

Division 39: Transport, \$514 521 000 —

Mrs L.A. Munday, Chair.

Ms R. Saffioti, Minister for Transport.

Mr P. Woronzow, Acting Director General.

Mr I.F. Cameron, Managing Director.

Mr P. Seares, Managing Director.

Mrs P. Kapoor, Acting Executive Director, Finance and Procurement Services.

Mr P. Laing, Senior Policy Adviser.

Mr P. Abromeit, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information she agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the call to the member for Moore.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 583 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and appropriations, expenses and cash assets. Can the minister outline whether any of the \$426 million capital appropriation has been identified for any specific corridors or parcels of land that will need to be procured?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: The member referred to the \$426 million capital appropriation and asked whether that —

Mr R.S. LOVE: Whether part of that allocation is for the state to purchase any land and whether that land has been identified.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Is the member referring to the Westport account?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Using the state's strong financial position for the future, we have allocated \$400 million to the Westport land acquisition and planning process. There is a lot of land along the corridor in proximity to Anketell and where the proposed port will be, so we have decided to allocate \$400 million primarily for land acquisition and other amounts for other work.

On the matter of whether we have identified individual pieces of land, we are setting up a model whereby the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage and the Department of Transport will work together when land becomes available to purchase, noting that land acquisition and corridor protection are fundamental to the future success of the port. We do not want to be in the same situation that has happened in the past when the government has made significant infrastructure announcements but other parties have bought the land and the government was forced to purchase it back at a higher price or the land was used for alternative purposes. We are setting up a process for the departments of Transport and Planning to purchase land when it becomes available.

[2.50 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I turn to page 585 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. The eighth significant issue impacting the agency is headed "Maritime" and refers to the One Mile jetty in Carnarvon and the moneys to be spent removing and repairing bits of the jetty. When the decision to do that was made, did the department undertake an analysis of the value of making the jetty longer, rather than the jetty ending in a mangrove swamp?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: There are two parts to that project. The first is the demolition works, which is funded and for which \$4.2 million has been allocated. That work will be undertaken by the Department of Transport. That budget commitment involves the demolition of the existing jetty. I think we have committed to the demolition works

post-100 metres. As the member is aware, bits of wood have been floating around the ocean. That wood has been picked up and stored away. I was able to visit the Department of Transport yards to see the different types of wood from the jetty. Some wood looks in good condition and some does not look in great condition. All the existing wood that has been found floating in the ocean has been kept.

The contract for the demolition of the jetty has been awarded, and that work will be undertaken by the Department of Transport. The work that will be managed by the Gascoyne Development Commission is the direct responsibility, in a sense, of the Minister for Regional Development. That work involves the jetty's replacement. I think we gave an election commitment to allocate \$4.8 million for the jetty's replacement. We have also sought a contribution from the commonwealth government to help fund the replacement. The Gascoyne Development Commission has led the consultation with the Department of Transport, a number of forums have been held at which Hon Alannah MacTiernan and Hon Kyle McGinn have attended, and the Gascoyne Development Commission conducted an options discussion about the jetty's replacement. The types of issues that the member has raised, such as the length of the jetty and what it will be built with, are all currently subject to discussion and community consultation and further funding being available, particularly from the commonwealth government. That is where that project is at. No final decision has been made on what it will be replaced with. That is subject to community consultation.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Would the minister concede that extending the jetty, which spans 400 metres, to 750 metres from the start of the jetty to the water, would probably not really achieve a lot? Is the minister indicating that there is the potential for that proposal to be revisited if there is enough concern about what has been proposed?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Yes. As I said, the Minister for Regional Development and Hon Kyle McGinn are leading that discussion in the community. I visited the area to get an understanding of what happened to the jetty. It is a timber jetty and is in pretty dire straits. There are a number of challenges in its removal and replacement. I know there is a lot of history to that area. I was able to visit the One Mile Jetty Interpretive Centre, which I had never visited before. It is an incredible little museum. One of the volunteers walked me around and it was quite incredible to get an understanding of the history of that area.

I do not want to pre-empt any community consultation. As I said, there are two key discussions on what the jetty will be made out of—wood versus concrete and steel—and how long the jetty should be. The two variables are currently being discussed by the commission, the relevant ministers, the community and the local council. I had the opportunity to go with Eddie Smith, the shire president, and the CEO, to see the One Mile jetty, the fascine and the old prawn jetty, which was quite interesting. It was a good day.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I thank the minister. I have finished with that line of questioning.

