

**PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 6 - TRANSPORT AND
CUSTOMER SERVICE**

Monday 2 March 2020

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

REGIONAL TRANSPORT AND ROADS

UNCORRECTED

The Committee met at 09:30.

MEMBERS

Ms Abigail Boyd (Chair)

The Hon. Scott Farlow

The Hon. Sam Faraway

The Hon. John Graham

The Hon. Shayne Mallard

The Hon. Mick Veitch

PRESENT

The Hon. Paul Toole, *Minister for Regional Transport and Roads*

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

Corrections should be marked on a photocopy of the proof and forwarded to:

**Budget Estimates secretariat
Room 812
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000**

The CHAIR: Welcome to the public further hearings of the inquiry into budget estimates for 2019-2020. Before I commence, I acknowledge the Gadigal people, who are the traditional custodians of this land, and pay respects to Elders past and present of the Eora nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginals present. I welcome Minister Toole and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Regional Transport and Roads. Today's hearing is open to the public and is being broadcast live via the Parliament's website. In accordance with the broadcasting guidelines, while members of the media may film or record Committee members and witnesses, people in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photography. I remind media representatives that you must take responsibility for what you publish about the Committee's proceedings. The guidelines for the broadcast of the proceedings are available from the secretariat.

All witnesses in budget estimates hearings have the right to procedural fairness, according to the procedural fairness resolution adopted by the House in 2018. There may be some questions that a witness could only answer if they had more time or with certain documents to hand. In these circumstances witnesses are advised that they can take a question on notice and provide an answer within 21 days. Any messages from advisers or members' staff seated in the public gallery should be delivered through the Committee secretariat. Minister, I remind you and the officers accompanying you that you are free to pass notes and refer directly to your advisers seated at the table behind you. Transcripts of this hearing will be available on the web from tomorrow morning. Finally, could everyone please turn their mobile phones to silent for the duration of the hearing.

All witnesses from departments, statutory bodies or corporations will be sworn prior to giving evidence. Minister Toole, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn in as you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament. I also remind the following witnesses that you do not need to be sworn, as you have been sworn at an earlier budget estimates hearing before this Committee: Mr Rodd Staples, Mr Matthew Fuller, Mr Peter Regan, Mr Peter Allaway and Mr Roy Wakelin-King.

RODD STAPLES, Secretary, Transport for NSW, on former oath

MATTHEW FULLER, Acting Deputy Secretary, Regional and Outer Metropolitan Division, Transport for NSW, on former oath

PETER REGAN, Deputy Secretary, Infrastructure and Place, Transport for NSW, on former affirmation

PETE ALLAWAY, Acting Chief Executive, NSW TrainLink, on former oath

ROY WAKELIN-KING, Executive Director, Regional Roads, Transport for NSW, on former oath

JOHN DINAN, Acting Executive Director, Community and Place, Regional and Outer Metropolitan Division, Transport for NSW, sworn and examined

The CHAIR: Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.30 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. with the Minister, and then with the departmental staff from 11.40 a.m. to 12.40 p.m. and then from 1.40 p.m. to 4.20 p.m. So it is a bit of a reduction on the time that we had listed. I now declare the proposed expenditure of the portfolios of Regional Transport and Roads open for examination. As there is no provision for any witness to make an opening statement before the Committee commences questioning, we will begin with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Welcome, Minister. I wanted to start initially by asking about your administration of the regional seniors travel card. How many seniors have applied for this travel card to date?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: To date we have received over 180,000 people who have signed up and have been eligible for the regional seniors travel card. So there has been a great take-up. We know that communities have been waiting for this travel card for a number of months and they have been waiting for January to come around so they could make applications. We are very pleased with the number of people who have signed up and have been eligible in just over three and a half weeks.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: More than 180,000 who were eligible? How many have signed up who were not eligible?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: That is probably more of a difficult number to obtain because some people may pick up the phone and ring Service NSW. There may be people who know they are already ineligible. There may be people who have gone online. So to have an exact figure as to who is ineligible is a little bit more difficult to find.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I agree with that, Minister. How many have applied that you are aware of who are ineligible?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I do not have those numbers.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Are you tracking that at all?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I would have to take that on notice to see if we have that information.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We might come back to that question, if the officials can supply you with that information as we come back to it.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We might be able to do that this afternoon if we find that information for you as well.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Of the 180,000, how many have been granted?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Those 180,000 people have been eligible and 180,000 people have started to receive their cards. Some might be still in the process of being sent out by Service NSW because, as you know, people can still be walking in the doors of Service NSW today, this week, next week, next month. They also could have been there last week, so those cards will be mailed out.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: If 180,000 have already been granted, there are probably more people who have applied and are yet to be granted.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: No, the ones who have actually got it are the ones who have received it. We estimated that there was the potentiality for around 400,000 people to be eligible for this card. This is the first time that we have trialled a card like this in regional and rural New South Wales. Certainly the take-up has been overwhelming from the community, which I am absolutely pleased about because at the end of the day this is

