 3 January 2017 stated that there were 1 295 road fatalities in Australia, of which 196 occurred in Western Australia. Of those, 120 occurred in regional WA, with 28 fatalities in the wheatbelt. A further 135 injuries also happened in the wheatbelt. I am not just talking about deaths; I am also talking about hospitalisation and serious injury. The wheatbelt has 216 accidents per 100 000 population compared with the Perth metropolitan area, which has 82 per 100 000 people. That statistic comes from the 2015 “Wheatbelt Highway Safety Review: Summary Report”. Things have become worse, not better, since then. I note that the Curtin Monash Accident Research Centre did a 13-year study on heavy vehicle accidents in WA and recommended that road authorities continue to focus on the improvement of rural roads and the prevention of articulated heavy vehicle crashes in these areas, since 68 per cent of fatal crashes and 58 per cent of hospitalisation crashes occur in rural areas.

What about road infrastructure? What are we doing about it? Yes, we are putting in restrictions and we are trying to make people safer, but in some ways that is frustrating the situation. The restricted access vehicle network, commonly known as the RAV network, has been reduced. Some farmers cannot take their wheat directly onto major roads but have to travel through other farms to get to the RAV networks, which is causing somewhere in the region of 100 000 extra vehicles on the road. Some of the roads are not capable of carrying big, heavy trucks. To give members an example of the wear and tear that some of these heavy articulated vehicles cause, I refer to reports from the experts. Main Roads WA would have this information and I would like it to make sure that our Minister for Transport reacts to these figures, because that is what we need. It is worth noting that an illegally loaded six-axle truck causes the same amount of wear per kilometre as do 9 000 cars. That statistic is from a 1996 report of the Select Committee on Heavy Transport, which was tabled in Parliament. Most of the 18 000 heavy vehicles employed to cart grain in this state are 10 or 12-axle road trains, which, due to the laws of physics, is equal to 36 000 times that of a car. I know that sounds unbelievable but it is true. The wear and tear that these trucks cause on our roads is killing people. They are wearing the roads out and we are not maintaining them.

The 2016 Western Australian Local Government Association’s “Report on Local Government Road Assets and Expenditure” stated that it would cost somewhere in the region of \$700 million just to maintain WA’s network from further degradation. The government spent only \$575 million, which is a shortfall of \$116 million, meaning that 26.5 per cent of revenue was not used. That revenue needed to be spent just to repair the road, not upgrade it, and keep it at that level. We are falling back as we go forward. However, metropolitan councils need spend only 10 per cent of their revenue. This is where we can make a difference. Local governments in the north and south wheatbelt respectively spend 87 per cent and 101 per cent of their total revenue to maintain their roads. We have got it wrong. Both this government and the previous government got it wrong. I am not worried about pointscoring; I want to get it right. We have time to fix the problem. We are short of money, but as members know, the longer we ignore these facts and figures, the longer we will continue to pay a price. It will cost us billions in potential income and jobs. It is now time for this and the other place to do something about these figures and get serious

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about our roads, especially those in the wheatbelt. I mentioned road maintenance and I may come back to it with a few figures a little later.

Road funding has been a problem. Under the terms of the “State Road Funds to Local Government Agreement 2011/12–2015/16” the annual share of state road funds to local government was 27 per cent of the estimated vehicle licence fees for the year. This year it is 22 per cent, which is down. Agreements have not been finalised for 2016–17 to 2020–21. Not enough is being done on regional roads and infrastructure. I will come back to some other road issues, but I will move to another area in which we can make a major difference.

We have an alternative to roads. The alternative is rail. When I came to this place and even before the election, I kept hearing that rail would not work well and that it was rubbish. The facts say that anyone who thinks that way is wrong. If members look at the facts and listen to people in the electorate who live and breathe this stuff, those people will tell them where we are going wrong. Rail is the alternative. It is not the only one and we obviously need more funding for roads. This raises the question of the use of rail. Evidence from the strategic grain network review of 2009 clearly articulates that transporting grain by rail is cheaper than by road. Why bother paying for reviews and wasting that time if we do not take note of their findings? We need to respond to this right across the board. The sale of Westrail in December 2000 is a good example of something we got wrong.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: When was that sale?

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: In December 2000.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: December two thousand and when?

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: The sale of Westrail in December 2000—I do not know what day it was!

I will not go through how we got that wrong because I could speak for an hour about where that deal went wrong, but that is a good example of where we mucked up. A strategic grain network review report of 2009 recommended the closure of only 509 kilometres of tier 3 narrow gauge rail. The report recommended that an investment of \$350 million in the road network be undertaken. How much of that money has been spent? I would say that probably none of it, or a very small amount, has been spent. Despite numerous reasons showing the SGNR report to be a flawed document, the government refused to commit the \$93 million required to maintain the renewing sleepers.

Hon Jim Chown: Which rail line are you talking about?

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: I am not getting specific about the actual railway. This is from the strategic grain network review.