I want to flick to something completely different. I turn to the outcomes and key effectiveness indicators on page 587. The first outcome under the heading “Outcome: An accessible and safe transport system” states —

Percentage of wheelchair accessible vehicle taxi journeys carrying passengers in wheelchairs which meet the waiting time standard

I do not know the full reasons why, but I have received a number of complaints from regional communities about the unavailability of taxis for people with a disability in Busselton, Mandurah, Geraldton and Broome, for example. From what I understand, the Department of Transport was paying a subsidy or some sort of payment for the provision of these taxis but that seems to have somehow fallen off the rails. Consequently, those taxis are no longer provided in those areas. I understand that it is a consequence of the development of the NDIS and people having access to other forms of transport, but in some communities some individuals were relying on those taxis that could accommodate a wheelchair. Is the minister aware of the situation, and is it a budgetary matter that is reflected in the minutiae of the budget? It is very difficult to know exactly where all the expenses lie when confronted with large departments.

[3.00 pm]

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: This issue has been raised with me. On a number of occasions, I have checked the availability of taxis that accommodate wheelchairs. There are a couple of issues. The first is the impact that the NDIS has had on the transport industry, and we will continue to work on that. More generally, earlier this year we awarded three grants of \$15 000 each to regional taxi operators to contribute to the cost of the purchase and installation of wheelchair hoists. I will just seek confirmation from my advisers here. We have a vehicle modification grant, and that continues. That is, for operators who want their taxi to be multipurpose, the government subsidises the modification to allow them to carry wheelchairs. That grant is \$15 000 per vehicle. We estimate that there will be about eight grants in 2021–22. We also have a carryover of seven operators who were successful for the grant in 2021–22 but have not yet been able to secure the equipment to commence the installation. I think that there are a couple of factors at play. The issue of the shortage of people and skills across the state has contributed to that situation, and, I suspect, given the shortage of vehicles coming into the state, the availability of vehicles has also had an impact, but it is something that we are very much constantly monitoring. The grants for modification have not changed and that grant of \$15 000 continues to be available to support the modifications of vehicles. I have heard

different issues raised at different times, but we believe that we can continue to work with the industry to do that. We have also reduced the barriers of entry so that more people are able to provide wheelchair-compliant vehicles.

[Ms R.S. Stephens took the chair.]

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is the minister aware of any ongoing funding in the form of a subsidy that may have been delivered for people to operate those types of taxis?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: There is the taxi user subsidy scheme, too. There are two components: there is a modification grant to facilitate the modification of vehicles and there is the taxi user subsidy scheme. That is for both metropolitan and regional areas. That TUSS continues. I think there were some issues with Black and White taxis, as I recall, but I might ask Iain Cameron to provide a further update. The TUSS has not changed at all and has not been removed. There are a couple of issues with TUSS. First of all, we are looking at how we can move to an electronic payment rather than a manual payment. The second issue is how it ties in with the National Disability Insurance Scheme. It has been a very difficult issue to challenge. As the member knows, NDIS on transport has been a difficult area to navigate, because sometimes we need volume to guarantee a service, and sometimes that cannot be guaranteed through the NDIS arrangements. It is something we continue to support, and if individual issues are raised, we ask the department to have a look at those. Did you want to comment?

Mr I.F. Cameron: Thank you, minister. Just to add to what the minister said, the issues of wheelchair-accessible taxis and taxis in regional areas are not new. In the past, both pre-reform and post-reform, we have had times when, for one reason or another, a business decision is made locally. As the minister said, the grants and funding that we provide through the department have not changed. Where there is a drop in a service, we are now able to work quicker with the local communities because those barriers to entry have been removed. Wherever those services drop or change, we will work with the local community, the local governments and the providers.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I think that even the availability of vehicles is probably a challenge, because we know that people have been waiting a very long time to get vehicles more generally.

Mr R.S. LOVE: There are situations whereby a taxi has been operating and has ceased to operate because it is not profitable to continue. As I say, I do not know whether that is a result of the NDIS coming in and taking some of the trade, but it leaves some areas with a gap, which is troubling to those people who are caught up in the situation.