about providing \$250 in the pocket of those people in regional communities that they can now use for travel. It allows people to stay connected with their family and their friends.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You have given us those two figures: about 400,000 who are eligible and 180,000 who have applied. What do you say is the take-up rate for this program? You estimated this beforehand. What is the take-up rate?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It is hard to know what the exact take-up rate is going to be because we went to the election and we had this—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am not asking what it will be. I am asking what it is today, the day of this budget estimates hearing. What is the take-up rate?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: The take-up at the moment is just over 40 per cent, in relation to those figures that you are talking about. We also do not know if everyone is going to use the \$250 on those cards. It is there for people to use and I would expect them and want them to use it because this is about helping people, especially in the bush, who have been doing it tough. When it comes to—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: In fact, your costings assumed that they would use it all, which makes sense.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: That is right. I think at the end of the day it is important that people have the opportunity to apply for the card. Nobody is going to miss out on the card who is eligible. Anyone who is eligible for the card will receive the card.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So a take-up rate of over 40 per cent. How much over 40 per cent?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I cannot give you a figure because people could—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I would have hoped you could, Minister. This is budget estimates.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: People can still come in the door, Mr Graham.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It might get higher; I agree with that.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: That is right.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: What is the take-up rate as of today?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I can sit here and work out the exact figure but it does fluctuate from day to day because of the number of people who are still taking it up.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, and I want to know, today what is the take-up rate?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: As I said to you, Mr Graham, it is over 180,000 people who have signed up who have been eligible and who are now going to receive their cards.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So if it is 180,000 of the 400,000 you have told us might be eligible, that is 45 per cent.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Correct.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Is that the take-up rate as of today?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: That is close to it. It could have fluctuated. We might have had more people over the weekend who have signed up.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, it might have got lower. It could be higher.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It could be higher. But I actually think it is a great program. It has been well received. It is exciting, the fact that people see that this is an opportunity to get that money to support them in the regions.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, that is higher than was projected in your costings. How much extra will this cost? What is your estimate today, as of budget estimates?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It is a 45 per cent take-up. As I said to you, there is \$250 there. It is still unknown to know that when people receive their card if every one of them—you are on the assumption that everyone will receive \$250.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It is not my assumption; it is your assumption.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: No, sorry.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is the costing that you provided that I am looking at, and you have confirmed. How much over budget is this program on the 45 per cent take-up?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We will not know those figures until we have the period of actually running it for 12 months for those cards to find out if people have actually used the full allocation of the \$250.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Or the extra cards that come in through the door. We know that every 10 per cent increase in the take-up rate is \$22 million. A small increase in the take-up leads to a large budget blowout. How much over are we projected to be now? It should be at least \$10 million and counting.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Well, that was part of our Parliamentary Budget Office [PBO] costings before the election. We actually had to model this off a scheme that ran similar in Western Australia at the time. It was something that we took to the election. We have done costings on 40 per cent, 50 per cent, 60 per cent take-up. I think my main point to you is that everybody who is eligible for the card is going to receive the card. Nobody is going to miss out. I think the Hon. Peter Primrose asked me the same question last time—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The question that raises is have you spoken to the Treasurer and had an additional amount approved, or are you just waving these out the door with no budget provision?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We go through our budgetary processes every year. What I like about it is the fact that people are taking it up. People are seeing the opportunity to use it—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But Minister, I want to know: Is the administration behind this appropriate? You are \$10 million over budget. Has that been approved, or are you just spending with no approval?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We are not going to stop people who are eligible. Those people who are eligible can sign up for the card. Those people who apply for it will receive it if they are eligible. When they receive it, Mr Graham, they will still have 12 months. This card, you might see someone in two months' time actually apply for the card. They are not going to be penalised—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is right. So it is \$10 million over today. It will get higher. There is no doubt about that is there, Minister?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: As I said to you, I cannot give you a figure because I do not know what the take-up rate is going to be if everyone uses their full allocation. But what I like about it is the fact that through our budgetary processes this is something that we will actually be putting through the system. However, it is still early days to actually know what the take-up—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But you have not done that yet. Is that right?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It is part of the discussions we have had already with the uptake that we have had from people—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But you have not put it through the budget process yet.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We are always doing our budget process though, Mr Graham.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: What is the cost to the budget of your decision to expand the scheme to include veterans and war widows?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I think we made it very clear at the election that—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am asking about the cost, Minister. What is the cost of that decision?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It is just over \$26 million for that particular addition for the veterans, that is if there is a full take-up. That allows if there—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Can you just confirm you are \$36 million over the budget for this program—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Well, no, I will point out to you that in Transport we have had discussions around that and we are going to absorb the cost for veterans who, I believe, were also worthy of receiving this card. We have had—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So it will be cut out of Transport elsewhere? Where will those cuts fall?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We are not looking at cutting anything, Mr Graham. We are looking at—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The Treasurer will not be very happy with that answer.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: You would have to ask the Treasurer.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes, that's right. But we are very happy to have veterans included. I do point out to you that this is a program that we went to the election with our eyes pretty well wide open. This is the first time that a program like this has ever been run here in New South Wales. I put on the record that this is a program that you guys never supported. Labor never backed this program—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I just want to ask about the cost, Minister. So you are confirming it is \$10 million over and \$26 million—which you are reserving the right to go ask the Treasurer for—some \$26 million that Transport will absorb. They are the figures you have given us.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I do point out to you too, Mr Graham, that—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am simply asking if they are the figures.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: In Transport we do have a budget, which is actually important to people in this State. We have in Transport alone in just this year—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Well I am concerned about—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: In just this year alone in Transport and Roads we have actually got a budget of \$15 billion; in the regions we have a budget of just under \$6 billion. So this is—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Not by the time you have finished with this.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We have a budget of \$6 billion—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, are you going to absorb that—I think the terminology is really important—are you going to absorb the \$26 million as a part of the Transport budget or are you going to derive it from efficiencies gained elsewhere within the Transport budget?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We are going to find that within and we have indicated that. But you are talking \$26 million as though it is going to be 100 per cent taken up and 100 per cent utilised as well. Once again—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: But it would be unwise not to expect that it.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We will budget well and truly to make sure that we are covering the cost. Once again, no eligible veteran who applies for the regional seniors travel card will miss out.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So why were veterans excluded in the first place, Minister?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: When we went to the election—it is actually in the press release that was put out when the program was announced back in February 2019. It clearly stated that the regional seniors travel card was going to be for aged pensioners and holders of a Commonwealth Seniors Health Card. We have delivered on that election commitment. I have been very clear in my language since I have become the Minister that they would be the two—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: When did you decide to include veterans in the program?

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: What's wrong with veterans?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: There is nothing wrong with veterans; I am glad they are getting it. I just want to know when the decision was made.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I think when we announced it and when we started to see the card roll out there were actually a lot of groups who said, "Hey, we would like to be included. We think this is a great program. Can you extend it to us?" We had a look at the—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Are you going to extend it further?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I will answer your first question. We had a look at our veterans. Obviously, the reason they do not receive an aged pension is because, for a number of them, they have actually gone and defended this country and they receive a service pension. I thought it was appropriate that we sit down and look at—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That they should get it.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: —expanding the program—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: No-one is denying that they should get it.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: —expanding the program—well, hang on, this is a program you did not support, I point out as well.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: No-one is saying they should not get it. What I want to know is: They were not a part of the original election commitment. You have included the veterans now, appropriately so. No-one is saying you should not have done it.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Absolutely.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Appropriately so. You have allocated \$26 million at the upper rate if they all take it up, which you are going to absorb within the Transport—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Over two years, yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes. Is there any other group that you are going to extend this to?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We have had other groups that have come along and said, "Hey, we would like to be included in the program".

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Such as carers.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes, carers and—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: People with disabilities.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Absolutely, Mr Veitch. I made a comment about this last week in the House. I said that because of the popularity of the program there have been other groups that have actually come along and said, "Hey, can it be"—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Should they not have been included in the first place?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I actually said in the House last week that they have said—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It looks like an afterthought. That's what happened.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: No, because we have been very clear in our language. I make the point as well—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Why were people with a disability in the regions not included in the first place?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Let me go back and just say to you, too, that there were other groups that were disappointed that they could not be included in this program as well. However, what I have done is ask the department—we had a meeting on this last week—to sit down and actually have a look at other programs that are already supporting those people with disability and those programs for carers. No, let me finish.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Are you going to—the important thing about people with disabilities is if you are going to include people with disabilities, are you going to go to Treasury and seek supplementation for that cohort or are you also going to absorb that within the Transport cluster?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We have not actually—what I want to do is have a look at the existing programs that are there. For our carers and for people with disability we have programs already in relation to the transport travel subsidy scheme. We have also got support around community transport. What I want to do is—I have already asked the department to sit down and have a look at the existing programs. I want to make sure that they are actually reaching those groups that could benefit from the program. The other question I have asked is are we informing those individuals and those groups about the support that is available on the ground?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: As you would know, in regional communities a lot of these people, a lot of the services you were just talking about are not actually available.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: As the Minister for Regional Transport—and I think that is what gives me a much broader scope than we have ever seen in the past—I am able to put the spotlight on regional communities and for those regional groups to be able to see what support is there, how we can actually change it, if need be, and in some cases—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, can I give you an example of why I am asking the question?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: —it might be the communication to let them know what is available—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I will give you—