I can tell members that two standing committees—the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs in 2012, and the third report of the Economics and Industry Standing Committee in 2016—have condemned the government for those actions. I would rather believe those people than anyone picking out one or two little areas. What will the value of the government asset—the tier 3 network—be when the lease expires in 2049? Not much, I would imagine. The previous government continually changed the performance standards and the definition of “fit for purpose”, which allowed Brookfield Rail to declare its tier 3 network uneconomical. Are these the actions of an ethical government? I do not know. What is this government doing about it? I am not worried about the past; I am worried about the future. I need this government to respond to an obvious mistake. We need to move forward in that area.

I have very little time, so in closing I mention that Western Australia is hindered in the marketing of its biggest export product outside of mining by being tied to road infrastructure that is not fit for purpose. Governments cannot afford not to stop further degradation of the long-term viability of the tier 3 rail lines, an alternative ignored by the current government and other major parties. Meanwhile, we are overspending on metropolitan roads. Those are the facts and those are the figures.

HON ALANNAH MacTIERNAN (North Metropolitan — Minister for Regional Development) [10.24 am]: I appreciate the member bringing this issue forward. In many respects and for many of the principles the member has set out, there is not much that we disagree on. I regret that he was not in Parliament back in December 2000, when we were trying to stop the travesty of selling off the freight network. I personally travelled around the grain belt in the lead-up to that. I went to public meeting after public meeting at Bruce Rock, Narrogin, Merredin and Geraldton. I spoke with farming groups and heard how profound their concern was. I recommend the member read my *Hansard* from the time. Labor did not oppose the sale of the freight business. We recognised that it would be better handled —

Hon Colin Tincknell: I didn’t want this debate to be about the past. I really need it to be about the future. That is what I am asking this government to focus on.

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Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: I am happy to do that, but sometimes we need to understand what happened in the past to understand some of the limitations on what can be done now. That was a bad deal but it had some provisions that offered protections. One of those was that if the rail company determined that it was not going to use those lines, there was a “use it or you lose it” provision. Whoever the infrastructure holder at the time was—it has gone through many different companies—if they were not using those lines, the lines would come back into government ownership and the government could give third parties, such as Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd, access to those lines. Unfortunately, for reasons that I have never been able to understand, in 2009 the previous government went one step further and made that unfortunate deal a lot more unfortunate by removing that “use it or you lose it” provision. This has been a very difficult set of circumstances for us to deal with because the leverage that we might have had do something about those tier 3 rail lines has been removed. Indeed, we put significant money into those tier 3 rail lines. As the state minister I negotiated with Anthony Albanese in the federal Labor government to get money injected into the lines but, unfortunately, under the next government it did not go into the third tier.

What are we doing about it? Arc Infrastructure absolutely understands that we need to get more grain freight back onto rail. A review of the economic regulation model is being conducted by the Treasurer at the moment. A case is currently in the courts about the amount Arc Infrastructure will charge CBH to move grain along the rails, which is obviously a critical factor. We are doing what we can by conducting this review. A very formal process has to go on to review the operation of the market rules. At the same time, a case is being contested. I have some grounds for optimism. I see Arc Infrastructure and CBH working much more collaboratively in a general sense. I think that we will be seeing more reason developed in this area and a greater appreciation that we need those tier 3 and, indeed, the tier 2 lines, which from time to time it has been indicated may go. We are doing a number of studies about other uses of that rail infrastructure in the south west, which, hopefully, we can say a bit more about in the next month or two. Obviously, we believe in diversification, as Hon Colin Tincknell does, and we could tell some very positive stories about diversification and, in particular, the effort that we are putting into ensuring that we have downstream processing in this state. If I get the time, I will go on to talk a little more about that. The member framed it with larger concerns and I will try to respond to him about those.

It is really quite wrong to suggest that we are not investing in those regional roads and that we have cut down maintenance. The Minister for Transport, Hon Rita Saffioti, has provided me with figures that show quite clearly that we have increased the road maintenance budget across the state.

Hon Colin Tincknell: Is that overall, minister, or are we talking regionally?

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: This particular figure is road maintenance expenditure generally, but 70 per cent of that is in the regions. If we look at road maintenance in the last year of the previous government, the actual expenditure, which was a bit higher than the budget expenditure, was roughly \$361 million. In our budget, and, indeed, in our actual expenditure, last year, we took that figure up to \$438 million. It increased from \$361 million to \$438 million in one year. That is maintenance. The budgeted figure for this current year is \$440 million. That is a very significant \$80 million increase in the figure in the last year of the previous government. Of that, \$330 million, or 70 per cent, is on regional road maintenance. The percentages have stayed the same but the massive increase—the lion’s share, or 70 per cent, of that increase—goes into the regions. In all, that is a 33 per cent increase in maintenance expenditure. We have to get the canard out of the way. In a state such as this, covering a third of a continent and with only 2.5 million people, obviously road infrastructure under any government will always be a struggle, and we need to deal with it.

Another specific issue that the member focused on is agricultural roads. We have \$10 million. Everyone has been investing a lot of money in the agricultural lime roads. As transport minister, I remember that we were constantly pouring money into those ag lime roads. Our budget currently has \$10 million allocated for the ag lime roads. That \$10 million is to be used for part of that constant upgrading.

Hon Jim Chown: That is two intersections that need to be done.