Ms E.J. KELSBIE: I refer to page 597 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, “Coastal Projects and Zone Management”. My query is regarding Denmark’s Ocean Beach and others, I guess. We have had a pretty wild winter down my way, and Ocean Beach has suffered significant erosion, with the dunes and parts of the foreshore actually collapsing into the ocean, and the shire has had to close some of the facilities for a while in the interests of public safety. Can the minister please advise what funding is available in the budget to support the efforts of local government to rebuild following such erosion events and to protect popular iconic beaches like this one from future erosion?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I thank the member. I remember that the member raised this I think when we were in Kalgoorlie. As part of this budget, we have allocated an additional \$18.5 million over the next five years to help manage the impacts of coastal erosion and protect our coastline. This means that we will have \$33.5 million of funding over the next five years. I think that we have had a significant boost, and, of course, we have also asked the commonwealth to partner with us on this issue, because we believe this is a national issue. We got it onto the infrastructure priority list to identify that this is a significant issue that all states, in a sense, will be facing, and it will be a continuing issue as a result of storm surges and the impact of climate change. As I said, winter erosion is common in many parts, but the recent impact at Ocean Beach was unusually severe. That is one of the things that we are looking at. We have awarded the Shire of Denmark a 2021–22 Department of Transport coastal adaption and protection grant of \$55 000, which represents about 50 per cent of the estimated cost of \$111 000 to complete repairs of the retaining wall in line with the grant application submitted in March. This includes funds for coastal engineering consultancy, mobilisation, materials, plant hire and labour. As I said, the grant scheme is a program that provides up to 50 per cent of funding to coastal managers, including local governments, to undertake projects associated with identifying and adapting to coastal hazards. Under the CAP grant scheme, the Shire of Denmark completed its coastal hazard risk management and adaptation plan in 2018, and the long-term strategy is to continue to manage the retreat of infrastructure, but also make sure that we can protect the Denmark Life Saving Club. I think that the member was a president of that club, was she not?

Ms E.J. KELSBIE: Yes, I was the first female president, for about four years.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I read that somewhere. We know that the protection of the surf lifesaving club is very important, given the role it plays in the community. As I said, the grant of \$55 000 will help to refurbish the timber pile retaining wall. The Shire of Denmark has developed its plan for the area, and we will continue to work with local governments and shires such as Denmark to see how we can both manage and protect infrastructure where we can, but also try to monitor and understand erosion events to try to make sure that future infrastructure provision does not exacerbate or make issues worse.

As I said, it is a major challenge. There are many major challenges in managing climate change and significant weather events, and coastal erosion is one of the most significant, particularly where we have infrastructure located close to the coastline. We did a report that identified 55 hotspots. Of course, in Albany, I think there was also a discussion about private property falling into the ocean. There is the issue of private property and council and state infrastructure and how we can manage the protection of that infrastructure in some instances. There are other views of a managed retreat in circumstances in which we cannot prevent the continued impact, but I think that, particularly in places where we have significant infrastructure, trying to protect that infrastructure is paramount.

[3.10 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I want to move to page 587 of the budget papers and the explanation of significant movements of the department. Note 1 refers to the variance between the 2020–21 budget and the 2020–21 estimated actual for freight being transported on rail. The explanation given is that there was a decrease in rail container volumes to and from the Fremantle port. How did that manifest when we heard from representatives from the port authority that there was actually an increase in container traffic? Was there a disruption to the line or was there some other reason that that could not happen, because apparently there was an increase in the total number of containers coming through?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I think this was related a little bit to the unpredictability of some of the trade movements. Although trade movements increased, there were also some disruptions in movements. Some of the longer term guaranteed movements were not delivered. As I said, we have stabilised at around 20 per cent. It dropped to 18 per cent, but we have stabilised at around 20 per cent; I think we are up to 22 per cent again. I think the best way to describe it is by saying that it was because of the unpredictable trade movements that happened as a result of the COVID pandemic. Although activity increased, there was not the predictability in some instances. I understand that some of the longer term bigger movers went back to trucks for a period. As I have been briefed, it was more to do with the unpredictability of some of those container movements and, as a result, some of the train movements were not as strong as they had been.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I turn to page 589 and the driver and vehicle services. One of the dot points refers to assessing driver competency and issuing and renewing drivers' licences in accordance with commonwealth and government requirements and driver competency standards. Significant concern has been relayed to me by people from various communities, including Bunbury, about the difficulty of getting bookings and the very low pass rates—less than 40 per cent seems to be the norm now—of people sitting their driving test. There is some concern about what is behind that. The minister may remember that there was a change in the number of hours that people had to do before they sat their practical driving assessment. When that was announced, it was put with the idea that there would be an increase in the pass rate because people would be more competent as drivers as they would have more experience. In fact, we have seen a general decrease in the pass rate. I wonder whether there is an understanding of why the initial pass rate seems to be getting lower rather than increasing, even though young drivers are getting double the amount of instruction before they sit their practical driving assessment.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: This is about young people getting their drivers' licences. The most common issues raised with my office are school bus services and drivers' licences. Getting our driver's licence is such a big part of our life. I will not go through the history of when I got my driver's licence!

