

POPULATION GROWTH — GOVERNMENT PLANNING

Motion

HON MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM (Agricultural) [10.10 am] — without notice: I move —

That the Council condemns the government for failing to accurately predict and plan for Western Australia's rapid population growth.

On this very important International Women's Day, from the very outset I would like to give this motion some immediate context and added importance by looking at some information that I noted on the website of the University of Botswana.

Hon Simon O'Brien: Is that your alma mater?

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: I am reliably informed that the University of Botswana is a very important university in the context of things. I refer to comments on the website about what demography is and why it is important, because that is what this motion is about. It states under the section "Demography" that, amongst other things —

Population growth can complicate and magnify, and even create, a wide variety of social, economic and political problems. Among the problems associated with population growth are food security, unemployment, environmental degradation, increasing demand for houses, energy, educational and health facilities and individual freedom. A study of demography provides the necessary tools for planning social, economic, community services at the national and sub-national levels. Population data on the size, structure, composition and growth rate of population are therefore indispensable inputs in planning for the social, economic and political well-being of people in a country.

It goes on to say —

The planning exercise includes activities such as drawing up voters list for political elections, collection of taxes, planning for commerce and industry, provision and maintenance of social services such as education and health, planning for housing, pensions etc and preservation of law and order.

I now move to the substance of this non-government business motion. I will start with a significant local fact. According to the Minister for Planning's media statement dated Tuesday, 14 February 2011, the Western Australian population is projected to grow to 3.061 million by 2026. The media statement goes on to reveal that the three million-plus figure is 400 000—in excess of 13 per cent—higher statewide than a previous projection made in 2006. It is a difference of nearly half a million people in less than six years! The ministerial statement then revealed that the new figure is based on a new approach that in turn identifies a new projection, and that this is supported by two alternative scenarios either side of the indicator. If the new projections outlined by the minister produce such a huge increase to 2026, the question to be asked is quite simple: why has it taken so long to develop meaningful and up-to-date figures? That is a significant issue in the overall scheme of things and in the context of this motion. If we add 400 000 to the previous figure, which had already factored in some growth, Western Australia will have a population increase in the order of 750 000 people over the next 14 years. That should sound alarm bells no matter where one is in this state, but particularly if one is a member of Parliament or, dare I say it, a member of the government.

The inability to accurately predict and forecast population growth and to plan for how it can be managed has brought into sharp focus this government's inability in a number of areas to develop the economic, social and environmental potential of both urban metropolitan and regional rural parts of Western Australia. That poses a further question: what meaningful planning has occurred, or better still, what informed predictions have happened since 2008? I suggest, given that figure of 400 000, that the answer to that question is: very few. Also, where in the ministerial statement does it mention the regions and rural parts of this state? I would have thought that that would have been an imperative. Population growth is occurring across the state, and particularly in the area I represent, which is Geraldton and the midwest. I will talk more about Geraldton and the midwest in a while. I also ask: where in the forecasting by the minister and his department are SuperTowns mentioned? Are they part of the minister's planning for faster population growth or maybe decentralisation? They are not mentioned. I would have thought that was necessary. From the briefings and advice I have received, particularly with regard to Katanning, which has been suggested to become a SuperTown, we have been led to believe that growth is not only a City of Perth scenario. I am sure members would agree with that. There is also the Pilbara Cities concept.

As I have indicated, between now and 2026 something like an extra 750 000 people will reside in Western Australia. That is an extra three quarters of a million people in only 14 years. On that score, what are the experts on population growth saying? What do they want us to believe about the implications of this significant

Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Lynn MacLaren; Hon Wendy Duncan; Hon Helen Bullock;
Deputy President; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Ken Travers

increase? On a 720 ABC news report aired on 15 February 2012 just after 7.00 am, a comment was made that there needs to be a major rethink of planning policies to ease pressure on public utilities, transport, housing and other public services. As far as the minister is concerned, that is a staggering admission of planning that, if it has not gone wrong, has perhaps not even occurred. The minister's response to the ABC news report was that the government needed to start planning to accommodate the growth. I reiterate: it needed to start planning to accommodate that growth. That is fine if one is genuine about doing that, but what has happened since 2008? If the government has to start planning for that growth now, what has happened in the years preceding the situation that now prevails? I suggest that at this point in time alarm bells would be well and truly ringing. It should be obvious to all that the government and the minister have no plan or have not had a plan to deal with this significant increase in population over the next 14 years. They only have themselves to blame for having taken so long to update those population figures. To my way of thinking, the minister needs to have his finger on the pulse. Planning is an ongoing issue; it is not something that is done every three or four years or just prior to an election. With just over 12 months to the 2013 election, there is a lot of catching up to do.

As far as I am concerned, there is no better example of poor planning and ineffective action than the situation at Cockburn train station; that is, if the member for Jandakot's grievance on 3 March is to be believed. One of the government's own local members recognises the enormous issues surrounding population growth and the imperative to do something now and not in five or 10 years' time. I will continue with the issue of transport. I remind members of petitions that were presented in this place on Tuesday. I know that Hon Ken Travers will have something to say about poor planning and inadequate predictions in the state government's 20-year public transport plan. He is on the record as saying that there appears to be little evidence of government urgency with transport planning, as well as what I have just said. That particular point is acknowledged by professor of sustainability Peter Newman, who is on record as saying that there is a serious need. I will quote an article in *The West Australian* of 16 February in which Professor Newman says —

“We need to push ahead with key public transport projects, including the widespread introduction of a light-rail network.”

