



REGIONAL FUNDING ROW

SuperTowns a giant con, says Labor

| Daniel Emerson

The Government's vaunted SuperTowns program has been labelled a "massive con" by the Opposition, with its original tranche of funding allocated long ago and not a Budget top-up in sight.

Announced in February 2011, SuperTowns anointed nine towns in the southern half of WA future growth centres to take pressure off Perth as the State swelled to a projected 4.5 million residents within 40 years.

Collie, Katanning, Northam, Morawa, Margaret River, Jurien Bay, Manjimup, Esperance and Boddington were offered "first-round funding" of \$85 million.

The towns were given \$7 million to develop "growth plans" and came up with a combined wish list of \$464 million worth of improvements. In the 2011-12 Budget, \$78 million was allocated for 17 "priority projects".

But the following year, the Government said "SuperTowns will be able to seek funding through a contestable arrangement, based on individual growth and busi-

ness plans . . . through the country local government fund".

That fund was scrapped in the last Budget and will wind up in 2016-17.

Yesterday, Regional Development Minister Terry Redman said the Government never intended to fund the SuperTowns' long-term projects but instead "kick-start" the priority projects.

"With their growth plans in place these towns now have strength to leverage funding from a range of Federal, State and private sector sources, including the Royalties for Regions program," he said.

Opposition Leader Mark McGowan said other Royalties for Regions township funds were small and contestable by all other regional towns.

He said the nine towns were led to believe they were special cases and accused the Government of creating enormous expectation which was now dashed.

Chief executives of local governments with SuperTowns were yesterday still hopeful their long-term projects would be realised.