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: As I said, I can only demonstrate. Of course there will always be massive need, but members need to look at our performance compared with other performances. We are trying to address these issues, although I will say, and I know I will get Hon Jim Chown very worked up by saying it, that there has to be some thought given to investment in other solutions. I note the very good work of Bob Nixon, for example. Instead of carting lime sands from Lancelin, he is looking at the use of morrell soils. Indeed, he is on our re-established Soil and Land Conservation Council that is looking at what other materials are available nearby that can perform that task. I am sure that Hon Jim Chown was at the Dowerin field days yesterday. Was he there?

Hon Jim Chown: Yes, I was there.

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: I did not run into him, unfortunately. I did run into a number of other members there.

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Some extraordinary research is being done through the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and the University of Western Australia, doing modification gene editing and selective breeding, to find plants that can cope with a higher degree of aluminium toxicity, which is the problem that comes with the acidification of soil. Some quite spectacular results are coming in from that other work being done on restructuring plants at quite a cellular level to deal with this.

Without wanting to upset Hon Jim Chown, while we were in Dowerin we launched the Regenerative Farmers Network WA. An increasing number of intergenerational farmers are putting far more emphasis on soil health and the quality of the biome of the soil to build it up. Farmers, such as Stephen Frost from Albany way, using the practice of building up the soil biome are demonstrating that they are getting much higher productivity out of soils that have been considered to be acidified. That has shown the greater resilience of these plants to those things. Are we going to do away with the liming of soil? In the short term, absolutely not. We do not want to put all our eggs in one basket and we need to be thinking in a more complex and sophisticated way about these issues. That having been said, both the Minister for Transport and I have recognised that there is a body of work to be done here, and a particular focus needs to be given to the wheatbelt.

We commend the shires for the very good work that they have done. In March we started the agricultural roads task force that has Main Roads, the Department of Transport and the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development working together with local government. Hopefully, in a few months that work will be completed to give us an overall picture of the priorities, what we need to do to upgrade those roads and to make a pitch for some federal government funding for that. We are on task and we are doing that body of work.

Hon Jim Chown: Is CBH part of that task force, minister?

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: Yes, Co-operative Bulk Handling is definitely aware and involved. In the last couple of weeks, as I think I might have mentioned to the member behind the Chair, we have been talking to CBH, Arc Infrastructure and the Western Australian Farmers Federation about the grain harvest and whether additional work needs to be done. We are getting projections of anywhere between 15 million and 18 million tonnes.

CBH and Arc Infrastructure seem to believe that they are going to be able to handle this. Some specific rules may well need to be put in place for some roads, but Minister Saffioti and I have agreed that we will have a look at that to make sure we are properly prepared for the great harvest to come. It was great to be at Dowerin to see the amount of enthusiasm and happiness within the farming community.

HON JIM CHOWN (Agricultural) [10.39 am]: I thank Hon Colin Tincknell for the motion today. It is a reasonable motion that deals with infrastructure in both the agricultural area and regional Western Australia. I agree with the member about the importance of the regions to the welfare of Western Australia. Just to put a few things in perspective, Western Australia is a third of this great nation—it is a massive landmass. We have about 2.9 million people here. The largest state asset that our government has is our roads. It is an enormous task to maintain these roads and bring them up to standard. Anybody who travels out in the regions would be quite surprised at how good the roads actually are. When we were in government, comments came through the ministry from travellers who were coming around the top end or from the eastern states. They would ring the ministry or write to the minister of the day and say how good the roads are in Western Australia. They are good. I remember being berated by a group of people in Katanning about how bad local roads were. About 50 people were in the room. I said, “Well, if you drive on the secondary and tertiary roads in Katanning and Kojonup and then go to the equivalent place in New South Wales and make a comparison, you’ll see that your roads are excellent.” I thought I was going to be berated by this crowd for saying the wrong thing, but a chap in the back stood up and said, “I drive all over Australia. I’m a truck driver. I agree with everything you have said.”

The previous government spent well over \$1 billion per annum on regional roads in Western Australia. We made some significant upgrades to the road system throughout the state. If Roe 8 had gone ahead, which it will not, vehicles would have been able to go all the way from Darwin to Fremantle port and to Albany and out east without going through a Stop sign. That is about transport efficiencies. It is a shame that Roe 8 did not go ahead. I hope that at some stage a future government looks at it again to provide road efficiencies in road transport. Road users in this state are totally reliant on the safest roads possible. We have just heard from the minister, but I encourage the McGowan government to maintain the standards that we set as a government in spending large amounts of money on regional roads. That is absolutely essential for the safety of all road users. As I have said previously in this place, we do not have the good fortune of having massive rivers to meet our transport requirements. We do not have a population that would maintain a rail system to every little town—it is impossible. It would not be economic. It is a dream.

Hon Colin Tincknell: Will you take an interjection?

Hon JIM CHOWN: No, I will not. I have 10 minutes; Hon Colin Tincknell needs to listen.