Our public transport strategy is woefully inadequate at this point in time because of inadequate planning and poor predictions of increased population growth, but I will leave it to the Labor shadow Minister for Transport to talk more about that.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to move in and out of Perth, a primate city like no other city in Australia. There is nothing smart or productive about cars, trucks, buses, and, to a lesser extent, taxis sitting on our freeways, highways and major roads waiting for bottlenecks and traffic jams to clear. Members can take this from someone who has spent most of his recent life down on the south coast: just getting to this place on time in the morning can be a huge headache. My Perth base is in Victoria Park, and if The Esplanade is closed down, I and tens of thousands of other Western Australians will be forced to take either Orrong Road and the Graham Farmer tunnel to get to this side of the river or Mill Point Road and the Kwinana Freeway. The congestion and resulting inefficiencies will, despite what the Minister for Transport says, take years to alleviate. As far as I am concerned, they will simply be the result of poor planning, inappropriate commitments or doing things with significant haste—members can take their pick.

There is a big-picture issue with population growth that not only this government but all state governments need to consider. On paper it is quite simple: it has to do with infrastructure and the government's commitment to it. I want to talk about infrastructure in Geraldton and the midwest in a while. In Western Australia, we can and need to deal with far more people than the 400 000 extra people we are likely to see before 2026 if we are going to deal with the demands of our growing economy. We need to get infrastructure right in our cities, as well as recognising the role that our regions have to play.

I will move on to the regions. The regions in Western Australia certainly offer much. There are enormous opportunities that need to be unlocked. The mining boom, the national broadband network and the movement of retirees and young families to areas like our midwest can have great benefits for our state. But the significant economic opportunities in the state's midwest can only be realised with better strategic planning. I have made mention of this issue before, but I want now to highlight the need to look at better energy supplies in this part of the world. The result of better strategic planning will be that population changes can produce enormous benefits. We need to plan for and promote increases in the size and mobility of our skilled working-age population, thereby enabling us to perhaps take advantage of the great economic opportunities that places like Geraldton and the midwest will offer us. Certainly, at this point in time it is imperative that the government better plan for such an outcome. That is something it has not done, and there are big challenges in front of it to do that. The government's biggest challenge is its continued non-delivery of stage 2 of the Mid West Energy Project. In the six minutes remaining, I will quote some information about the background and the proposal to put this project

Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Lynn MacLaren; Hon Wendy Duncan; Hon Helen Bullock;
Deputy President; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Ken Travers

in place. A government of Western Australia, Department of State Development and Mid West Energy Project document, "Submissions 2009", reads —

- The Mid West of Western Australia, with Geraldton at its heart, is poised for a dramatic economic and social transformation that will see it become one of Australia's major infrastructure hubs and, potentially, a world centre of scientific endeavour.

I think that is alluding to the Square Kilometre Array project. There is not much we can do about that now, but it will hopefully happen in the very near future. The second point reads —

- With major development projects planned, the Mid West's need for a secure, high capacity electricity transmission network is paramount.

On that very point, the proposal from Infrastructure Australia, through the government of Western Australia and the Department of State Development, reads —

- The Mid West Energy Project proposes a new electricity transmission line from Perth (at Pinjar) to Geraldton (at Moonyoonooka). This will deliver reliable supply to Geraldton, numerous new Mid West mines, Geraldton Port and Oakajee industrial developments, allow renewable energy projects to feed into the grid and establish an environment capable of supporting the Square Kilometre Array project.

That is all highly relevant —

- **Stage 1:** is to be funded by the State —

This is the guaranteed part of the project at this point in time —

and involves building the line from Pinjar 201 kilometres north to Eneabba with planned completion by late 2012. It will allow for future electricity network access for a range of prospective mines, the most advanced of which is Karara Mining Ltd's energy intensive, \$1.8 billion Karara Iron Ore Project north-east of Eneabba.

- **Stage 2:** —

This is the problem —

The Mid West Energy Project Stage 2 is currently uncommitted and unfunded, and proposes to extend the line a further 159 kilometres north from Eneabba to Moonyoonooka. The scope and timing of Stage 2 is currently being confirmed. It will provide the energy transmission capacity required to supply Geraldton into the future and enhance the reliability and security of supply to 55,000 people in the Geraldton region.

On that point of 55 000 people in the midwest, the projections for population growth in Geraldton over the next 20 or more years could see it head towards 100 000 people. Therefore, the imperative to get to and do something about stage 2 is something I am particularly concerned about, as is the City of Greater Geraldton. Those points are very relevant at this stage. The immediate go-ahead of that plan eventually would have seen the port city's desired 330-kilowatt line delivered. But, according to many, including the City of Greater Geraldton, if it does not go ahead, which appears to be what is happening at this point in time, economic devastation may well be the reward for this region.

I will move on and quote from WA Regional Cities Alliance media release about this very issue of where Geraldton and the midwest is heading. A document from 16 February reads —

City of Greater Geraldton Mayor, and Chairman of the WA Regional Cities Alliance, Ian Carpenter expressed concern at statements in Planning Minister John Day's address to the Committee for Economic Development of Australia on Tuesday (Feb 14), on WA's recent population growth projections.

The document continues —

It is widely acknowledged Perth is fast becoming a vast urban sprawl, with traffic problems and other factors seriously undermining the quality of life for its residents.

Mr Carpenter said what is needed is a new State Plan —

This is my point exactly —

Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Lynn MacLaren; Hon Wendy Duncan; Hon Helen Bullock;
Deputy President; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Ken Travers

which identifies clear policies and strategies to facilitate the development of major regional cities to share the burden and benefit of the projected population growth. This includes relocating government departments and agencies across the key regional cities.

I believe the government is on record as saying that will not happen. It might have been a government minister, if not the Premier; I cannot quite vouch for that. Mr Carpenter continues —

“We need population targets that can be worked towards—it is counterproductive to simply assume the vast majority of all population growth in this State will go to Perth.