There are a couple of things. I will ask Iain Cameron to make this point, but more generally the road safety results for young drivers have improved incredibly over time. The statistics on the number of young drivers killed or seriously injured on our roads are very strong, which supports the increased focus on driver training. About three or four years ago, changes were made to the order of the hazard perception test and the number of hours. I do not have a historical analysis of pass rates over time, but I know that we have brought in a number of initiatives to help with quality assurance, including recording driving tests through iPads.

The other point I want to make is that over the past 18 months, we have had some impacts because of the COVID pandemic; we had lockdowns last year and a few this year. We closed our driving assessment processes for a number of weeks, and months in some instances, and that required quite a lot of catch-up.

I do not know whether the pass–fail rate has changed dramatically over time. The statistics indicate that the rate is about 40 or 50 per cent and that corresponds with my anecdotal evidence. My niece got it on her third attempt and my nephew got it on his second attempt. My experience is that it is rare for someone to get it on their first attempt. I do not know whether the rate has dropped dramatically over time. We are introducing a number of different measures, including electronic bookings. We went through a period in which we confirmed that people were going to turn up to their test on the following day to make sure that there was more availability, because sometimes people would book tests and then not turn up. The other more general issue is that sometimes people will book a test because they have done their hours, even though they may not be ready to sit the test. That is something that only the individual and their family will know. That is a view that has been put to me. I might ask Iain Cameron to provide further advice on this one.

Mr I.F. Cameron: As the minister said, there has not been a dramatic change in pass rates in recent times. The comment that the minister made earlier is the most important one: from a safety point of view, over the last 10 years, the safety of young drivers aged 17 to 19 years has improved by 60 per cent. That coincides with a number of the changes to the licensing system that the minister has talked about—that is, the preparation. It is not a requirement just to be professionally coached. It can be just hours of supervised experience, so the quality of that experience varies. As the minister has said, the 50 hours has been set not so much purely from a safety point of view, but from the point of view of what the community can reasonably access over time. There is international evidence that a much higher number would result in much higher safety, but the minister's point is key: some people are not ready after 50 hours. We have a statutory minimum number of hours that enables them to sit their test.

The reasons for failure are worth noting. They are generally breaches of the road rules—for example, speeding, failing to stop at a Stop sign and things like that. As the minister said, people are concerned about whether the assessment has changed. It has not. The assessments are monitored and candidates certainly get verbal feedback, and they are able to see how and where they failed. The important thing is that the reasons for failure are quite significant. They are breaches of the road rules. They are not minor technicalities; they are significant ones.

[3.20 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: Representations made to me indicate that people have had to put their children through the testing regime seven, eight or nine times. I think the cost at that stage—do not quote me in *Hansard*—was over \$90 a test and the cost increased by a small amount last year, I think. Some people are paying hundreds and hundreds of dollars to go through this test. I accept what was said about the need to be safe, but when we have virtually doubled the number of supervised driving hours required before one sits the test and the assessment process is still the same, why have we seen an increase in the failure rate, rather than an increase in the pass rate? That does not seem to be a logical result to me. I think a review of the processes would be good.

I take issue with the other point made about feedback. Feedback is minimal to the point that none is given. Often when a young person has failed, especially the first couple of times—maybe it gets worse, I do not know—they are quite upset. It has been relayed to me that at that point the assessor will often take that as a signal that they do not want to talk to them, so they will just ignore them and leave them and do not provide feedback. They are left quite bewildered about why they failed. I have heard from enough people from all over, in not only my electorate but many areas, and I think there is a common problem here. I am wondering whether the government could undertake to look at what is going on and why those trends seem to be occurring. I have heard that from driving instructors as well as from parents and young people. I believe there probably is an issue here, and I suggest that if we want to improve the issuing and renewing and the system around assessing driver competency, maybe the department could look at it.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: We will take that on board. As I was saying, getting a driver's licence is always an emotive time. I remember going through it a number of years ago, and it is one of those major milestones in life. We have to make sure that the young adults are treated with respect and feedback is provided.