The CHAIR: Order! If we could have one person speaking at a time, primarily so that Hansard can record it accurately.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Just as an example, someone with a disability who is going to use public transport from, let's say, Bega. The nearest train comes out of Canberra. They drive three hours, sometimes in not good conditions, to get to Canberra to then get the train. Part of the issue here that other groups are raising, particularly people with disabilities, is the accessibility to public transport in the regions is not always as people would expect. That is why they are asking can they be included in this. That is why I am asking the questions around disability support pension [DSP] and carers recipients, pension recipients. It is not the same across the State, as you would appreciate.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Absolutely. I think this is why I have actually said that rather than have a short fix, it is about looking at a longer term benefit back to these groups. You know this as a—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But not a travel card. A longer term benefit but not a travel card.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I do point out, Mr Graham, that your party did not support the regional seniors travel card. Now you are complaining about the cost of the regional seniors travel card—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, you won the election. I am asking will these citizens get a travel card and you are saying no.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Well, hang on.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: They might get something else but they will not get a travel card. Is that the answer?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Some groups are disappointed that they cannot be included. I have said that on numerous occasions. I also know that there are some forms of support for them and I want to make sure that they are reaching those groups as best they can. I also want to know whether people know about it. There are a lot of programs out there. When I sat down with the department last week to have a look at the number of programs that are available for people with disability and carers, I want to make sure that they are aware of them. Sometimes we might need to make sure that that information is clear and provided to those groups about what support is available for them on the ground.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: How are you communicating with the disability sector? People with disabilities require a diverse set of communication methods. Can you assure this Committee that the department is looking at all possible communication methods to get the message out to the disability sector, firstly? Secondly, we do not want to be pulling these people along on a ride that they may not finish up getting on. When will they know whether or not they are going to be included in the scheme?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: There is a bit of work in relation to this. What I found going through this whole scheme, there are people who are on multiple schemes, people on one particular scheme, there are companion cards, as I said, the Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme, some people undertake community transport and some of them cross over with the types of support they receive.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: When are they going to know? What is the time frame for this body of work? This is important work, I appreciate that, but they need to know.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Absolutely, and I have asked the department. The department will come back to me in the next month with having a look at all those programs and identifying where different categories of people sit and then have a look at how it reaches out to those community groups, who may be eligible as well for that support. I think that is the first thing that we need to do, see if this can provide a longer term benefit to those communities.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: In about a month they will know whether they are going to be included in or excluded from the scheme?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I make the point that the regional seniors transport card is set for what it is today. The regional seniors transport card is set for age pensioners, Commonwealth Seniors Health Card holders and eligible veterans. You are also aware that I have said the broader piece of work is happening around people with disability and people who may be carers.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I am interested in the time frame so they know in their own mind.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: This is to make sure that it goes beyond the trial period as well, so we are not talking about something that just runs for one or two years. This is about making sure it is a change in the program that will support people for two, five, possibly 10 years, so they are aware of that.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That will include working up the request to Treasury.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It is not even Treasury alone, it is other Ministers as well. It is working with other Ministers about the programs that are in existence and how we can actually work—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So it will be funded?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We need to see what is available there because there are already pockets of support for carers and people with disability. We have to make sure that we are reaching out to those people appropriately with the support that is needed in those communities.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You said into the future. This program is currently budgeted for two years. Are you saying to this Committee that you are going to run this program longer than two years?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I never said that. I said the regional seniors transport card, it has been said that it would be a two-year period. That was what we took to the election. That is what has been articulated.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You are saying you are doing a body of work to go forward.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Beyond, for the carers and people with disability to ensure that they do not have something that is only going to last for one or two years. It is about doing a broader piece of work to ensure that it is going to go beyond a two-year period.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You are looking at running a program beyond two years for people with disability and carers?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Absolutely. This is not just a one-off hit and a one-off fix for them. This is about trying to make sure that there is a program on the ground that will continue to provide support—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Is that the same thing for veterans?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: For veterans, obviously they are part of the two-year program as well. It gives me the opportunity, Mr Veitch, as the Minister for Regional Transport and Roads to look at all of our programs, pull in the department, and this is why we have put the spotlight on regional communities and we can do this. We probably have not done this in the past and I make no apology for pulling these things apart to see how best they can reach and support our communities.

The CHAIR: Minister, I wanted to talk to you firstly about bushfires and the damage that has been done to local roads. At what stage are you at working out the damage and the extent of cost to regional roads and the travel infrastructure?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: There is no doubt that the bushfires across the State have had a massive impact on our local roads, our State roads, on our rail corridors around the State. The teams from Transport have been working flat out on the ground since around the middle of last year. When we have a look at some of the fires that began on the North Coast, the damage that has occurred to our road network has been immense. Some of the trees that have fallen over onto the roads have had to be removed; we have had limbs that continue to fall off a number of those trees. We have to replace the guard rail. We have had issues around slope stabilisation as well, which is needed where some of the bushfires have gone through.

Then the team has had the fires in the west of the State and now in the south of the State. I make the point that a lot of the members who are a part of Transport for NSW belong to those communities. Some of those people have lost their homes. Some of those people have lost outbuildings and been impacted themselves by the fires. We have had crews working tirelessly on the ground. The first priority for us has been to try to ensure that we can reopen those State roads as quickly as possible. It is important for getting people in and out of those communities. The other issue is it is about supporting business and growing our tourism or getting tourism back up and running again in those local areas.

The CHAIR: Is there a process for cataloguing the damage that has been done in regional areas, the priority of repairs and a time line for when those repairs are likely to be done?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: There is. And I make the point, you talk about even local roads. We are talking about in New South Wales regional and rural councils, there are about 93 councils. Twenty-five of those councils have been impacted by the fires. Even where we have reopened a number of those roads the work will continue.

In some cases it will take another three months. In some cases it will take another two years to clean up the sides of the roads. One thing I have found from Transport is that we have had teams from other parts of the State that have joined those crews in the north, south and the west to assist them in the clean-up to ensure that the roads could be reopened as quickly as possible. Transport has also worked with local councils to ensure that we can reopen their local roads as quickly as possible. We also have the impacts on our rail lines as well, severe damage on the Blue Mountains line still.

The CHAIR: Just to the roads first and of course the flooding as well. Is the Government going to be funding or helping to fund some of that local roads rebuild, which would ordinarily be within the responsibility of councils?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We are providing support to councils. I will get Mr Staples to outline a little bit more as to our support levels as well. I can tell you right now, we are supporting councils. Transport teams are on the ground supporting them, engineers having a look at issues around even slope stabilisation in some areas. Councils do not have the resources or the skills to be able to do it. Some have more than others, so we are providing a lot of support to them. But I will get Mr Staples to provide an update.