“This will see a more sustainable and less sprawled Perth and strong vibrant regional cities—on the whole a stronger, more sustainable and balanced State,” said Mr Carpenter.

“The ball sits firmly in the State Government’s hands.”

I might just stop at that point simply because if I do get any sort of right of reply, I would like to make mention of some of the other issues, notwithstanding the problems in Geraldton. I think that will be more appropriate a little later if I do get that chance.

HON HELEN MORTON (East Metropolitan — Minister for Mental Health) [10.30 am]: I am really happy to have the opportunity to respond to this motion and highlight all the excellent work that this government is doing to both predict and plan for Western Australia’s population growth. I will make some general statements first, and then focus mostly on the metropolitan area, as I understand my colleague from the Mining and Pastoral Region will speak more fully on the regional areas.

One of the dynamics created by economic growth, of course, is commensurate growth in population. That has been the case in Western Australia more recently. Growth is not something that we in WA need to fear; it is certainly not a new phenomenon for this state. In fact, it could be argued that our first real population boom came with the arrival of nearly 10 000 inmates and 2 500 pensioner guards and their families from 1850 to 1868 when Perth entered an era of increased employment and relative prosperity for that time. In the 1890s, the discovery of what turned out to be vast deposits of gold in the Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie region led to a massive influx of people from the eastern states and overseas. The population of Perth actually quadrupled in just 10 years, between 1891 and 1901. More recently, during the 1960s and the 2000s, we have seen rapid growth, led by the resources sector, which has transformed Perth into a more modern and vibrant city. As we are probably all aware, people from across the globe want to come and live and work in Perth, which is consistently listed as one of the most liveable cities in the world.

The next era in Western Australia’s planning history will be shaped yet again by patterns of economic growth, migration and the fertility of Western Australians. It is true to say that Western Australia’s population is growing. According to Department of Planning projections, the state’s population is projected to grow to three million people by 2026. As a point of comparison, the state’s current estimated—2012—population is 2 346 400. By 2026, we will have approximately 700 000 more people than we do currently. I think that concurs with the figure that Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm mentioned. However, probably what is more important is that this is about 400 000 more people than in the previous projections released by the previous government. I would say that this state’s growth and population projections are in much better hands under this government.

In light of this, the state government committed to a program of planning reforms and initiatives to maximise the efficiency of the planning system. Since 2008, it is safe to say that the approach to the planning of Western Australia has changed under the Liberal–National government. Although we are all aware that Western Australia will continue to experience rapid population growth and development, we now have the tools at our disposal to accommodate this. We are no longer operating in the old business-as-usual approach to planning; we are collectively looking to the future in a realistic and sensible way.

Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm: My question is: why has it taken until 2012? Now, you mentioned 2006 when Labor was in government. My question is purely and simply: why has it taken all this time for you to make that statement and for the minister to make the statement that he has? That’s what I want to know. It’s taken that great length of time.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I will cover one of the most important steps that took place to enable this to happen. I was actually just getting to it, so I am pleased that the member interjected at this time.

The state government has successfully implemented planning reforms and initiatives, over the past two years in particular, all of which are tailored to improve the efficiency of our planning system and cater for population growth. Legislative reform was a crucial tool in our efforts to streamline the planning approvals process to cater for the challenges of growth. A number of major initiatives under this government’s reform program are now bearing fruit, including the Approvals and Related Reforms (No. 4) (Planning) Bill 2009, which both houses of

Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Lynn MacLaren; Hon Wendy Duncan; Hon Helen Bullock;
Deputy President; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Ken Travers

Parliament passed last year. These benefits include strengthening state and regional planning by extending the use of existing strategic instruments and introducing improvement schemes; enabling more transparent and efficient decision making in development applications of strategic significance by introducing development assessment panels, thereby allowing the minister to direct a local government to amend its local planning scheme to be consistent with a state planning policy; improving consistency in local planning scheme requirements by enabling the creation of overriding regulations; and, finally, enabling the state to collect data on local development decisions to monitor the effectiveness of the reforms to the approvals process.

This government has further articulated its vision for growth through “directions2031 and beyond: metropolitan planning beyond the horizon”, the strategy that will guide Perth’s development over the next two decades. This spatial framework sets out a clear narrative and vision for the sort of future city we want in Western Australia. We envisage a world-class liveable city that is vibrant, easy to access, teeming with job opportunities and with a unique sense of place. This vision is supported by themes and objectives that set the strategic directions to guide government policy on the planning, coordination and development of land use, transport and service infrastructure. It now includes housing and employment targets and the new activity centres hierarchy. The Directions 2031 framework also provides for different lifestyle choices and vibrant nodes of economic and social activity in activity centres that are central to successfully accommodating a growing population.

Our priority is to maintain the integrity of the Perth lifestyle while accommodating the population growth that will ensure the state’s future success. As a government, we are already in the midst of a number of major infrastructure projects that will further promote Perth on an international scale and cater for a growing population with diverse housing needs. The new population projections further illustrate the need for projects such as the Perth Waterfront, Perth City Link, and Riverside project that will create more places for people to live and work in our city, as well as the importance of further urban consolidation across the metropolitan area.

The Perth Waterfront project features prominently in this overall vision for the city and presents as the future face of Perth. The Perth Waterfront will provide an attractive business environment and will also create significant investment in the tourism, retail and business sectors which will ensure that Perth remains a contemporary, vibrant and globally competitive city well into the future.

Through another fully funded project, Perth City Link, the city centre will be reconnected with Northbridge for the first time in 100 years with the sinking of part of the Fremantle rail line and the Wellington Street bus station. This area will be a vibrant mix of transit, commercial and retail zones, public spaces and living opportunities, all of which will cater for population growth in the city.

