



SAFETY CONCERNS

Roads fund cuts anger councils

■ Brad Thompson

WA is facing a Christmas road crisis after local governments threatened to give up responsibility for hundreds of kilometres in regional areas and take legal action against the State Government over a \$70 million funding cut.

Local governments are warning dire road safety consequences as a result of a \$100 million-a-year shortfall in funding and have sought legal advice on the latest cut announced by Treasurer Troy Buswell as part of a mid-year economic review.

WA Local Government Association president Troy Pickard said there was a growing appetite in country shires and towns to transfer big sections of the road network to the State, particularly in the Wheatbelt where roads were being "smashed to pieces".

"I feel for their communities, not only are they driving on unsafe roads, they have to bear the impact of rail closures and record harvests," he said.

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WALGA president **Troy Pickard**

ment. It'll be their problem and they'll need to consider and develop funding streams such that the road network is safe and fit for task."

WALGA estimated the State would need to find \$120 million this year for urgent repairs and upgrades on roads affected by rail closures.

Mr Pickard accused the State of breaching an agreement signed in 2010 by stripping \$70.4 million over three years, including \$32.2 million this financial year, in local government road funding.

The State Road Funds to Local Government Agreement ties funding to a percentage of vehicle licence fees collected by the State.

Local governments have warned the cuts — about 25 per cent of the allocation for this financial year — will compromise road safety as they cancel contracts or try to shift the

funding shortfall on to rate-payers.

Mr Pickard accused the State of misleading the public with claims it had been renegotiating the agreement with local government.

He revealed Mr Buswell's ministerial staff and Main Roads had cancelled a series of meetings with WALGA, one just 30 minutes before it was due to take place.

Mr Buswell has also rebuffed attempts to set up a working group to examine the freight task in the Wheatbelt.

"The announcement last week is on top of a significant backlog for road maintenance in WA," Mr Pickard said.

"We manage 88 per cent of roads so we've got a large share of the responsibility but receive a trickle of funding from the State."

A spokeswoman defended cuts under the SRFLG Agreement, questioning the capacity of local governments to deliver the road works funded through the deal.

She said local government had underspent the money available by up to \$35 million a year which justified the cuts in tough economic times for the State.