Mr STAPLES: Certainly there are already established disaster recovery processes within government, and notwithstanding the scale of what we have seen in the last six months has obviously been quite extraordinary. I reiterate the Minister's words about the whole-of-government and the Transport and local government response around all of that. It is a complicated thing to go through in terms of funding. I give you an example of that: Blue Mountains rail damage. We have access potentially to insurance for some of those things to pay for some of the recovery around that. For local councils, they have got mechanisms through the Commonwealth, Federal funding around emergency response and disaster recovery and so forth.

What I would say at the moment at a State level, within the works on our State roads the clear direction to our people is get on and get the roads repaired, and we are doing that in a staged manner or priority to get roads open. In a lot of cases you will find that we have not been able to restore all of the safety features on those roads, so we open them at a reduced speed initially but we get them to a state where we do not have concerns on tree falls and so forth, but we get it up so that we can get connections between communities. Then we will progressively go through and restore signage and safety barriers and so forth along the way, but we are not impeded at this stage by the lack of funding in doing that.

For local government, we are working on the ground, region by region, helping and sharing resources where they have priority areas and so forth, but in the main we have the roads open now. We have that sort of connection. It is just now about going through and upgrading them to the original state and having confidence around that. The funding mechanisms sit and flow to State and local government through the disaster recovery mechanisms we already have in government.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I guess it goes without saying that I do know there is a lot of work being done and there has been an amazing effort across the State of people pulling together and helping each other out, particularly those communities impacted by fire. I am hearing though from some local councils that the amount of funding from the Federal Government is simply not enough and they are quite concerned that if another fire comes quickly they will not have their main roads at the level that they need to be and it will actually impede the bushfire fighting effort in the future. Is there any intention to provide funding not just to repair the roads but to put them back to a standard, even perhaps to a standard they were not at to begin with, where they can be more comfortable that their fire trucks and other heavy vehicles in particular can access bushfire-affected areas?

Mr STAPLES: I think it is hard to give generic answers to a question like that because you have got to go to each location and the specific things around. I characterise what we are doing in three main buckets of activity. There is the emergency response when a bushfire is in flight. Roads need to be restored or closed, depending on what is happening in there. That in large part has been a large project for us in the last four or five months. Obviously at the moment, given the big wet that we subsequently had, we do not have much of that at this point in time. The majority of our effort resides in recovery, which is about the sorts of things I have just been talking around on repairing roads and so forth. Local government authorities are doing that.

The third tranche goes to—I think the Premier has commissioned an independent review in relation to the overall bushfires—whether there are lessons that we can learn at least in terms of improvements to the assets and infrastructure to provide more resilience. I think we will find that in due course there will be things that we want to do along transport corridors, whether they be at a local government level or at a State level, and there will need to be funding allocated around that. But we are not jumping into that just yet. I think it is pretty important just to take a little bit of time to be considered around that. I am not aware personally of any particular pressing

issues where there is a road closed at the moment or not open that is of concern on the current fire, but certainly I am happy to be made aware of that and see whether or not we can engage with councils on that specific matter. We do not want to be closed-minded around that.

The CHAIR: Minister, obviously the bushfires took a lot of people by surprise and the season took a lot of people by surprise. What lessons has the Government learnt in relation to regional transport in terms of potential projects going forward and to improve the resilience of regional communities?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It is a good question. Certainly I have my opinions personally but I think that the inquiry that Mr Staples said the Government is already holding is actually going to probably raise and address some of those issues as well. What we have found in some of our rail corridors is the fact that a number of those trees have actually fallen on our lines, which has now caused delays—incredible delays—in those particular areas. As a whole, the inquiry will actually indicate how Government can do things differently and how Government can do things that even better.

One good story I will tell you at the moment is the fact that you have a look at some of the clean-up work that is happening around on our roads at the moment. What we are doing with a lot of the trees at the moment, some of them are staying there for animal habitat but we are also giving those trees and cutting them up to go to BlazeAid. We have good stories of those trees actually being used to assist farmers when it comes to putting the fences back onto their properties. Some of the guardrails that have been damaged as well, we are using that again to support some of those rural farmers as well. Those things are important but I am sure the inquiry will actually raise a few more things, especially around corridors, both road and rail.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, I want to continue asking about the regional seniors transport card. You have been very specific talking about the criteria for this card. You have talked about age pensioners, Commonwealth seniors health card holders and then you have added, thirdly, the category of veterans after the Government reversed its position on veterans. Why were National Party candidates at the election saying this to the electorate? I am quoting from your campaign material: "To be eligible for the card you need to be either an age pensioner or a superannuation and annuity income earner who lives in regional New South Wales. It's that simple." It was not that simple, was it, Minister? Why was this material issued when that is clearly wrong?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Look, as I said to you, there was a press release and I have a copy of the press release here that was issued back in February 2019, which actually indicated that it was for age pensioners and Commonwealth senior health card holders.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Correct, so not everything that was issued was wrong but this is material going into people's letterboxes. Do you want me to read it again? It says, "You need to be either an age pensioner or a superannuation and annuity income earner." That is wrong, is it not? Do you concede that, Minister?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I have seen the letter and I agree that the letter actually could have been—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Did you send it out?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I have actually seen the letter.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Did you send it out, Minister?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I have agreed that the letter could have actually been clearer in its communication.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am not asking could it have been clearer.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Well, no. I can tell you—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Is it flat out wrong?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: No, it is not because this is actually something that we have been consistent on—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So are superannuation and annuity income earners—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: As the Minister, I have been consistent.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Point of order—

The CHAIR: I will hear the point of order.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: You know what it is. Allow the Minister to answer the question. He is being badgered.

The CHAIR: Yes. I think there is a balance.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: To the point of order: I am comfortable the Minister answered my question entirely when he said that he does not agree. I am entirely comfortable the Minister—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Hang on, that is not—you cannot actually put words in my mouth now, Mr Graham. At the end of the day, you cannot have your own interpretation here, so let us be very clear. You asked me about a letter and then you have your own interpretation. Now I respond.