These major projects are the new face of the Perth CBD under the Liberal–National government. Ultimately, these projects will be further enhanced by the diverse range of convenient and accessible lifestyle choices in the community, all made possible under the guidance of “directions2031 and beyond”. Perth is changing—that is something that everybody can agree on—but with this change comes immense opportunity, and it is visions and plans such as “Directions 2031”, as well as the significant investment this government is making in capital works, that will ensure we keep the very best of Perth intact while capitalising on opportunities for the future. As I mentioned earlier, Perth and Western Australia generally are no strangers to growth and change. Through plans such as “Directions 2031” and projects such as the Perth Waterfront, the Liberal–National government is well on its way to providing for the needs of a growing and prosperous state.

HON LYNN MacLAREN (South Metropolitan) [10.41 am]: I welcome the opportunity to speak to this motion. There is no question that this state has been caught on the hop with population growth and it is not the fault of only the current government that we have not planned properly for that growth. I disagree with the mover of the motion and the attempt to point the finger at the current government, which has, after all, been in power only a few years. Over time the government of Western Australia, under both parties that have held the reins of leadership, has failed to accurately predict and plan for Western Australia’s population. As a result, we have an unsustainable sprawling city and a high level of car dependency, leaving much of the population highly vulnerable to rising oil prices. As Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm said, the media today was a good source of information, with the headline, “Petrol price rockets to \$1.50 a litre”. We know that petrol price increases particularly affect people living in the outer suburbs and those most dependent on using their cars to get to work. I acknowledge the minister’s contribution in saying that this state has invested quite a significant amount of our money on infrastructure projects; however, the one outstanding failure is the failure to get us away from our dependency on the car for transport. This week we have debated the Perth Waterfront development, and in my remarks I indicated that I wanted to see some light rail links throughout the city. I think that Western Australians would enjoy and be increasingly grateful for infrastructure that could get them around the city without making them car dependent and fuel dependent.

Hon Helen Morton: Can I just ask if you are happy about not having the tunnel?

Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Lynn MacLaren; Hon Wendy Duncan; Hon Helen Bullock;
Deputy President; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Ken Travers

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: Am I happy about not having the tunnel? What do you mean? Is that the trade-off?

Hon Helen Morton: What I am saying is that is only increasing the reliance on cars—you see.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: One of the big challenges that the government has faced over time is the siloed approach between land use planning and transport planning. While the government looks at one particular project—for example building a tunnel and sinking a road underneath the surface to create space above, which links cities and creates land space; it really is a form of land-use creation—it avoids the much more comprehensive analysis. If the government only builds roads and tunnels, it does not put in infrastructure for light rail or even more heavy rail. We know we have great needs for heavy rail on the east–west links. That siloed approach has left a position in which we are kind of stuck with sprawl and with a concentration of activity in the commercial centre in the CBD, and the big waterfront project exacerbates that problem. As a member for the South Metropolitan Region, I have, over time, seen the City of Fremantle decline in significance as a regional centre. At the same time that Fremantle has declined in significance, Perth city has become ever more dependent. We are focusing all development activity on the inner city and I do not think that Western Australians are particularly grateful for that planning approach. By investing in places like Fremantle and other places such as Midland, which are outside the city central, we will not only have really beautiful places to live and work, but also not be creating that dependency. I do not know whether anyone was on the road this morning, but I was on the freeway at 9.15 and traffic was crawling all the way from the Canning Bridge into the city. That was at 9.15, when it would be thought that the peak traffic period had passed. We are not doing anything to reduce our dependency on these major arteries into the central city, and I think that is one of the things that population growth will, over time, exacerbate. We know the solution.

Only this morning I was looking on the web to see how the city of Seattle's planning has evolved over time. When I visited Seattle last year, I saw that it was sinking a freeway along the water's edge and creating parkland and commercial space, and really activating the city with the waterfront. It is the same thing that we are trying to do in Perth.

Hon Helen Morton: Is it good?

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: It seems as though it is working really well. Straight off the bat, I noticed that it is a process of increasing liveability and involving communities and their needs, which is what I tried to focus on in my speech on the waterfront development. It is about how people want to use the waterfront, not which buildings we can put there or how we can create an inlet. It is about what people will be doing in the area. I encourage the minister to look at the process in Seattle, which is a huge city with a much bigger population, in creating that waterfront.

I want to point out in talking about our increased vulnerability to transport costs—this science has been mentioned several times—a document called “Unsettling Suburbia: The New Landscape of Oil and Mortgage Vulnerability in Australian Cities”. This document has come out several times and has been updated for several years. The version I have was updated in 2006. The study finds that outer metropolitan areas in the growth corridors suffer a high degree of vulnerability both in oil prices and interest rates. The maps in the document are called VAMPIRE—vulnerability assessment for mortgage, petroleum, and inflation risks and expenditure—maps because they show redder areas as we move further away from the centre of the city. Those individuals are extremely vulnerable when interest rates or oil prices increase.

I seek leave to table this document so that members can refer to this Griffith University research.

Leave granted. [See paper 4301.]

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: Thank you very much, members, and Mr President.

The document describes the problem of transport planning being a key factor in reducing the cost of living, which increases our quality of life and which keeps us high on the liveable cities list, and not slipping to twelfth position, and at times even lower. This is the type of investment that we hope the government will make now, recognising that growth is inevitable in this city; especially now the projection is for a population of three million by 2026. There is simply not enough room on our roads to maintain this current reliance on the car.

I support the motion to the extent that we see that successive governments have failed to invest in infrastructure to future proof the state in times of approaching peak oil and in times when climate change will affect the rising cost of living. I urge the government to pay attention to what members are saying today about appropriate planning and the need to invest in infrastructure that will make it easier for a city with high population growth.