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Let us look at the tier 3 lines, which were a matter of contention when we were in government. Five lines are out there. They move, in the best year ever, 1.5 million tonnes by five. That is about 300 000 or 400 000 tonnes per line. It is not economically viable. CBH has recognised this. It currently has 196 receival points in this state and is going to rationalise them back to about 120. It will knock out all the little bins. Road transport will actually increase at the harvest task. There will be more trucks. The CEO recently said that it will be an extended task of maybe five or 10 kilometres extra. Across the agricultural region, when the rationalisation takes place, these vehicles will be going five to 10 kays further than they do currently. That is about efficiency. That is why CBH is rationalising some. The actual road task at harvest time will increase by five to 10 kilometres for the many, many thousands of tonnes and the many thousands of truck movements that take place.

Yes, the road system needs to be upgraded and maintained. It is an ongoing task for any government. I will talk about road safety in my electorate. The member is right; the figures are absolutely terrible. I remember standing up in a similar debate in this place a few years ago. Hon Colin Holt also joined in. He made a very pertinent point from an RAC report from 2012, from memory. He said that more than 85 per cent of those deaths are single run-off-road crashes, caused by alcohol, fatigue, drugs and speed.

Hon Colin Holt: And lack of seatbelts.

Hon JIM CHOWN: And lack of seatbelts. So, 85 per cent—it might have been a bit higher—of all these deaths were caused by individuals not being responsible in how they operated a motor vehicle. It had nothing to do with the roads. I attended a terrible funeral a couple of years ago in Bruce Rock where three young men had died in one night in the one vehicle. It was alcohol related. It is a culture out there that needs to change. As I have said in this place before—I think it might have been after that incident—people need to take responsibility for their actions. They need to understand that a motor vehicle is as dangerous as a loaded weapon. They need to be responsible for other road users, the people in the car and themselves. Their mates or their friends need to say, “You can’t drive. You’re not driving”, and they need to take their keys off them. They need to say, “I don’t care what you do, but you’re staying here.” This is a vast area that is quite unpopulated and people have a sense of freedom on the road. They think they will get away with it; and they do, until they die. It is a real issue. I dispute the finding of the RAC report in 2012 that the statistics said that it was totally related to bad roads.

Meeting transport requirements in this state is an ongoing task. Hon Colin Tincknell is quite right—there is a report that we were about \$900 million behind in maintenance. Maintenance and road building is a very exact science nowadays. It is extremely expensive. The cost per kilometre is mind-boggling. It is not like the old days of the horse and cart or the T-model Ford bumping along. As the member clearly indicated, heavy transport requires roads that will take their loads and take how often they are on those roads. Today, Main Roads Western Australia builds a road to last for at least 40 years. I believe that this government and the previous government have put as much money as possible into regional roads, because they recognise how important road transport is in this state. Bear in mind that 27 million tonnes of iron ore runs into Port Hedland annually on road transport. Our best crop is 16 million tonnes. Most years, the average crop in this state is about 11.2 million tonnes. That just puts it into perspective. More than a million tonnes of sand comes out of the sandpits north of here into the metropolitan area every year. I think it is about 1.4 million tonnes. That sand is coming into the metropolitan area on single semitrailers for building requirements. The road task is exponentially growing on an annual basis.

I will say this even though it is to reflect backwards, but as the minister said, sometimes it is a learning curve: in regard to infrastructure in this state, the previous government built hospitals throughout the regions. We built new hospitals in Kalgoorlie, Albany, Nickol Bay and Busselton. Without infrastructure, we will not retain the population in regional Western Australia. Without people in regional Western Australia, we would not have industry out there. That is one reason I am very upset with this government’s cuts to regional education. One of the big things that keep young families and young couples out there is giving them the opportunities they would have in the metropolitan area. When the government starts cutting educational facilities out there, they will not stay. Regardless of whether the roads are paved in gold or how good the other infrastructure is, they will not stay. People leave. Maintaining young couples is one of the great issues for the shires in my electorate. They train them up and then, when their children reach the age of 12 or 13, they say, “Well, education facilities are not adequate here. We can’t send them off to Moora Regional College knowing they would get a good education there, so we will move away and go back to the metropolitan area.” When people are dragged out of regional Western Australia through government policies like this, the impacts are just enormous on infrastructure and human requirements such as education and health. I have only 20 seconds left.

The previous government spent \$540 million on the Southern Inland Health Initiative throughout regional Western Australia. It was a fantastic initiative and it was funded from royalties for regions. It refurbished hospitals across the board and encouraged general practitioners to get out there. I hope one of the Nationals people will get up shortly and expand on that.

HON DIANE EVERS (South West) [10.49 am]: The following is from the Greens (WA) website —

Western Australia has one of the most centralised demographic concentrations in the world where the vast majority of our population live in a single metropolitan area. However, it is Western Australia's regions, and the West Australians who live and work there, which generate most of our primary wealth.

Despite this, the regions are often less well serviced than the metropolitan area in terms of health, education, land-use planning, environmental services and a range of other government provisions. Regional communities are also responsible for managing a diverse, fragile and often degraded environment.

With local governments limited by the resources that they raise through the blunt instrument of rates, they are often individually unable to provide significant cohesive and strategic regional initiatives, although many, through voluntary regional organisations of Councils, are moving in this direction. This is particularly true in regions that are very large in area, but very sparsely populated, like the Pilbara and Kimberley.

The resilience of regional communities to future challenges can be enhanced by diversification of local economies, effective stewardship of the natural environment, supporting local communities and allowing for more participation of regional communities in creating their own futures.

