

SOUTH WESTERN HIGHWAY — ROAD SAFETY

Grievance

MS E.J. KELSBIE (Warren–Blackwood) [9.20 am]: I rise today to raise a grievance with the Deputy Premier and Minister for Transport. Please bear with me.

Many thousands of Western Australians are preparing themselves for the end of the school term tomorrow. With the excitement of a two-week break ahead, many will be packing their cars to bring their families down to my beautiful part of the state for a well-earned holiday in Warren–Blackwood. Although this is fantastic for local tourism, it also means a lot more cars on our regional roads. With more road users is the inevitable possibility of increased traffic accidents. Between 2018 and 2022, there were 9 893 reported accidents on roads in the south west region. Of these, 10 per cent resulted in at least one person being killed or seriously injured. In just four years, 1 212 people were killed or seriously injured in reported crashes, including 171 fatalities and 1 041 people seriously injured. That is 1 212 Western Australians whose lives—and the lives of those around them—were changed irrevocably forever.

Of the people killed or seriously injured, 25 per cent were in incidents when speed was suspected to be a contributing factor. Speed is at the very heart of road safety because it affects both the risk of being involved in a crash and the outcome should a crash occur. Motorists using South Western Highway are constantly faced with drivers who increase their speed to dangerously overtake on the other side of the road. This puts the overtaking motorists and those driving in the opposite direction at risk of a high-speed crash.

I am a regular user of this stretch of road. I know that driving on regional roads can be dangerous if the right road-safety measures are not in place. Although the government cannot change driver behaviour, it can ensure that roads and conditions help everyone to safely get where they need to go. Those who drive on this highway every day have had enough of feeling unsafe and have contacted me to see what the government can do. Multiple constituents have raised this issue either by reaching out to my office or talking to me when I doorknock in local towns. They all mentioned the need for passing lanes so that motorists, truck drivers and bus drivers can feel safe. One of the biggest concerns has been from regional school bus drivers who witness dangerous and reckless behaviour by motorists on a daily basis between Manjimup and Bridgetown. Bus drivers are extremely concerned about the risks motorists take on this stretch of the highway as they overtake school buses carrying around 50 students. Endless dash-cam footage shows the extremes some motorists will go to to overtake the school buses and the danger bus drivers feel that puts their young passengers in. Although cars and buses regularly frequent this stretch of South Western Highway, so do trucks.

The devastating impact of road trauma can be reduced. Road safety starts with every individual road user at a community level. When these community members reached out to me about the dangerous situations they are faced with on our roads every day, I made a promise to advocate on their behalf. I am proud to be part of the Cook Labor government, which I know is already making a real difference in addressing unique road-safety issues within our community.

We are investing big in local roads, evidenced by an announcement earlier this week to invest a record \$1.38 billion in local road projects across the state. Almost \$44 million of that investment will go towards roads in the south west and great southern to improve and maintain our regional road networks. Although this is a huge step in the right direction, today I call on the transport minister to please tell me what is being done to ensure the safety of people driving through my electorate along South Western Highway between Bridgetown and Manjimup.

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan — Minister for Transport) [9.25 am]: I thank the member for Warren–Blackwood for her grievance and also her tenacity in getting her grievance out! Of course, she got through it with a very, very sore throat, so I thank her very much for that grievance.

I thank the member for her strong advocacy for the people of her electorate. She is well liked and well supported, and works very, very hard across her entire area. This is demonstrated by the feedback I get when I am down there.

One of the key focuses of this government is regional road safety. The government is spending a record amount across all the spending indicators. The member outlined the state and local government road agreement for a record spending of \$1.38 billion, a significant increase from the previous one and the one before that. In 2020, we launched our regional road safety program to upgrade over 8 500 kilometres of roads, with key safety treatments including sill sealers and audible edge lines. Over \$640 million worth of road-safety improvements have already been completed across 7 450 kilometres of WA's rural and remote road network, and treatments on an additional 1 000 kilometres will be completed by June next year.

The life-saving treatments, where they have been applied, have resulted in a 50 per cent reduction in fatal crashes, and a 35 per cent reduction in serious injury or crashes on treated roads, when compared with the average of the five years prior to construction. We know there is always more to do. Every death and serious injury is

a tragedy that impacts communities, families and the wider society. We continue to do all we can to improve our roads throughout WA. As part of the regional road safety program, \$2.5 million has been spent on treating the 33 kilometres of South Western Highway between Bridgetown and Manjimup, which has seen the seal widened to 10 metres and audible edge lines installed. This has been an important improvement and one that I am certain will prevent crashes.

Of course, one of the key issues the member raised is about overtaking opportunities, which are limited on that stretch of road. There has been a total of 25 crashes on this section of road over the last five years, including, sadly, one fatality and three other crashes requiring hospitalisation. As the member notes, this is a freight route, and the opening of the Talison Lithium mine has seen an increase in heavy vehicle movements across the area. Part of the overall strategy to continue supporting road safety is an investment by the government. I know the member was very much a key part of announcing an investment of \$3 million to investigate the recommissioning of the Greenbushes rail line. This will help take hundreds of trucks off south west roads, again improving road safety. That work is now underway. I am very excited about the work and what that would mean for putting more freight onto rail more generally and improving road safety along South Western Highway, which has been a theme of this government.

Further, a \$14 million upgrade of South Western Highway south of Donnybrook was completed in June 2022. The upgrade involved the realignment of three kilometres of road to improve safety, including widening work, improved clear zones and the construction of passing lanes. Main Roads Western Australia is progressing plans for the construction of two passing lanes on South Western Highway between Bridgetown and Manjimup, both of which will be approximately one kilometre in length. They will provide more opportunities to safely overtake. The first lane will be located north of Yornup and will provide passing opportunities for northbound traffic. The second lane will be located south of Yornup and will provide passing opportunities for southbound traffic. Both projects have funding allocated for their development this financial year under the Safer Roads program. Designs and land matters for each passing lane are progressing and we expect the environmental approvals to be sought early next year. In that part of the world, environmental approvals and other approvals are challenging in some ways, but very much a key part of progressing the project. We are looking at securing funding under one of the safety programs, and our target is to start construction over the summer of 2025–26. Before that, we need to get all the necessary approvals, conduct stakeholder engagement and secure funding. I am sure that as the member continues to advocate for these projects, they will continue to be a priority for the government, and we will continue with the detailed planning in the hope of having the passing lanes constructed.