I will finish my remarks by saying that the Greens have long advocated higher density living in areas of high population. It is a matter of investing in not only Fremantle and country centres like Albany—I know Hon

Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Lynn MacLaren; Hon Wendy Duncan; Hon Helen Bullock;
Deputy President; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Ken Travers

Wendy Duncan will probably speak about regional centres—but investing outside the city centre to make us less needful of long-distance transport and more contained within a sustainable footprint. It is also a matter of building our city into a higher density and liveable city where people can enjoy the natural environment of Perth. By creating that high density, we can also make a successful economic investment in public transport in our city.

HON WENDY DUNCAN (Mining and Pastoral — Parliamentary Secretary) [10.50 am]: As a strategic planner in my past life, I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion and advise the house that the Nationals will not support it. Royalties for regions was probably born from the obvious lack of planning that occurred under previous governments, particularly in regional Western Australia. The dysfunctional state of towns such as Karratha and Port Hedland due to a lack of planning for population growth raised the ire of people in regional Western Australia and gave the Nationals the opportunity not only to develop a policy to ensure that the lack of planning was endeavoured to be redressed—I will come to the Pilbara later on—but also to look more broadly and to decide where else was likely to suffer this sort of rapid population growth and how we could act to prevent the same situation arising that previous governments, particularly the previous Labor government, allowed the Pilbara to get into.

Yes, Western Australia's population is predicted to more than double to more than 4.5 million people in the next 40 years, and one million or more of those people are expected to live in regional Western Australia. As I said, the key aim of the royalties for regions program is to unlock the potential for statewide growth so that we can welcome extra people into Western Australia in a planned and sustainable way. At the moment, royalties for regions is providing much needed funding to build on the unique strengths of each of the state's key regions. The focus has been on assisting communities to plan and cater for increased population growth and future economic development. The Western Australian Planning Commission has taken the lead role and is working alongside the Department of Regional Development and Lands to plan for growth through a series of regional infrastructure planning frameworks in the Pilbara, Gascoyne, Kimberley and midwest, and there are more to come. Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm talked about the need to start planning. The planning has happened and is happening.

Hon Ken Travers: That's what your minister said—we need to start planning.

Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm: Your minister said that; exactly—we need to start.

Hon WENDY DUNCAN: The planning is happening.

Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm: Tell the minister.

Hon WENDY DUNCAN: It is happening in regional Western Australia. If planning is to be done properly, we must consult the community and take the time to make sure that it happens across agencies and communities so that we do not end up with the silo issues that Hon Lynn MacLaren mentioned. Members will see that we are making a very strong effort in the planning that is happening throughout regional Western Australia to ensure that the WA Planning Commission, the regional development commissions, the federal government's Regional Development Australia and the regional organisations of councils are all involved and lined up so that their strategic plans match. In the south of the state, the Department of Planning and the Department of Regional Development and Lands are working through this process with the SuperTowns project. This is a direct response to plan for growth in regional Western Australia and to endeavour to avoid what happened in the Pilbara and the neglect of the previous government that we are still trying to recover from. The SuperTowns project is focused on planning; it is focused on the development in those areas occurring through a strategic, methodical and community-supported approach. On the issue of planning across all levels of government, every year we have allocated royalties for regions funding through the country local government fund to ensure that local governments also are undertaking planning exercises with not only their overall strategic plans, but also their asset management planning and proper financial planning.

I mentioned the Pilbara. The Pilbara is a very challenging place in which to redress the neglect of previous years. There has been an incredible effort to catch up with the need to supply utilities, housing and land to meet the needs of the growing population. We really must acknowledge that people love to live in places such as the Pilbara in this state. The climate of the Pilbara is very similar to other parts of the world that have very large populations. We have to stop this country cringe. We have to acknowledge that people want to live in the Pilbara and other places to the north of our state, and it is the state government's responsibility to make sure that those places are liveable. Through the Pilbara Cities program, the Nationals are planning to enable —

Hon Kate Doust: Brendon Grylls does not want to live in the Pilbara, so obviously it's not liveable.

Hon WENDY DUNCAN: I do not think Tom Stephens does either.

Hon Ken Travers: He's lived in Port Hedland for a lot more years than the future member wants to.

Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Lynn MacLaren; Hon Wendy Duncan; Hon Helen Bullock;
Deputy President; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Ken Travers

Hon WENDY DUNCAN: Under the Pilbara Cities program, we are planning for 50 000 people in both Port Hedland and Karratha and 15 000 people in Newman. Hon Lynn MacLaren mentioned that the Greens (WA) support increased population density. One of the problems in Perth is that there seems to be a bit of a pervading nimby attitude whereby nobody wants high-rises in their backyard. Of course, there is also the objection to urban sprawl. That is a great opportunity for regional areas to have some of the population overflow. A high-rise apartment building is under construction in Karratha and it will have all the amenity of any city apartment building. It is something that we are very proud of and very excited to see completed in the near future. As I mentioned, the Pilbara Cities project has very strong linkages with the Pilbara infrastructure planning project. Under the royalties for regions program, we will spend \$1 billion over four years to improve the liveability of those towns and to equip them for the future.

In the first year of the Liberal–National government, the northern towns planning fund was established to accelerate the critical planning for the north west and to enable the preparation of plans for Port Hedland and Newman. Of course, there have been plans and development funds in other areas of Western Australia. We are working our way through the state. We have seen the Gascoyne development plan. Of course, Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm is interested in the midwest development plan, under which \$220 million of royalties for regions funding has been allocated to meet the needs of the growing midwest region.