I read that out as published on the Greens (WA) website and elsewhere as its policy on regions to reinforce how important these regions are to us and how we need to encourage people to participate in building stronger regional governance. We need people in the regions to fill positions of employment that come up out there. We need that diversity to make communities more resilient. We need to support those local governments and establish regional governance networks that rely on not only local governments but also regional development commissions, our state department services, the commonwealth regional development authorities, Aboriginal representatives, natural resource management groups, industry and tourism—all of that. People need to be involved in their own future and their own governance and we have to get away from taking a silo approach; we have to work collaboratively.

We need to do this because the biggest industry is mining but mining operates in a boom and bust cycle that we do not manage very well. During the height of the recent boom, when all costs were high due to high employment and construction costs, we chose to build. We were paying top dollar to build schools and hospitals. We know we live in a boom and bust economy, so why do we not manage that revenue better so that when the economy starts tipping off, we can reinvest the money we have gained through that period to build the facilities we need in our regions?

There is mining and there is farming. I am sorry to see that some of my colleagues have left the chamber on urgent parliamentary business. Regenerative agriculture will provide more jobs out there where the space will be created for people to be involved in agriculture—people who cannot afford to buy a property of their own but may want to work in that industry and live in those regions. Through regenerative agriculture, much more hands-on work is involved to develop much more nutritious and productive produce from the land. That is what will get people out there.

The other big issue in the regions is the environment. We know climate change exists. I think we have finally got to the point at which we accept that climate change is happening, that humans are the cause of it and we have to do something about it. We discussed that over a year ago in here and there was some general consensus that we could accept that. Let us do something about it now and preserve the environment, make sure we maintain our healthy forests and the biodiversity, and make sure we invest in renewable energy and more efficient forms of transport, because that is where our future lies. This all has to happen in the regions. The city is the mouth of Western Australia; it speaks and it consumes. We need to get more activity out into the regions.

People in the regions are quite simply looking for good health and education services. Give us health services, and we do not just mean another new hospital. In smaller communities we want specialists, and we want nurses in some places, to visit small communities, even just once a week, maybe using a community resource centre or some other place. Even better, get a doctor out there, so that people with ongoing issues that are not really big enough to drive a few hours to get to a medical centre to be checked on, can say, for instance, "I have seen this spot; can you have a look at it and tell me if I need a specialist?" or "My knee has been troubling me; is there something I can do so that I can avoid surgery?" Medical practitioners can come to those communities for the simple things, even on a monthly basis. Why not get that established, so that we can get to these health issues earlier? In education, people just want choice and equity. We need to keep those small schools going. As I said the other night, if we find a high school or school that is getting a bad reputation, that is the school that we need to focus on. That is the one that needs extra support, to build it back up so that it is an equitable service to what their counterparts might be getting in city areas.

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We could speak about rail transport quite a bit here. I will accept that there are a lot of good roads, and there are some that still need repair, but if we could get that transport off the roads and back onto rail wherever possible, it would mean those roads would stay good for a much longer time, and we would not have to keep putting \$1 billion a year into maintaining and repairing roads that have been damaged by trucks whose freight could have been carried on rail. It seems simple and obvious, and I will keep saying it as much as possible.

Hon Colin Holt: How do you do that, pragmatically?

Hon DIANE EVERS: We must accept the fact that it may cost a little bit more up-front. We repair and reinstate rail lines and build new ones where we can, so that transport can happen on rail. Even if we have to subsidise that, it would reduce the cost of road maintenance, so it would be worthwhile in the long run. The sooner we go to that sort of method, the sooner we will start saving those dollars in the future.

Another issue in regional areas is energy and telecommunications. I cannot go on enough about this. People need access to reliable energy sources when they are creating manufacturing enterprises. It may need to be a decentralised system of energy. We need to look at decentralised systems, whereby communities or individual businesses can develop the energy supplies they need to provide a reliable service.

I also mention that we need to support local governments. Waste management is an issue that is becoming bigger than each local government. It needs a coordinated approach, and if we can help local governments face the issue of managing their waste in the future, that will be of benefit to them and to the state. Eventually, we will develop enterprises so that we do not look at our waste as a problem, but rather as a resource to do something else with. There are so many ideas out there, and it just takes the initiative, the motivation, the energy and possibly a bit of investment from the state and federal governments to develop those industries. We need to do it soon.

Another point I want to suggest about local governments is in the Greens WA policy. One thing we can do is create full rateability of tenements for extractive industries to resolve the rating inequity for local governments in which state agreements operate. I will not go on further about that, but I just want to make sure that it is included. We need to get more from our mining companies for the benefit they get from selling the resources of this state.

Several members interjected.

Hon DIANE EVERS: My last point will be on royalties for regions, and I would like a bit of quiet in the house, please.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I cannot hear Hon Diane Evers.

Hon DIANE EVERS: We have a couple of ideas about royalties for regions. We should modify the criteria and objectives of the royalties for regions funding, where we can, to build resilient communities and achieve long-term security for regions that look beyond the current resources-driven economic framework and towards the development of other diverse industries such as tourism, renewable energy and manufacturing, in particular. We should also respond to local needs while acknowledging that the short-term benefits of new infrastructure can place a long-term asset management burden on local governments and therefore on the communities. We also suggest that a percentage of royalty revenue be allocated to alleviating disadvantage, particularly if caused or exacerbated by the displacement of regional industry or social marginalisation brought about by the resources industry. We should also address regional sustainability issues.