The CHAIR: Order! If we can proceed by allowing a little bit more time for each of you to speak, that would be fantastic.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Sure.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: But you did send that campaign letter out, though, didn't you?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: These are letters that were actually sent out by the National Party. Look, I actually say to you they could have been clearer in their language.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: My colleague's question is: Was it distributed in your electorate?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I would presume it was, yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you. Do you agree, Minister, that the statement "superannuation and annuity income earners might be eligible for this" is wrong? That is entirely incorrect.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Well, it is a Commonwealth seniors health card and it obviously, with superannuants, it also does come under an income test. So let's not forget that there is an income test that was applied here—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I agree.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: —for those people who were actually eligible for the card, and I actually made the point to you that if it did create some confusion, that some people thought they may have been eligible, is not correct because those people in our communities who need the most support is where it was targeted for.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, the reason they thought they were eligible was you told them they were eligible in this material. Superannuation and annuity income earners were written to saying they would get this card. But they are not in the criteria you have outlined and you agree they are not getting it today, are they?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: No. I agreed that the—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: They are not getting it.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: No. I actually agreed that the language could have been clearer. That is what I agreed to.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So superannuants are getting it?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Secondly, Mr Veitch, a Commonwealth senior health card holder would actually have to see whether they are eligible for it. There is an income test that is actually applied to those people who are eligible for the regional seniors travel card. When you have a look at that income test—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And none of that is mentioned. None of that is here.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I have made it very clear as the Minister, since being appointed into this role, as to who is eligible for the card and who is not.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And you were very clear before the election too, and it was flat out wrong.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Why is Labor defending the wealthy? Strange.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We also need to encourage self-funded retirees to actually check, rather than just rule people out. We need people to check to see if they are eligible because to say that self-funded retirees are out completely is not correct because—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: How many?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: No, no, there are some people who are still eligible.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: How many self-funded retirees, superannuants and annuity income earners are there in regional New South Wales?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Look, I do not have that information. What I said to you earlier was that—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: There would be hundreds of thousands of people, would there not? You would agree?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Look, I am not guessing numbers. I would rather—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But you would agree, you have lied to hundreds of thousands of citizens of New South Wales, told them they are getting this card and they do not have a card.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: What I am excited about is that many people have taken it up, and I remind you, you never supported the card. You actually did not support it.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Do you apologise to these people for misleading them?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: What is really good is that I actually—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The member for Dubbo has apologised, he has actually said it was wrong.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I have actually said to you the language could have been clearer and I actually think that—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Are you going to apologise for that fact?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I think the language should have been clearer and I think that is something that should have been written in a clearer way for people to understand.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Were they included in the Parliamentary Budget Office [PBO] submission?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: But what is good—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Were they included in the PBO submission?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: No, in the—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Point of order: One question at a time.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: The PBO costing was actually done exactly for aged pensioners and Commonwealth health senior cardholders.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So not superannuants?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: The costings were done by PBO in relation to the number of people that were eligible for the card. As I said to you, the press release that came out—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Superannuants were not included in the PBO costings?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: The press release that came out in February was very clear about who received it. In April I became the Minister and I have been very clear ever since as to the eligibility of the card.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It did not go to PBO. You did not include that cohort of people in the PBO submission, yet the National Party told me they were going to get it.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Mr Veitch, you are now talking about a program again that Labor opposed.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: This is about what you put in the PBO and what you told the people of New South Wales. It is actually a pretty serious issue. Did you put this information to the PBO?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I get stories of people now that are going—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You did not put this to the PBO.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I get people—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Point of order: The Minister is trying to answer Mr Veitch's question. The Minister is not being given the opportunity to be able to answer the member's question and should be afforded that opportunity.

The CHAIR: If we could at least allow the Minister to finish his sentence or phrase, that would be great.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Just to focus your attention, I return to the question my colleague asked you. One of your members has already apologised for this. He agrees with you that this language could have been much clearer. Will you apologise for the fact that this material went to hundreds of thousands of citizens and it was wrong? Will you apologise?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I have said it in my own area for the couple of people that have come in and spoken about it, that the language should have been clearer in relation to those letters. I have actually made that—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You apologised to them. Will you apologise to the public of New South Wales? Are you sorry that this was wrong?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: What I have also noticed is the fact that a lot of people who have been checking out their—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Why will you not apologise? This was just wrong. Why cannot you say sorry? Here is your chance.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: You can sit there and yell at me and put your antics on, but I can tell you right now, you should apologise for not standing up for regional and rural communities—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Here is your chance.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: You should apologise to regional communities for not actually standing up for them. I make no apology for fighting for people in regional and rural communities—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Just apologise for misleading them.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Your colleague has apologised.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: —and I will do that each and every day.

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr PAUL TOOLE: These people when they need support, it is the National Party that has actually given it to them, because they have never seen a program like this delivered before.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You have not given it to them.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: You opposed it all the time.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is the point, they have not got it.

The CHAIR: Order! It is almost impossible for Hansard to be recording this. We have at least three people speaking at once. Take a breath and let us start to listen. Try to allow each other at least a full sentence before interrupting.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: At least the member for Dubbo apologised. Minister, you are talking about people in regional New South Wales. The geographic area that you have included in the definitions for regional New South Wales, you have essentially lifted the Restart NSW definition for regional. Is that correct?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: That is correct. You asked me that question at the last estimates.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: What it means is—and you will have to accept that this is one of the issues that people have and no doubt you would have heard this from people around the State as well—when you start putting lines on maps, essentially someone on this side of the street may be eligible for the program and someone on the other side of the street may not be eligible for the program. Is that correct?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: That is going to happen, yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: This hard line on the map is the way we are going to go with this program?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: The geographic definition has been used not only for my portfolio but also for all portfolios in government.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: They are all using the Restart NSW?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It was also identified, when the PBO costings were done for the regional seniors travel card, as to the definition of what regional is. Mr Veitch, it is really disappointing that I hear the member for Campbelltown saying that Campbelltown western Sydney—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I am not the member for Campbelltown, you know that.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: He is part of your party, so you should apologise to regional communities that you want to have Newcastle declared regional.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I am talking about people out your way that—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: You want Campbelltown to be declared regional. You want places like Penrith to be declared regional.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I am talking about people in your electorate.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: At the end of the day, you guys want to actually include parts of western Sydney as regional.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: No, no.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: The definition that is being—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: There are people in your electorate who are actually contacting our office saying they are not eligible.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: The definition that is being used has been consistent with what Restart NSW has in relation to them.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Are you going to apologise to the people in your electorate because they are not eligible?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: You are asking about geographic locations, Mr Veitch.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: A line on a map.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It is a line on a map and I have actually agreed with you on that. That is the definition that is being used.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: No exclusions for those people—literally there is a street—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: If you let me finish, I just want to make the point to you as well that when you look at places like Sydney and Newcastle, they have subsidised transport.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: We are not talking about Sydney or Newcastle, we are talking about residents in regional New South Wales.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: People travelling in the regions have to travel hundreds of kilometres sometimes just to be able to keep a medical appointment.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Point of order—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Sometimes they forego this because of the cost. What we are doing is providing that support for those people to ensure that they are given the level of support that is required.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Except if they are disability support pension [DSP] recipients, carers, you had to be bullied into getting the veterans in—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: You can defend Newcastle if you want to, but—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: —and superannuants, you did not tell the PBO about.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: —Newcastle is not regional.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It looks like to me the scheme is a bit botched.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Well, to me you want Newcastle to be included as regional.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Point of order—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: You want Campbelltown to be included as regional.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: How can Hansard possibly record?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It is not regional.

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I have to point it out to you.

The CHAIR: I need to hear the point of order.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: The Minister was talking over me as well. I appreciate we are trying not to take points of order for no reason and I appreciate them being acknowledged because my colleague made a point of order that was not acknowledged. The point of order is we have two people continuously talking over each other and I can see Hansard struggling. They have no ability to record that.