The SuperTowns plan is really how it should be done. This plan is an endeavour to ensure that the predicted population growth in Western Australia—the extra one million people who are predicted for Western Australia—will go to towns that are ready and willing to welcome and cater for them. The nine SuperTowns in Western Australia are Boddington, Collie, Esperance, Jurien Bay, Katanning, Manjimup, Margaret River, Morawa and Northam, all of which have been selected for their potential for economic growth, the drivers in those communities that will enable those towns to reach their full potential, and the can-do attitude of the local governments and the local people who want their towns to grow and their economies to flourish. Through royalties for regions, \$85.5 million has been allocated to the SuperTowns program, and that will assist them in producing their growth plans and start funding for some of the transformative major projects that have been identified for those towns, to prepare them for the growth we expect. Those projects, as they are funded, will create new jobs, services, infrastructure and accommodation in those towns, transforming them into attractive places where thousands of Western Australians will choose to live and work and enjoy the special things about living in regional Western Australia. These initiatives are without precedent in Western Australia.

The PRESIDENT: Hon Helen Bullock.

Hon Ken Travers interjected.

The PRESIDENT: No, this is non-government business and members have indicated their wish to speak at certain times. I have taken note of that and I am allocating time between members on all sides of the chamber who have indicated their wish to speak. That is as fair as I can be.

HON HELEN BULLOCK (Mining and Pastoral) [11.00 am]: Thank you, Mr President, for your generosity.

Hon Helen Morton said in her speech that this government is focusing on planning and prediction. I do not have a problem with that at all; I think any government should focus on planning and prediction, but I have a few problems with a couple of the words that Hon Helen Morton used in her speech on the Perth Waterfront project disallowance motion on Tuesday. I will refer to her speech a little, to put things in their context.

She actually confirmed unprecedented population growth in Western Australia; she said that Western Australia is experiencing a once-in-a-lifetime period of economic and population growth. Each year, more than 30 000 people move to Western Australia, and by 2020 the state's population is expected to be more than 3 million—that is, 600 000 additional people on today's population. She then went on to say that Perth will face critical shortages in residential, office, retail and hotel accommodation over the next 10 to 15 years, unless the government takes action. I note that she used the word “will”, to suggest that shortages will occur 10 to 15 years down the track. However, I am surprised that she has not yet realised that these critical shortages in residential, office, retail and hotel accommodation are actually happening right now. The question we must ask is: what has this government done over the past three and a half years to address these critical issues? It has taken three and a half years for this government to realise that the predictions for population growth in Western Australia are way off the track; 400 000 people have not been accounted for by the Department of Planning over the past three and a half years in planning for Western Australia's physical infrastructure, such as roads, freeways and transport systems, and social infrastructure.

That explains what we have experienced to date, but before I go through examples of what we have encountered in recent years, I want to mention an article that I came across by Peter Howat and Melissa Stoneham, published in the June 2010 edition of *Issues* magazine. The article pointed out that we must be aware of the long-term

Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Lynn MacLaren; Hon Wendy Duncan; Hon Helen Bullock;
Deputy President; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Ken Travers

economic costs of such rapid population growth. Everything has a downside; we have experienced unprecedented economic growth over the past 10 years, but this unprecedented growth also has a downside—that is, unprecedented population growth. The question is: what is the economic cost of this growth? The article refers to the consequences of this growth, which include the introduction of higher taxes at both state and federal levels to generate enough funding to build infrastructure—both physical and social infrastructure, such as transport systems, health care and education. It is also pointed out in the article that such rapid growth is likely to be associated with declining living standards which include, as Hon Lynn MacLaren mentioned, increased traffic jams; power blackouts; water restrictions; unaffordable housing; environmental destruction; urban crowding; reduced service delivery and falling health status. How true is this prediction? We have experienced all these issues in the past three and a half years under this government.

Due to a lack of infrastructure planning, the people of Western Australia have experienced difficulties in their day-to-day lives. I want to go through a few examples of how things are these days. I might leave the topic of traffic jams to Hon Ken Travers; that is his hot topic and special area, and I am sure he is looking forward to his turn to speak on that issue.

I will move on to talk about hospital waiting lists. Hospital waiting lists are getting longer and longer; what is going on? It is because of a shortage of doctors and nurses across Western Australia.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Brian Ellis): Order, members.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: Thank you, Mr Deputy President; I think I have the call!

There is also a shortage of teachers in schools across Western Australia.

I also want to talk about urban crowding. Over the past five, six, seven or eight years, members have probably noticed that houses with backyards are fast becoming a thing of the past. Blocks in the suburbs are being subdivided and sold for housing developments. People are these days living in very confined spaces. I suppose that explains why one in five people in Western Australia—perhaps in the whole of Australia—has experienced mental health issues, which has contributed to long waiting lists for people seeking treatment from psychologists.

Somebody mentioned that Western Australia has become one of the most expensive places in the world to live. The average price of a normal three-bedroom house in suburbs like Ballajura or Noranda is more than half a million dollars; it is just unbelievable. Four or five years ago, houses like that cost roughly half that price. According to WAtoday, Western Australia is also experiencing a rental property shortage. The median rental in Perth is some \$400 per week for a two-bedroom duplex, and rents are expected to increase by 10 per cent each year.

Yesterday I read a media release that referred to the government increasing interest rates for Keystart. A consequence of this is to push first home buyers onto the already tight rental market. What is going on? We have experienced water restrictions in the past couple of years. We can blame global warming for the shortage of water supply. But the bottom line is that it is because of lack of planning. It seems too hard for this government to do anything anymore. I suppose the government has given up already. After all, it has another year to go, so perhaps the government does not need to think about its responsibilities.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Brian Ellis) Members, the question is that the motion be agreed to. Before I give the call to the Minister for Finance, I indicate that the order that has been left to me by the President is that the Minister for Finance will be followed by Hon Ken Travers and Hon Alison Xamon.

HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan — Minister for Finance) [11.10 am]: I thank you for that, Mr Deputy President, and I thank Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm for his motion inviting the Council to condemn the government for failing to accurately predict and plan for Western Australia's rapid population growth. That is the limited nature of the motion before the house. I thank Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm for the motion, because it gives us the opportunity to consider the wider issues that have been raised. Some of the comments that have been made on the motion have been predictable in tone, depending on whether one is a proponent of progress in government or a carping opposition. But what I do not think the mover of the motion did was give us any reason to associate ourselves with a condemnation motion of the government for its alleged failure to accurately predict and plan for Western Australia's rapid population growth.

Western Australia's rapid population growth is simply unprecedented. If we look at every precedent and every prediction that has been made in recent times, or going back over decades, our growth has exceeded all expectations. That on the one hand is a measure of success. It is also an extraordinary challenge. We have heard from Hon Helen Bullock, for example, about some of the challenges that arise when we are faced with rapid—indeed unprecedented—population expansion. But, Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm, should this government be

Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Lynn MacLaren; Hon Wendy Duncan; Hon Helen Bullock;
Deputy President; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Ken Travers

condemned because of this rapid, unprecedented and impossible-to-predict population growth? I do not think the government should be condemned for that.

But this motion does give us an opportunity to discuss the matter. I would like to refer to the particular area of impacts on transport, because that has been raised by a number of members this morning, in particular Hon Lynn MacLaren, who discussed the question of transport generally and public transport in particular. We heard about how, as she was on Kwinana Freeway, I presume it was, this morning at quarter past nine, increasing her carbon footprint —

Hon Lynn MacLaren: In my hybrid vehicle.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: — in her hybrid vehicle—she was noting the congestion that she experienced at that time. It is true that more people equals more traffic and more congestion. When we have a rapid expansion of population, those who are responsible for delivering infrastructure—or in the case of education and health, other resources—have to recalibrate what it is that they are providing. That is a challenging exercise for any government. So what are we doing about it? As Minister for Transport myself a few years ago, one of the things that I identified was the lack of an overall blueprint for public transport. So, the question that I asked was: where are we going in the future? What I had observed was that individual projects were being done, apparently to fulfil some particular need at some time, but without any overarching rhyme or reason to them. I thought that was a serious deficiency that needed to be addressed. That particularly came to my attention early on because I was also contemplating the future of the Department of Planning and Infrastructure. Therefore, in due course, acting in concert with the then, and current, Minister for Planning, Hon John Day, we set about breaking up that department to create the departments that exist today. In releasing the Department of Transport from what had been the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, we also formed a closer and far more cohesive arrangement with the other key government transport agencies in the Public Transport Authority and Main Roads, and that is something that I am very pleased we were able to do. One of the drivers for that was the observation that was made to me from those agencies that over previous years, transport planning had taken a back seat and had been allowed to wither on the vine. That was because the transport planners had gone out of Main Roads and out of transport and had been put into the monolithic DPI, and their influence had been diluted. Examples of the consequences of that can be seen all around us. So we have set about fixing that.

That observation goes a long way towards addressing the sentiment in the motion that we are somehow failing to predict what happens in the future. We are responding to rapid population expansion by redeveloping the planning capacity, which had been lost prior to our coming into government.

In producing a public transport blueprint, I wanted to give a long-term framework to allow our state to provide the necessary public transport infrastructure in a timely and orderly way, and in a way that would be affordable for the state into the future. Everyone wants a light rail. They want one tomorrow. They want one yesterday. But I have to tell members it is hellishly expensive. When we try to work out how we are going to pay for that infrastructure, we then have to deal with all sorts of difficult situations—which some people never have to come to grips with—about what order we are going to provide things in and how we are going to service them and all the rest of it. So at least now we have a public transport blueprint. That also provides some valuable information to help prioritise the things that we require now and the things that we will require in the future. For example, if we are to develop a light rail system, how do we do it; what are the priorities; and what are the criteria for working out those priorities? It is not about building little boutique developments that become stranded assets. It is about taking a coordinated approach. That is planning, and that is what this state government has been doing.

I now want to mention one of the things that seems to have gone past a lot of people. This is something else that I am rather proud of in relation to public transport. If we look at what is already provided for in our budget, there is a massive increase in public transport capacity by way of our bus networks. In particular, I wanted to set about putting in place a plan for government to make sure that we had bus services to service suburbs that currently do not have those services, and that we prioritise over the next few years to make sure that where services are inadequate because of rapid population growth in a locality, or just inadequate because of frequency, we are prepared to deliver those services.

This is already in the budget. Bus service kilometres will increase by 3.3 million kilometres in this financial year and will increase to 15.2 million extra bus kilometres per annum by 2015–16 and thereafter. They are permanent increases. That is about dealing with a rapidly growing population. I say to the mover of this motion that I am quite proud of those things. I do not think that the government deserves to be condemned. We are planning for rapid population growth, but we are doing it in a live sense. It is already happening. We have to do it while we keep our existing services up and running. The planning capacity of this government has been well demonstrated; I have just given a couple of examples of that. I am sure that the Greens in particular would

Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Lynn MacLaren; Hon Wendy Duncan; Hon Helen Bullock;
Deputy President; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Ken Travers

acknowledge that under this government more is being done for public transport across the board than has ever been seen before.

HON KEN TRAVERS (North Metropolitan) [11.21 am]: I support the motion moved by Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm, because this government is the last group of people in Western Australia to finally acknowledge the rate of population growth that we have been seeing. The document that the government has been using internally for the last three and a half years to project population figures, and on which all the government planning in the key areas of health, education, police, public transport and traffic congestion has been based, is a flawed document. Everybody else in Perth knew it. Even the government's own Treasury department knew that the document was flawed, but the government continued to blindly sail on and use that document to do all its modelling and predictions.

In February this year the government finally acknowledged that the growth projections it had been using were wrong. That was when it released the new *Western Australia Tomorrow* 2012 series.