HON COLIN HOLT (South West) [11.00 am]: I am happy to contribute to this motion. I do not think anyone would disagree with the first part of the motion. As someone who has worked in every region of the state and lived in most of them, I fully appreciate what regional Western Australia has to offer and how it contributes to not only the economy of this state, but also Australia. Obviously, the Nationals WA have recognised for a long time that a strong regional focus is good for the state, good for metropolitan Perth and good for the rest of Australia. We would argue that until royalties for regions came along, there was a lack of investment in those regional centres. The success of that campaign back in 2007 and 2008 was built on the fact that regional people recognised that as well.

A lot happened during those eight years of government when the Nationals drove that regional agenda and that regional focus. Hon Jim Chown touched on some of the issues around health. That was a game changer in a lot of situations in regional WA when people were moving away from towns because of the access to health services. A renewed focus and half a billion dollars' worth of funding into that sector drove some incredible outcomes. Some of those legacies are still playing out today. The telehealth program was one of the cornerstones of that push. I am absolutely convinced that it really changed and saved people's lives. We talk to people who live in towns that previously had a nursing post. They relied purely on a part-time nurse but now have access to specialists and specialist care through the telehealth system. That has changed the way we do health business in the bush. I will come back to some of those things in a moment.

I was really interested in the second part of the motion moved by Hon Colin Tincknell. I wonder whether he has seen the regional blueprints that were developed by the previous government. Towards the end of 2015, every

development commission spent a great deal of time developing regional blueprints as a guide to investment into the future. Some of the things set out in the motion relate to roads—roads were recognised in the motion—and I think Hon Diane Evers has read them because some of the things that she focused on in her speech related to the diversification of our regions through those blueprints. The blueprints were developed towards the end of 2015. Most of them had a different release date. That was 18 months before the March 2017 election. The previous government made a decision to develop a blueprint for every region because it wanted them to guide investment into the future way beyond that window of 18 months. It was a good idea and a worthwhile government policy for these investment blueprints to transcend any change of government. The question that Hon Colin Tincknell could probably put to the government when he has the opportunity to reply is to ask it how it is using those blueprints to guide its decision-making and investments during its term of government. Eighteen months did not give the previous government a lot of time to implement them. They certainly guided investment. Now is the time that they would kick in. I would also ask the government what it will do in the future to update, replace and review those blueprints. I am interested in how it will do that and what commitment it has made to future —

Hon Diane Evers: Some of them have already done it in 2015. The GSDC's approved —

Hon COLIN HOLT: That is what I said. That is when the development commissions first released their blueprints. How is the government using those blueprints to guide their investment decisions? Has the government revisited them, and what is its commitment to reviewing them? Again, we want it to transcend politics in this sense and see how it will use the blueprints in the future, because they are useful and valuable tools that people put a lot of work into. I think it is a good question for Hon Colin Tincknell to ask the government in part (2) of his motion.

I also want to talk about some of the broader infrastructure needs of the community. I touched a bit on health. I remember going to Collie about six, seven or eight years ago and talking to the leadership of the Collie community. At that time, Coalfields Highway was terrible; we were losing too many lives on that road and something had to be done about it. It is progressively getting better every year because a lot of work has been done there. There is an inherent danger on that hill. When people drive up that hill in the morning, they are driving directly into the sun. It is a real challenge for motorists and no matter what we do to the road, really, that risk is still associated with it because of that condition at that time. A lot of people from Eaton, Australind and Bunbury drive up the hill to work around Collie in a number of industries. From talking to the Collie community at that time, that was not their number one priority. It was not because they did not want to —

Hon Colin Tincknell interjected.

Hon COLIN HOLT: The community really wanted it fixed to ensure that people were safe on the roads, because they were sick of losing people there too. However, their number one priorities were around education, health, aged care, higher education and community amenity. Instead of people driving in and out of their community, they wanted people to live there. Although roads are really important, the community leadership at that time said that those other things are what really makes the community—not a really good road that makes people drive out. They said that really good health services, good educational access and good community amenity would keep people in the town. I reckon they were spot on. The leadership at that time took the SuperTowns program extremely seriously and delivered a lot of stuff into the community to meet those needs, including the skate park. People say that everyone in a community wants a skate park. It was one of the first ones. I go there and think: “Jeez, there are 400 kids on the skate park. It's incredible.” The town's art gallery, the new childcare centre and upgrades to the hospital, the aged care centre and the school are all important, and there is more work to be done there.