The CHAIR: If I missed the point of order, I apologise, but it would have been because I could not hear either. I remind not only members of the committee but also the Minister not to talk over the other person. That would be fantastic. There is a balance to be struck. It is completely within a committee member's right to ask the question and that can involve interrupting the answer to be direct. It is also the witness's right to be able to respond with at least a sentence. If we could proceed with that in mind, that would be great.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, on this question of regional boundaries, are you reviewing or are you considering reviewing those boundaries at all?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: If you are asking me if I am going to include Newcastle and Campbelltown into it by reviewing the boundaries, the answer is no.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Are you reviewing or considering the boundaries at all?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Newcastle already has subsidised transport. They have got light rail. You do not see any of those kinds of supports being given in regional communities.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Understood. When people call up, why is phone advice being given that these might be reviewed?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I am sorry, I am unaware of the boundaries being reviewed. I point out to you, these are the geographical boundaries that my portfolio has also been divided—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So you will not change these boundaries?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Minister Constance has metropolitan and outer metropolitan and I have regional and rural areas, clearly defined by what Restart NSW identifies.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I move onto the 15,000 kilometres worth of roads. The last time you were before us, you said that the task force would be appointed before Christmas. As it turned out, it was appointed towards the end of January. What is the remit of that task force at this point in time? Is it to determine the criteria for the roads that will be transferred across to the State and a timetable for that program?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: As I said to you, the panel would be looked at being appointed by the end of last year. We are about a month behind in relation to actually appointing the panel. I know that the panel itself has had two meetings. It had another one last Friday to discuss the principles around the reclassification of roads. What they are doing is they will actually commence a road show. They will go out and talk to councils, they will talk to stakeholders. There will be an opportunity for those as well to put submissions forward about roads that they would like to see reclassified. It is a big piece of task and I think if I have –

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I want to clarify before we move on to the next bit: The principles or the eligibility criteria, that has been determined or they are currently determining that?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: They have actually gone out with some draft terms at the moment. They have actually had their meeting on Friday to go through that again but then they will go out to councils to look at commencing that work to have the discussions around councils.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So that is to consult with the councils about the criteria?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: No, it is going to go out to the councils now to start looking at roads that they propose to be reclassified back to under the State's control.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I think that is really important though to make that so.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Correct.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The criteria or the principles are going to be worked on by the task force. Then when they start the roadshow, as you call it, that will be with things like delays so that councils can start proposing roads that they consider would meet the criteria, is that right?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: That is right but I have spoken to councils already. I meet with joint organisations of councils. I have made it very clear that when I have met with them that there is a lot of excitement about the fact that the Government has made this as an election commitment. They are also very keen to start discussing proposed roads. But I think—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: They are talking to everyone about it.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Hang on, Mr Veitch. You also know and I have made this point as well that it is going to take time because it is a big task, it is a complex task. You also need to have a look at what the impacts might be on even smaller councils and I have been very clear on that.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yeah, that is right.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Hang on.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I am agreeing with you.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: You agree with me because you have actually said, "This is a big task and it is critical it is done well and with councils' interest at the heart of it."

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Absolutely. I am glad you read my press releases.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: You have actually said exactly what I said at the previous budget estimates.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So there have been no roads then that have already been ticked off as a part of the transfer? No roads at all because the criteria has not been set?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: The criteria is being discussed with councils. A number of councils have provided feedback in relation to how those roads were to be reclassified. I will have the committee go out and the committee will make recommendations back to the Government. We are indicating it could take 18 months but I would expect that to be around about July 2021 to come back.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: There have been no roads at this point in time where the council could stand up and say, "That road will be transferred" because they actually do not know the criteria.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Even for those roads that potentially were made as an election commitment, they still have to go through the process. We know that the nature of some of those roads may have changed as well. We know that therefore for whatever reason—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Simply, there is no road yet you could go and say that?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: That is correct and I will wait for the report to come back in 2021 before we look at starting the process of rolling that out.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, can I read from Mr Marshall's Facebook page? The member for Northern Tablelands says:

I sought and received formal confirmation from Minister Toole that the election commitment I made would be honoured. Kempsey Road will be taken back by the State Government as part of a wider election commitment to transfer up to 15,000 kilometres of council-owned roads across the State.

That was last Thursday. You said there is no road that could be put up as being transferred. Yet as late as last Thursday the member for Northern Tablelands was telling his community that Kempsey Road is a part of it.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We have made—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: With formal confirmation from you.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Do not yell. We made some election commitments because of the nature of which those roads have changed will mean that they will primarily be considered in that program.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So that road is a part of the commitment?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Hang on. Election commitments will be honoured by our Government but I also say that they will not be transferred today, next month, end of the year. They still need to go through the process and I still want the panel to go out and do the work on that road and any other regional road that we made as an election commitment during that time.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So it may not be transferred?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I want the committee to still do the work.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It says here you provided it: "I sought and received formal confirmation from Minister Toole." You have already confirmed.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Have you provided formal confirmation?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: The panel will do its work.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Have you provided formal confirmation, Minister?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I expect the panel to go out there and still do its work.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You have not answered my question: Have you provided formal confirmation?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Our election commitments will be honoured. Our election commitments are—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It is a simple question: Have you provided formal confirmation?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Do not yell again. Just calm down.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Have you or have you not provided formal confirmation?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Point of order—

The CHAIR: I will hear the point of order.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: The Minister is attempting to answer the Opposition's questions. The Minister is not being provided that opportunity. I ask that the Minister be allowed to finish his sentence.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes or no? "Yes I have" or "No I have not"?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: As I said, election commitments will be honoured. We made those election commitments very clear at the last election and with some of those roads there is actually a very clear reason as to why they will be reclassified. But at the end of the day we are still going to have the panel do its work—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You said earlier there are no roads included and now you are saying, "Well, there might actually be some as part of the election commitment." Clearly you have told Minister Marshall that the Kempsey Road is to be included already before the task force has developed the principles and criteria, as you said.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: They will still go out and still do the same process for those councils and they will still be asked to provide input. They will still be asked to provide feedback. There is not just the reclassification of roads in relation to this work—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Does Minister Marshall know this?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: He knows this because I have indicated to Minister Marshall as well that the panel will need to do its work. If you are asking me the question, "Is it happening next week?", the answer is still no because the panel has to go out and do its work.

The CHAIR: I will be handing to the Opposition the 10 minutes of crossbench time that would have been allocated to the Hon. Mark Banasiak. Before I do, I remind Committee members when taking a point of order—

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Are you giving the Hon. Mark Banasiak's time to the Labor Party?

The CHAIR: Correct.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: We did not discuss this earlier.

The CHAIR: The 10 minutes of my crossbench time, which is shared between the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party and The Greens, I am giving to the Opposition.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: It is a captain's call, is it, as Chair? I thought it was evenly divided.

The CHAIR: That is always the course. It is evenly divided between crossbench and Labor.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: If they do not turn up they forfeit the time.

The CHAIR: Then I will take my full 20 minutes.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Please do. We encourage you to do so. We would much rather hear your questions rather than questions from Labor.