More generally, it is worth noting that in remote towns and communities, such as in the Pilbara and the Kimberley, our experience is that many young adults are not going for drivers' licences. It happens a little bit in regional WA, but generally in the more remote parts like the Kimberley and Pilbara. Therefore, we have announced a \$4.9 million initiative to help young people get drivers' licences. I understand that the federal government has also announced free driving lessons, I think, for those who are on JobSeeker and subsidies for unemployed people to access paid driving instructors. We have allocated \$4.9 million. It is really about improving accessibility of driver tests, starting in the more remote areas. For example, we want to increase support to the Kimberley and Pilbara teams to undertake more drivers tests and, more generally, look at the availability of not only driver assessors but driving instructors, availability of cars and so forth. I hear from people whom I know that the requirements have changed. They have increased over time.

There are other theories about young people and road rules. I will give the member some other theories that have been put to me. One is that young people are not on their bikes or on the road that often anymore, so there are issues to do with understanding distances and the road rules. When kids used to ride their bikes everywhere, they had a better understanding of managing safety and understanding speeds and the road rules, because to move around the streets by bike, people have to understand the road rules. That is why I think bike education and walking and cycling to school, for example, is very important. If we get people onto the streets and understanding the hazards, perception and speeds and some basics, such as which way to look before they cross the road, that will all help in managing driving as well. There are other theories on that from that point of view. I know the member is from a farming background. The member would know that a lot of young people used to learn how to drive well before the age of 17. Again, a lot of young people who grew up in a rural environment probably are no longer doing that or do not have uncles and aunties with farms that they used to drive on.

There are a number of different reasons, but we are very committed to making sure that young people are respected in the process and, if we get issues, we follow them up. We try to make sure that there is quality assurance for all the driver assessors. Why my niece did not pass her test was quite interesting, but everyone has different views on how they have been treated. We want to make sure that there is a good level of quality assurance across the system.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I strongly support the idea of providing funding for some of those remote areas to undertake not only assessment but training, because one of the great problems in remote and Aboriginal communities is that many people do not have a driver's licence to do the instruction. A lot of kids end up driving without a licence because there is no-one to teach them, then they get a record and then they cannot drive.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: That is exactly the issue we want to address. Before they start to get into the legal system, we want to give them a chance. Access to vehicles and to supervised instruction is a challenge faced by a lot of families. I think it is probably even greater in some parts of rural or remote WA. It is an issue, and when both parents are working or if it is a single-parent household, getting that supervised instruction is a challenge. We support all these types of initiatives and commonwealth government subsidies. A number of NGOs and volunteer organisations work in this area. They differ from area to area. The Minister for Police is very keen to see police and community youth centres more involved in this space, which sounds to me like a good idea, particularly in regional WA. PCYCs have dedicated facilities and good volunteers and, of course, are connected to the local police service, and could do some driving support and instruction. I think that is a great initiative and we are very keen to work with the Minister for Police. Of course, he is also the Minister for Road Safety. We are trying to lock in and partner with established local groups—they may differ from area to area—to support not only the assessment, but the driving instruction.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Still on licensing, I turn from the basic car licence to heavy vehicle licences. It has been put to me by people in the industry that there is a shortage of drivers, and part of the problem is the time it takes to transition from being a car driver to having a heavy rigid licence to a multi-combination or higher level of licence. The idea has been put to me that it would be better to have a system for those licences that is based on competency, rather than age. As we know, there are shortages of drivers. Getting young people in there is very difficult, because they see that as a barrier to entry into the transport industry. Consequently, we are seeing older and older drivers.

I also have a question about whether there needs to be some strengthening of English as a prerequisite to those matters. Concerns have been expressed to me by drivers, especially those running east-west, that they will not use Great Eastern Highway or they do not like driving on it now because so many eastern states drivers do not understand the road rules or the road signs. We cannot help that, but we can help what happens in Western Australia.