Although I appreciate Hon Colin Tincknell's focus on infrastructure in a transport sense, really there is much, much more to the equation of living in regional Western Australia than just that. I want to come back to education. Right at this moment there is a fight on around education in regional WA. This government has made cuts to regional education. Hon Colin Tincknell and Pauline Hanson's One Nation and the Greens have the opportunity to support the amendment that we propose to move to the foreign buyers surcharge legislation. We will support that legislation if the money is reinvested in regional Western Australian education to save Moora Residential College and fund camp schools and the agricultural education farm provisions trust. It is a great opportunity for those guys to commit to supporting the amendment that Hon Martin Aldridge will move to bring about that change so that reinvestment can be made into the important things, such as education, which the community sees as very important to maintaining the vitality of their towns. Education is a critical part of it, and we recognise that. That is why we will move that amendment and that is why we continue to fight for that outcome. I encourage Pauline Hanson's One Nation, led by Hon Colin Tincknell, and the Greens to support that amendment so that the important things that they talk about can continue in regional communities.

HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West) [11.09 am]: I am delighted to make a brief contribution to the regional transport and infrastructure motion moved by Hon Colin Tincknell. I note that the south west faction in the house is doing remarkably well at the moment. We are not quite ready for a takeover, but we are getting fairly close!

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Hon Colin Holt: Hon Adele Farina is next.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: There is still a spare seat over here for Hon Adele Farina. We could make room.

Hon Sue Ellery: There's one for you over here any day, mate!

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: There is no room.

I would now like to talk about infrastructure in the south west. Hon Colin Tincknell focused on the wheatbelt and the Agricultural Region, but the motion mentions regional Western Australia so I would like to make a few comments about that. Like my friend the Minister for Regional Development, I am going to speak a little bit about history and a little bit about the current status. In the brief time available to me I think it might be a bit of fun to talk about what is needed and some of the history of how we got here.

Let me talk about some of the critical infrastructure that needs to be addressed going forward. I will start by saying that both previous governments invested quite significantly in infrastructure. Although it was my good friend Hon Simon O'Brien who opened the Forrest Highway as the then transport minister some years ago, it was the previous infrastructure minister, the now Minister for Regional Development, who started that process. It was not altogether "we're good and the government is bad"; it was a combination. It is a good plan and a good road. Unfortunately, it has shifted the bottleneck a little further south so that right now the bottleneck is around Bunbury, particularly at the Eelup roundabout. Of course, the federal government has come up with some significant funds for the Bunbury Outer Ring Road, and I suspect that that will proceed far more slowly than people think and it will take some time to complete, particularly the northern end. I know there is some debate about the route at the southern end, but I actually think that the northern end will be far harder to deliver and will take longer. But eventually at some point it will go around Bunbury and then the bottleneck will be at the single lane between Capel and Busselton. I have said numerous times that it is my view that that project should be rolled into the first project, because it will take time to deliver the northern end of that road. One day the highway will be dualled all the way to Margaret River. The Margaret River Perimeter Road is well on its way to being finished towards the end of this year, and that is a pretty good contribution as well. It is nice to see that is being committed to and finished.

Roads at the other end of the south west, around Albany, now need some serious injection of road funding. Albany Highway is and remains dangerous. There are not enough overtaking lanes and people put their lives at risk far too frequently when trying to pass B-doubles. Having said that, it is probably a safer road than the South Western Highway going south of Manjimup. There is not a single overtaking lane and when people get stuck behind a caravan or two, they have problems.

Hon Diane Evers: You have to add time to your travel.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: That is right. It is a slow road to travel on. As long as people have plenty of time, they are all right; they can wander through Walpole. But if they are in a hurry, that is a dangerous road as well. Those two roads, and eventually the Albany Ring Road that will bypass Albany, are essential bits of infrastructure that need to be delivered. I will be keen to see the government actually put forward its business case to the federal government for the Albany Ring Road and whether that can progressed. I will be following up that matter with some questions in the future.

I was particularly pleased that Hon Colin Holt mentioned the Coalfields Highway. My first response is, "You're welcome." The Coalfields Highway development was a 2008 commitment of the then Liberal opposition. It was my commitment in the campaign for the seat of Collie–Preston. People forget that the Richard Court government contributed \$20 million in its budget to the Coalfields Highway, but that was knocked out in 2001 when the member for Collie–Preston, Hon Mick Murray, the Minister for Sport and Recreation, was elected. The first thing the then Gallop government did was take that \$20 million out of the budget. The Court government allocated \$20 million for the first half of the upgrade, which was up to the Wellington Dam turn-off, and then \$20 million was budgeted for in the forward estimates under the Court government to deliver the second part of that road. The Labor Party removed that on coming to government. It was my election commitment in 2008, even though I failed to win the seat, but it was delivered by some of my Liberal colleagues at the time. In particular, Hon Simon O'Brien, as the then Minister for Transport, instigated that. There was significant investment in Collie. I think it was an important road. There were deaths there. There were deaths partly because of the massive amount of road usage that was occurring with the expansion of the Worsley alumina refinery, but, as that eased, some of the mad mayhem on that road stopped. It did settle down. That is an important piece of infrastructure that people can thank the previous Liberal government for, when the Labor Party stepped away from funding that road and took that funding directly out of the budget. That is important to note.