The CHAIR: I remind Committee members in relation to points of order that when you take a point of order you say, "Point of order". Do not give the reason for it. Just say, "Point of order". Then I will ask you what the point of order is and then you give it. Then there is time for a response when no-one else is talking and then I rule on the point of order. Minister, I wanted to ask you quickly about the Blue Mountains and the Great Western Highway duplication. Are you aware of the community opposition to that duplication?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I am aware that in any major project or any big project there are always going to be various views. We also know that Transport has hosted a number of meetings last year with the community. I think it is fair to say that their concerns are probably the same concerns that I have in relation to environmental impacts, heritage impact. That is why I want them to continue to engage with the community, to look at what is the best option through an area like Blackheath.

The CHAIR: Have you considered alternatives to that duplication, such as new rail infrastructure?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: That is actually part of it. We are actually talking about not just road investment, we are also talking about investment into rail. As a government, we are also looking at how we can get more heavy vehicles off the road, get freight onto rail. That is something we are very conscious of and we know that there is going to be an increase over the coming years of around about 28 per cent in freight. We need to be making sure that we are moving in that space as well. We are not just doing one in isolation; we are doing both road and rail when we are looking at movement through the mountains.

You know for a fact—and I travel it every time I come down here; I came down here yesterday and just the fact that when I went through Mount Victoria all the way through Medlow Bath there was about a 10 kilometre section of road it took me about 50 minutes just to get through because of the congestion. I have heard locals say to me, "We do not go out on a Sunday afternoon because of the amount of vehicles that are there." I remember when we made the announcement about going out and consulting with the community and putting the designs out there a powerline fell down on the road and because of the single lanes and not being duplicated it had the traffic backed up for kilometres.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Three or four hours.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I had to then divert to go to Bells Line of Road to make the announcement. Mr Mallard, who was also going to be there, could not make it because the road was closed. This is what we are finding where it is single lane through the mountains, where it is not duplicated, we are seeing huge traffic delays and issues as well. We have also announced, for interest too, a co-design committee for through Blackheath. So there are a number of options for consideration, but we want the community to lead it and the community to determine what might be the best fix for them through that area. It is also about having safer roads for them as a local community as well. It is not about people out west; it is also about people who live in the mountains each and every day, so they have a safer road network too.

The CHAIR: What percentage of traffic on that section of the Great Western Highway is trucks versus commuters?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I do not know if Mr Wakelin-King knows—otherwise we would have to take it on notice.

Mr WAKELIN-KING: If I may, we will take the specifics on notice. But what we can say is, as a general rule of thumb, when we look at the traffic volumes through highways of this nature, around 10 per cent to 15 per cent of the traffic on the road is heavy vehicles. That varies with the time of day and also during the week, but we will get the specifics for you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Are there any plans to move some of that? I suspect that a percentage of that would be freight and commercial heavy traffic. Are there any plans to move that onto rail?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We are always looking at it. But I can tell you right now that if you have a look at the mountains and you have a look through Blackheath, there has been and continues to be an increase in the number of cars and an increase in the number of trucks that travel on that section of road. I do not have the numbers exactly what that break-up might be from some traffic counts that have been undertaken, but it is growing and it is continuing to grow. But as I said to you at probably the first question, we are committed to also making sure and acknowledging that there is going to be growth in freight. It is about trying to get more of that back on rail too. So even plans around the Western Sydney Aerotropolis into the future—that sees even greater opportunity to

be able to get more product and more produce onto rail in that particular area too. That is important for the Central West and beyond.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, I want to go back to this formal confirmation that Minister Marshall was talking about on his Facebook. When you provide formal confirmation as the Minister, what does that look like? Do you provide an email or is it a written confirmation?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I speak to local members all the time. I get local members who ring me all the time as well. Sometimes it could be in writing; sometimes it could be a verbal discussion.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: A nod and a wink?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We do not do it that way, Mr Veitch. I do not know if that is how the Labor Party works. The old wink for the Labor Party—I have seen a few of you march down the road because of that.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: We have seen some of these guys too.

The CHAIR: Order! We now have three people talking over each other.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: What I am trying to get to here, Minister, is was Minister Marshall incorrect when he said that he sought and received formal confirmation from Minister Toole?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Formal confirmation of an election commitment that is going to be delivered is nothing new. That is given. Formal commitment, formal guarantee, for an election commitment that this Government has announced is nothing new. It is something that we will honour.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So you have given him formal confirmation that roads are going to included?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It was an election commitment, Mr Veitch, and there is no secret of that. We have made that very clear before the election that that was one of the roads that was identified as being part of the road reclassification.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So you have provided formal confirmation to Minister Marshall that you will do it?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: What I indicated to you earlier was the fact that no road has been decided today because I still want the panel to go through its process of looking at all the roads across the State and still talking to councils. But his is not the only road. There are a couple of roads that were identified through the election that would be part of the road reclassification and they will be honoured.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I am confused. We have not determined the criteria. No roads included, except those that were election commitments, and they are included.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: They will be included but they will still have to go through the process.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: But they will be included?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: They will have to go through the process.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Which then could exclude them against the criteria?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I think we can see with those—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I am very confused now, Minister.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I am trying to explain it to you. I am trying to help you here.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Why are we not shocked?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You have said previously there is no road included at this point in time because—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Because I have not got the report, Mr Veitch. I do not get the report until July.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So no road—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I have got no report until July 2021.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So, on that basis, no road is included?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: No, hang on. You can mix words here all you want.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I am not. I am trying to work it out.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: At July 2021, I get the full report in relation to the work that has been undertaken by the panel in looking at the reclassification of roads across the State.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: And, on that basis, there will be no roads until you get that report?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Hang on. There will be no roads reclassified until that point. I am not going to reclassify a road now or in a month's time or before the end of the year until I receive that report.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Then Minister Marshall is incorrect?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: He is not incorrect, because there is an election commitment that was made. Our election commitments will be honoured. We know that for some roads, they are clearly going to be identified in the road reclassification because we have seen the nature of that road change over time. But in relation to other roads—in relation to that road, it still has to go through the process.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Then it may not be included after it goes through the process?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I cannot pre-empt the report till I see the report in July 2021.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You are, because you are saying here that there is a formal confirmation that this road will be included.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It is an election commitment, Mr Veitch.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So all election commitments on roads will be included before you have got the report?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Our election commitments will be honoured, Mr Veitch.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Before you get the report?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: The answer is they will not be honoured before I get the report. Let's make that very clear. I will not make a decision on them until I get the final report. I think what you are saying is, "Will it be done before the report?" The answer is no. The answer is I will get the report and then look at changing the reclassification of those roads.