Hon Simon O'Brien: We acknowledge that we have a dynamic situation.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: But everybody else has known about this. This is not new, minister. The growth and enhancement has been recognised by everybody else. Every local government I have spoken to for the past five years acknowledges that Perth is going through a massive boom and that the population projections in WA Tomorrow need to be adjusted. On 15 February the Minister for Planning was quoted by the ABC as saying —

... the Government needs to start planning to accommodate the growth and high density housing is one of the ways to cope with the change.

That highlights the fact that the government needs to be condemned, because it has failed to accurately predict the growth. Let me give the minister some examples of how the government's failure to accurately predict is relevant. At the outset I make the comment that I agree with the comments by Hon Wendy Duncan insofar as one of the solutions for Perth is to put the growth out into the regional centres and grow regional areas across Western Australia. I want to see us all try to move the future growth between now and 2031 from the Perth metropolitan area and into Bunbury, Geraldton, Albany, Karratha, Port Hedland and other towns across Western Australia. I do not disagree with that. I have argued that we should have public transport master plans for not only Perth, but also Geraldton and Bunbury et cetera. When I make those comments, the Minister for Transport ridicules me. In his usual class clown way he tries to belittle the argument that we should be trying to provide for the growth in those centres today to plan for tomorrow. Of the expenditure on the Gold Coast light rail, \$200 million is on land resumptions. If we reserve land today in places such as Bunbury, we can save money for the state in the long term from a simple decision to plan today. But we have to get our population growth projections right.

This week in this Parliament we have debated the Perth Waterfront and the foreshore. We asked the government to table the modelling that it used for that. The Minister for Mental Health told us that the information was already on the internet. I appreciate the minister asking the department to send me the link and I have received that. However, I have sent her an email back to say that it does not include the regional document. The very last line of the document, which is only a summary of the modelling, states —

... as would be expected within the city centre with a forecast population of some 2.2 million people in 2031.

This modelling was based on a population of 2.2 million by 2031. As we know from the WA Tomorrow document released in February, the government now predicts a population of between 2.3 million and 2.4 million by 2026. That is a classic example of the modelling provided to us by the government being irrelevant, because it is based on flawed data. Every local government in Western Australia has been telling me and anyone else who will listen. When Labor was in government, I did a lot of work on this issue to make sure that departments started to acknowledge and realise the growth that was happening. The new government took over and it ignored that work and blindly believed that we were not growing when we were.

The master plan for health in this state, the "WA Health Clinical Services Framework 2010–2020", is also based on this flawed data. The government needs to go back and recalibrate all that work to recognise the new population predictions, which will mean the government will need to build Joondalup Health Campus into a tertiary hospital. These are all costs that the state will incur. That is why it is very important that we are very careful about where we spend our scarce resources. We cannot afford to build monuments in the city centre, which are nice-to-have projects, while the very basic infrastructure that our suburbs and regional centres —

Hon Max Trenorden: You did not say that when you were in government.

Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Lynn MacLaren; Hon Wendy Duncan; Hon Helen Bullock;
Deputy President; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Ken Travers

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Yes, I did, Hon Max Trenorden.

Hon Max Trenorden: You said tertiary hospitals should be close to the centre. That was your health program.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Fiona Stanley Hospital was built and paid for by the last Labor government and it is south of the city.

Hon Simon O'Brien: That is absolute rubbish!

Hon KEN TRAVERS: It was! The minister should go and look at the trust fund. The last Labor government put money in trust to build Fiona Stanley Hospital. The work, the design and the choice of location was all done by the previous Labor government. The Labor government did all the negotiations with Ramsay Health Care to upgrade the Joondalup Health Campus. Mr Trenorden needs to get his facts straight. We upgraded every major health facility in the Kimberley during our time in government. Those are the sorts of things that we did because we recognised the need to put that basic infrastructure in the regional centres and in the suburbs of Perth. We cannot afford to spend all our scarce resources on the city centre. That is why choosing Burswood as an option for a stadium is wrong.

Again, the minister has based the master plan for public transport on a predicted population of 2.2 million in 2031, which is a figure that we now know we will reach early in the next decade. The government needs to go back and look at that and realise that all the work it thought it could take the next 20 years to do, needs to be done in the next 10 years. Is the government getting on with it? No, it is taking forever and day to do it. At the same time, the Premier tells us that the government will have the contract for the waterfront development signed before the next government to limit any future government from going to the people and asking them where they want this half a billion dollars spent. Should it be spent on better infrastructure in the suburbs and regional Western Australia or in the Perth CBD? He will race through and get those contracts signed come hell or high water to stop us having that option to let the people of Western Australia choose.

As I said earlier, the planning is all based on very flawed modelling. We need to build far more schools in the suburbs of Western Australia. During the last Labor government more than 60 new or replacement schools were built, many in regional Western Australia, Hon Max Trenorden. Those are the sorts of figures. I do not think the member will find that the current government is doing that sort of school building program—nowhere near it.

Several members interjected.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Government members are simply in denial. That is fine. They can stay in denial, but they should not keep making decisions that prevent future governments from spending scarce resources where they need to be spent. As I said, the clinical services framework, the public transport master plan and the education forward works plan on new schools need to be recalibrated, all because the government has been in denial about population growth for the past three and a half years.

If I took members opposite out to the Cities of Stirling, Swan and Armadale, they could be shown the growth figures they told us would occur three and a half years ago. I am sure when they came in they made the same comments to ministers about what they expected their growth to be. The document *Western Australia Tomorrow 2012* more accurately reflects those figures. The government deserves to be condemned for its failure to predict and plan for the growth of the Perth population. I should say that Treasury understood it because it kept putting in budget higher growth than the government's own documents predicted.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.