I would also like to make some comments about the Greenbushes railway line. This is very interesting, because it also played a role in the 2008 election. Premiers do not remember. The railway line was closed in 2004 by the then Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, my good friend the now Minister for Regional Development. The

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argument was that it was too cost ineffective to put logs on rail. I do not necessarily disagree with that argument; I think it is an expensive process. At that point, the rail line needed some significant upgrades, and it needs far more intensively significant upgrades now. I understand that there is a conversation about lithium going on that rail line, which I think the minister was alluding to. But the entire length of that rail line, from the Greenbushes mine to the port of Bunbury, may well need re-sleepering, and that is a not inexpensive exercise. I suspect that that proposal may struggle, but even if it does not, let us go through a bit of the history of this.

The line was closed in 2004 by the Gallop government based on the proposition that it was not a great economic proposition going forward. If we jump forward to the 2008 election, there was a bit of pressure because Collie–Preston was a marginal seat. I needed a couple of hundred people to vote differently but it did not work. It was one of those classic marginal seat campaigns. I will never forget the then Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, the now Minister for Regional Development, and the then member for Collie–Wellington standing together on the steps of the old Donnybrook train station, which is now a community building and next to a community resource centre, and saying that a deal had been struck and the Greenbushes railway line would be up and running, despite the fact that my good friend Hon Adele Farina had mentioned in Parliament that it was a very problematic exercise. The then minister and the then member said, “A deal has been struck. We will get the Greenbushes railway line operating. Logs will go back on the Greenbushes railway line.” That was the promise in 2008, as, incidentally, it was back in 2005. There were a couple of timber industry representatives standing beside them smiling sweetly. What neither the minister nor the member said at the time, because there is always a little bit that never gets said at the end of a statement—we call that the fine print, honourable members—was: “As long as we can find a subsidy so that the price of those logs on rail is the same price as they are on the road because it is cheaper to put them on the road. We will have to find a subsidy somehow to pay for and subsidise that process or the timber industry guys standing next to us today will not put that timber on the rail line.” That is a bit of fine print that people were not aware of at the time, and I asked a couple of subsequent transport ministers to make that obvious. I have the evidence and I presented it. I got a letter from various people to say that that was the deal that was struck. That was not the deal that was announced; that was the deal that was struck. What happened? Of course, the government did not find a subsidy of a few million dollars a year to subsidise timber being on rail. What happened? The rail line never ran. It is now 14 years down the track. If it was going to be opened in 2008, a bit more had to be said than simply, “We have struck a deal.” In my view, that was a deliberate misleading of the community at that election. I think that all those involved should be highly embarrassed by that process, because the reality is that that rail line still does not run, and not having trains on a railway line means that it will struggle to maintain its upkeep. At this point, we find ourselves in the situation in which a little honesty would be a useful tool.

HON COLIN TINCKNELL (South West) [11.20 am] — in reply: I thank all honourable members for their contributions, especially my colleagues from the south west, as always. I will touch on some of the comments I heard.

I refer first to those of the Minister for Agriculture and Food. I acknowledge the work she is attempting to do with soil and the work being done right now. I also acknowledge the fact that the government is spending quite a bit of money on regional roads but at this stage, because of the lack of investment over many years, even more needs to be done. I never just focus on one issue such as roads, rail or infrastructure. I acknowledge the fact that was put by all members in their comments that health, aged care, education and community services are so important, but they all need to be paid for, and the best way of paying for those services is to have efficient, well-working road transport and infrastructure that will deliver more money into the government’s Treasury coffers. That is how those services get paid for. They are important and I acknowledge they are the things that people in regional areas will come and stay for; however, someone has to pay the bills and that can be done by having a better transport and infrastructure system.

Hon Jim Chown mentioned that a lot of money was spent and I acknowledge that. The previous government did spend a lot of money on hospitals, roads and many other areas. The previous government failed to sell that well during the last election campaign, because there was a lot of great work done in that area. There was quite a lot of infrastructure built, including a fantastic football stadium.

Hon Diane Evers talked about diversification and her support for rail. Once again, yes, we do need to invest in the future. That was clearly shown out by Hon Dr Steve Thomas mentioning that there was a good case that money had been spent on the rail work he was talking about before. The money was there, it was put aside and then it was withdrawn. The project was planned and then it never happened. To get that Greenbushes rail line going today would cost a fortune and may not be viable. If the work and maintenance had been done in the past, it would have made that lithium mine at Greenbushes that much more successful and profitable.

Hon Jim Chown reckoned that Hon Colin Holt and I look like twins, and that is fine! We do have the same first name! Hon Colin Holt talked about royalties for regions. One Nation and, I believe, my crossbench colleagues recognise that royalties for regions was a fantastic program that has been running for a long time now. Yes, there

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have been times when the administration of it was not great or the allocation of funds was not well directed, but overall it is a fantastic program that needs to continue in the future, and I acknowledge that.

No-one acknowledged or commented on the overspend in the metropolitan areas. As I mentioned in my initial comments, local shires in metro areas need to use about 10 per cent of spend on roadworks, whereas in the wheatbelt we are looking at close to 100 per cent of spend on roads. Yes, this is a big state. Obviously, we are overspending in the metro area, and that comes out in the figures, and we are still underspending, even though it is costing a fortune, in the regional areas.

I would like to finish by thanking members for their contributions. The honourable minister has a big task. I think everyone in this house has acknowledged there is still a lot of work to be done. The minister can count on the crossbench and One Nation for our support.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.