[3.30 pm]

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: There are a couple of things. Companies like Centurion, for example, or organisations like the Western Roads Federation and the Australian Livestock and Rural Transporters Association have put the issue of the ageing demographic of truck drivers to us. They always say that if you go to a school careers expo, there is no stand saying, "Become a truck driver." It is not promoted as an attractive career in high schools, and I think that is something we all need to try to turn around. There is that aspect.

We worked with the Minister for Education and Training and launched the heavy haulage driver operation skill set program on 12 April 2021. It tries to address the driver shortage. We want to see 500 new drivers trained for road transport and heavy rigid licences, with upskilling from HR licences to heavy combination and multi-combination licences. We are working with industry to do that. I understand that there had been more than 100 commencements in the metropolitan area as of 24 August, and 23 people out of the first cohort now have jobs in the industry. I went to the program, and we saw women, Aboriginal people and people moving from other industries—a really diverse group of people looking to become truck drivers. That is a positive and that is a specific initiative we have funded through a real partnership between the Western Roads Federation, Main Roads and the TAFE sector, and we want to continue that.

A second thing about the age and requirements is the licensing issue, but again we are looking at it. One of the complicating issues is insurance and whether people are able to be insured if they are younger. I was at a lunch the other day where the insurance industry was represented together with key industry people, and it appears that insurance organisations understand the challenges and are seeing what they can do to be more flexible about who can be insured. It was put to me at that lunch that maybe that delay between the ages of 17 and 25 is just too long, and by that age people are getting other jobs. We are definitely on to looking at the licensing requirements, and we are undertaking training more generally to try to get as many people to become truck drivers as possible.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Having six children, with four of them having their licences, I guess I have been through a bit on that! My concern about the process is that I have been told—I have not checked the fact—that fewer than half of people aged under 25 now have their drivers' licences. Although we have seen a reduction in the number of incidents, if you like, with drivers under the age of 25, there has been a reduction in driving incidents in all categories, and

that is principally because roads and vehicles are improving dramatically. I wonder whether the reduction is simply based on the fact that there are far fewer under-25s now on the road than when I was a boy.

Also, a little while ago, when that section of the department was able to maintain the funding from the licensing income under the net appropriation basis, the failure rate doubled in the following year. I am not saying that people consciously set out to do things, but the number of people employed in testing directly correlates with the number of times people fail. If people failed less, not as many people would be needed to carry out the testing. I wonder whether there is a system in the department that incentivises a higher failure rate. I heard what the minister's adviser said about the reasons people fail, but I can certainly say from my direct personal experience that there may be substantive things, but there may be very trivial things that come down to a straight personality difference. As I say, it concerns me that in this department there is a direct incentive for people to maintain their employment through people failing tests.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I do not think that is the case. I do not think we have bonuses for failing people!

Dr D.J. HONEY: I know; it is the number of people carrying out the tests.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I do not think revenue is kept depending on how many tests are undertaken. I do not think supervisors are failing people to keep their jobs. I think there is a massive demand out there and we probably do not have enough assessors. That might have been the case in the past, but I do not think it is now. I understand that it is a very emotive and stressful time, and people have different experiences. Our role is to continually make sure that we have a quality-assurance system. I tell members what, compared with when my mum got her licence—I will not go into exactly how she got her licence 40 years ago—the quality assurance is much better nowadays!

Mr G. BAKER: I refer to page 584 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the line item “COVID-19 Information Call Centre” under “COVID-19 Response”. I wonder whether the minister could update us on the assistance provided by Transport staff during the COVID pandemic.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Some of the work undertaken by the Department of Transport over the past 18 months has been in assisting the Western Australia Police Force with staffing the COVID hotline. There is a memorandum of understanding with the WA Police Force that in the case of natural disasters and so forth, the Department of Transport contact centre will supply staff. As of 27 March 2020, Transport commenced its preparation to implement 13 COVID. Initial operating hours were from 7.00 am to 10.00 pm, seven days a week, and current operating hours are Monday to Sunday, 8.00 am to 6.00 pm. A total of 793 000 calls have been received from the initial go-live day to date. Transport was very much on the front line of dealing with COVID issues. Currently, 65 staff members are employed on the 13 COVID line, including in leadership and support roles. These are all Department of Transport employees. The contact centre is managed by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. There have been a number of different inquiries—for example, questions about the G2G PASS, travel applications, border directions, COVID-19 testing results and so forth. I would personally like to thank everyone involved in the Department of Transport who assisted and continues to assist the police force.

Mr G. BAKER: So they are matters well outside the portfolio.

