

EXPANSION SLOWED

Bus pledge stalled by Budget woe

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The Barnett Government has pulled back on a key public transport pledge, with promised increases in bus services scaled back due to “budget constraints” and easing demand for public transport.

In a centrepiece public transport announcement of the the 2011-12 State Budget, then transport minister Troy Buswell promised the Government would deliver an extra 15 million “bus service kilometres” a year within five years.

But in parliamentary Budget Estimates this week it was revealed this will be scaled back to 12.5 million extra bus service kilometres within seven years.

“There was an announcement of 15 million service kilometres to be rolled out over five years,” Public Transport Authority managing director Mark Burgess said.

“With the subsequent tightening of the Budget and following negotiations with Treasury, we have tried to spread that target a little bit because of some degree of budget constraint. Therefore, the target of 15 million service kilometres has been wound back a bit and spread over seven years.”

Shadow planning minister Rita Saffioti said the decision meant people in growing outer suburbs were probably missing out on new bus services.

“It’s yet another consequence of the bad financial management of the Barnett Government that key services in growing suburbs aren’t being delivered,” she said.

“We’re seeing major gaps in service delivery, we’re seeing major issues of congestions relating to buses, and basically fewer people being likely to catch public transport.”

Budget papers show public transport patronage declined last year for the first time in nine years after a period of extraordinary growth that featured the opening of the Mandurah rail line, extension of the northern line to Butler and more bus routes.

Transport Minister Dean Nalder said the Government had increased the size of the bus fleet by 28 per cent since coming to power and he believed there was “upside in streamlining our services”.

“Demand has eased with the slowing of the economy and while we predict future growth, modelling shows we can spread it over seven years,” he said.