[3.40 pm]

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Exactly. When COVID first hit it was very much looking at the resources across government and how we could use those to manage the significant task in front of us. I am really happy that the Department of Transport stepped up and was probably the key agency supporting those staff. It has been something that I think the State Emergency Coordinator has mentioned to me a number of times and he thanked the Department of Transport and its staff for their work and commitment in helping answer those COVID-19 phone calls.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I wanted to talk briefly about the coastal facilities that the Department of Transport manages. I am talking about service area 3 on page 590 under the heading “Maritime”, and the third dot point, which states —

planning, building and managing new and existing land and water-based facilities for the use of the community as well as recreational and commercial vessel owners;

I would like to ask a couple of specific things within my area. As the minister is aware, I raised a grievance about Jurien Bay marina the other day. This photo shows the state of the marina at the moment. As the minister can see, it is quite abysmal. There are a lot of grumpy people up there about the state of the marina, and justifiably so. I know it is not in the budget. I would suggest that as a matter of priority—the minister may be considering it—the minister tries to get some funding for that in the midyear review coming up very shortly.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: We are very much considering it. I have asked the commonwealth to contribute as soon as possible. Primarily, as part of the midyear review discussions with the commonwealth, together with budget discussions with the commonwealth, we have asked for some funding from the commonwealth. I have already approached the commonwealth on that. Hopefully, it will contribute; and, if it does, I am sure we can get the project underway, noting that the process for getting the appropriate environmental and other approvals is still underway. We do not expect

those approvals to be finalised until the middle of next year. I am very much keen to get some funding, but also to finalise the approvals. Should we get the funding, we will be able to then proceed with the extension of that breakwater.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Thank you for that assurance, minister. I would suggest, though, that with a very large budget surplus it may not necessarily be the will of the commonwealth government to provide more funding to the Western Australian government, in which case we are still left with a situation. There is a need that exists regardless of whether the commonwealth government puts its hand in its pocket.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: The commonwealth government contributes billions of dollars to state budgets every year. I cannot say why it would withhold money to us this year. We believe we deserve our fair share. We provide a certain percentage of revenue to the commonwealth through, in particular, the fuel excise levy or its replacement, and we expect to at least get our fair share through its transport and infrastructure fund. I would not give up on commonwealth funding for such a project. I believe that it should be interested in this project. I am not sure about everyone's relationship with Barnaby over there, but get on the phone to Barnaby and see whether he is keen to support WA, given he is our Acting Prime Minister for a few days.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am sure he will have a receptive ear, but, as I said, with a very large budget surplus reported in the press in the eastern states, it might be difficult to get money out of the commonwealth government at the moment, I would have thought.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I do not believe that. The fact is that we have been managing the economy well and we have kept COVID out; we should not be penalised. I do not believe in penalising good behaviour. The fact is also that we are managing to prop up the national economy. I think we are sending \$1 billion over east every week to help support all the payments that New South Wales requires, because it did not manage the COVID pandemic very well at all.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Further to the issue of neglected state facilities in Western Australia, Port Gregory jetty has been sand locked for many years on one side at high tides et cetera, and it now pretty well has sand completely built up around it. Is there any process or has any thought been given to how that situation could be rectified, given that a number of fishing vessels now use Port Gregory jetty and it is a vital piece of infrastructure in that town?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I must say, I might need to visit Port Gregory to understand the extent of what has occurred there. There are a number of longstanding issues or problems in maritime infrastructure around the state. I remember when I first got the portfolio, I was amazed, and I continue to be amazed, that for a state with such an interaction with the water, we need a lot of investment to support both marinas and jetties across the state. I think one of the issues has been the infrastructure provided, in many instances. I am not laying blame on anyone, but maybe the science was not tested as much as it could have been, or there have been changes to our environment that mean that I see a number of briefing notes that say, "This harbour was created X, but changing sea conditions means it is not functional, or there are issues". That is across the state. We are investing a lot in trying to correct some past issues and also to provide maritime infrastructure.

As I said, if the member goes around the state, he will see we have Spoilbank Marina, a massive and significant project that is being undertaken; the marine hub in Onslow, partnering in particular with the local shire; the work we are undertaking for Exmouth and the Tantabiddi boat ramp, making sure that the business case we develop there creates a boat ramp that can facilitate tourism expectations for decades to come while not significantly impacting the environment; and the Broome boating facility. There is a lot of catch-up infrastructure, and we will continue to work on all of it. But, like I said, this is the state budget; it is economics. There are finite resources and we are working as hard as we can to try to address some of the problems of the past and provide projects for the future.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to page 591 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, under the heading "On-demand Transport". Could the minister update us on the taxi plate buyback scheme, whether that scheme is now complete, the status of that scheme in terms of the number of plates bought back, and the number of taxis operational?

[3.50 pm]

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Apologies; we do not have that information on hand. I am happy to provide it by way of supplementary information. As I recall, and this is just from memory, there were about 1 200 plates and I think all but three were purchased. All those plates have been bought back. We can, by way of supplementary information, provide the number of plates that were bought back by the government as part of the buyback scheme. That work was completed about two years ago, so I do not have that figure on me, but I might have it by the end of this session. Sorry; there will be no supplementary information because I have the information here. A total of \$118.2 million was paid against 1 032 taxi plates. That is probably fewer owners, but that is the number of plates. The buyback payments were completed in July 2019.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I want to talk very briefly about service and key efficiency indicators, service 1, which is strategic transport policy and integrated planning.

The CHAIR: Can you please provide a page number, member?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Page 588, service 1. It is straightforward.

In terms of the protection of infrastructure corridors and key freight routes, we have had some industry people express concern that there seems to be not enough consideration of the importance of freight networks when the government deals with the development of urban projects. What lead does the department take in representing those views when it is helping to contribute to discussions with the Western Australian Planning Commission and others about urban freight corridors?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Main Roads has a very strong voice in that process—some would argue too strong a voice! I have never heard that it does not have a strong enough voice in that process.

There are a couple of things. First of all, there is the current metropolitan region scheme in which there are primary road reserves and then there is the acknowledgement that things evolve over time. I will give the example that what was deemed fit for a freight corridor 40 years ago is different from what is deemed fit now, in particular with how interchanges are facilitated. For major freight corridors, we would look at Tonkin Highway and NorthLink WA. We would look at what was done at Gateway, what is being done at Tonkin Gap and what will continue to flow down south. There is much more recognition of wider corridors together with a removal, when possible, of traffic lights. In many instances, the interchanges have a bigger land requirement now than in the past. An example is the Kalamunda Road–Roe Highway interchange, which I visited yesterday. It is a magnificent interchange, but the use of roundabouts rather than traffic lights means that we have a bigger land take. Protecting freight corridors is very much top of mind. The WAPC is very cognisant of Main Roads' requirements.

I would also say that Main Roads' requirements have expanded over time, particularly in looking at how to protect corridor width and the prospective interchanges, and that will be primarily discussed. If we look at the Anketell corridor and the Tonkin corridor going south to Mundijong, we see that it is about not only the width of the actual road, but also how the treatments of those interchanges are undertaken. If we look at Tonkin Highway–Reid Highway, we see that it is a big interchange. When we want to remove all traffic lights or when we will not use traffic lights on the secondary road, it does have an impact on land take.

Mr G. BAKER: I would like to ask about Hillarys Boat Harbour. I refer to page 590, budget paper No 2, volume 2, under the "Maritime" heading. I ask about the rent collected by the Department of Transport compared with market value and whether COVID-19 rent relief was passed on to tenants.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: It is an interesting question. In March 2020, we supported rent relief for small businesses and not-for-profit groups that had leases with the state government, and their rent would be waived for six months effective from 1 April 2020. In most cases, we were able to effect that rent relief because the lease was directly with us. However, in other instances, we were going through a different party and some small businesses did not get their rent relief. These matters are currently in front of the State Administrative Tribunal. In some instances, some of the head lessees at Hillarys Boat Harbour did not pass on the rent relief to the sublessees—others did, but some did not. It is very, very disappointing that when the government waived the rent, which was really targeting small businesses, some of those small businesses did not get the benefit of that because the head lessee, which had a direct contract with the government, did not pass it on. As I said, that matter is playing out at the State Administrative Tribunal, but it is very, very disappointing that some of the head lessees did not pass on that rent relief. It is one of those things that in future when matters like this arise, we will have to structure the rent relief in a more direct manner, straight to the small business, and maybe bypass the head lessees to avoid this situation ever occurring again.

Mr G. BAKER: That is extraordinary.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Yes.

The appropriation was recommended.

[4.00 pm]