The CHAIR: But it is an election promise.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes, clear as mud.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, I would like to move to cameras. Point-to-point average speed cameras currently do not operate for cars in New South Wales.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes, sure.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: They operate for heavy vehicles. What is your view, as the relevant Minister, about switching them on for cars?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I think when we look at point-to-point cameras, we know that they have been effective in reducing the accidents for heavy vehicles for a number of our corridors where they have been positioned. So we know there has been success in that. That was the intent of why they were introduced at the time. We also need to be mindful that they are only operating in a small number of corridors, so it is not going to be a statewide solution. I do not think there is one solution alone that is going to address the issue around road fatalities.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I agree with that.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I think it has to be a number of measures to be undertaken. I make the point to you that this is a government that is not standing still in this space.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I will come to a number of those other measures, Minister, so you can feel assured by that. I raised this one because Minister Constance, a couple of times, has floated turning these on for cars. He has done so in a speech; he has done so on channel 7. What is your view about switching these on? Are you in favour of turning these on for cars in regional New South Wales?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We are actually holding a road safety summit in a few weeks' time and I am pretty sure a number of Opposition and the road safety committee have also been invited to come along. What we want

to do is to have a look at some of the practices that are occurring around the world. I think we need to also have a look at what things—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This specific item—turning these on—is on that agenda. That is why I am asking what is your view about turning those on.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I think road safety is something that is going to be discussed at the road safety summit. The Government has not changed its policy. The Government has not made a decision to change that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But your other Minister has floated this a couple of times. I am asking you, what is your personal view?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We are both running this road safety summit together. We are both very keen to go along there with an open mind to actually hear—and I hope you turn up. I hope you can come and provide some feedback and hear some of the global speakers who are going to be there talking about what has worked in their particular jurisdiction and how we can address road safety. We should not just focus sometimes on one measure. There are multiple measures that need to be addressed.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I will come to these other measures, Minister. I think you know the reason I am asking, because your former Nationals Ministers in this portfolio have heavily opposed that measure. They have ruled it out. They have ruled it out in very, very strong terms. Duncan Gay has prosecuted this case very strongly. But you are saying now this is on the table at this discussion. If the experts say this helps on road safety—it will not fix the problem altogether; I accept that. If this helps, it will happen. Is that is what you are telling us? It is on the table?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: What I said to you is we will go to the road safety summit with eyes open as to what happens around the world with other jurisdictions. There are a number of measures that have been put on the table for the summit—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I will come to those. If the experts say that they are for point-to-point cameras being on for cars, will you agree to that?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: That is a Government policy, at the end of the day. That is a Government decision to be made. But I am not going to—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But you are open to it, is what I—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I am not going to pre-empt—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You are the Minister.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I am not going to pre-empt a discussion on it before we actually go to that summit.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I agree, and I am not asking you to.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: You are.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am asking if the experts are for it, are you open to that—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I go back to where I was speaking before: Primarily, they have been on a small number of corridors for heavy vehicles that have been using our roads. Yes, we have actually seen where they have reduced the number of crashes in those particular areas. We need to have a look at this as a holistic view rather than just a one-off to say we are turning it on tomorrow.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But it is fair to say on that answer—the Hon. Duncan Gay would have given me a very different answer—you are open to turning those on? If the experts are for it, if the Government changes you are not ruling that out, are you?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I am looking at a broader piece of work. It is about looking at safer systems. In relation to one thing in isolation, no, I am not going to just say one thing and that is the end of it. I would rather look at it as a whole piece of work, and that is what we have done.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But I am asking are you ruling this measure out, and you are clearly not. I do not want to misquote you, Minister—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I am going to a road safety summit with eyes wide open, as to what I hope you turn up to and listen to as well. I think, importantly, we want to hear from experts as to various views. As I said,

there is no one single piece of road safety measures that is going to work; it has to be multiple things to be considered. But they have got to be practical, they have got to be reasonable and they have also got to be fair.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I want to confirm, given the answers you have given: Who is the decision-maker? Who is the Minister here, who is the decision-maker on this decision? Is it the—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Both Ministers carry responsibility for the Acts. Both of us have joint responsibility for the Acts, so we will both be having discussions after the road safety summit, I am sure.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: On some of these other measures that you have already referred to, also on the agenda—lowering the default speed limit of 100 kilometres an hour on New South Wales—you are open to that measure? It is on the agenda; you are not ruling that out?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I think you have got to be reasonable about this. I think you have got to say that if you take 20 kilometres off travel times then you are basically adding on another 20 per cent of travel time for motorists. Especially in the country, we know that that is actually going to extend our travel times. I think realistically that is not going to happen in the bush or in the country.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It is fair to say you are tougher on that one than on the—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Well, hang on. I think we are also always—if you are talking about a blanket system about reducing road speeds from 100 kilometres per hour to 80 kilometres per hour, the answer is no. But are there systems in place where we are looking at roads around safety all the time because they may need to have a reduced speed limit? Of course we are. But if it is a blanket system for a road to go from 100 kilometres per hour to 80 kilometres per hour—20 kilometres off equals 20 per cent extra travel time—the answer is no.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, Duncan Gay would have had a heart attack when I asked him about both those issues but you are—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: He is older. He is older, mate.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: He is looking well though. But you are a lot tougher on one of those issues than you are on the other. I think that is a fair characterisation.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I think we just need to see what is actually presented. I want to know how it is framed. I do not think you can just say we are going to just do something overnight. I think we need to be a little bit reasonable. We have got to make sure it is reasonable and we have got to make sure it is practical.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Let me ask you about one other specific measure: the reduction in blood alcohol limit from .05 to .02. Where does that sit in your reaction to it? Is that genuinely on the table or not?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Again, it will come up for discussion. I do make the point that we do not want to penalise people for actually wanting to go to the pub after work. I think that is a fair call. I think there are people who actually want to go to a restaurant at night—they might just want one drink. I think at the end of the day we do not want to penalise people who are doing the right thing. Again, I want to be open-minded and listen to people, but I do not want to just come in and say we are going to reduce it because I think it also impacts on the 99 per cent of people who do the right thing. There are more people who do the right thing than who do not. Sometimes you can put measures in place but there are still people who go out there, flout the road rules and the laws and end up doing the wrong thing. We need to be very careful there.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you, Minister.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Just following on, regarding the rollout of the mobile phone detection cameras into the regions, obviously the scale of rolling those out is a pretty big task. Is there a priority set of roads that you are rolling those out across? We have all been told they are switched on now. I do not want to know which—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I am not going to tell—I know one road you travel on, don't worry!

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Is there a program rolling these out across the State and what is the timetable?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: There is a program. We have indicated that over the next three years there will be 45 mobile and fixed speed cameras to be rolled out. Some of those will be on trailer mounts as well—sorry, for the mobile phone. They will be trailer mounted as well. The idea is to change people's behaviour. We want people's behaviour to change immediately. Over the last three months we were just issuing the warning letters. I can tell

you right now that nine people actually went through the two points where those cameras were taking photographs of people and we actually had 30,000 letters sent out. There are images of people actually texting on their phone, looking down, travelling at 100 kilometres an hour. We have got people who are still holding the phone to their ear. There are people who are not only putting themselves at risk but their passengers and the lives of other motorists at risk as well. We have got a culture here that needs to change. The answer to your previous question is, yes, we are rolling 45 cameras out over the next three years.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Thank you, Minister, I am going to move on to regional rail, if we can. This is a series of questions around Australian Rail Track Corporation [ARTC] and its contracts. From the outset, I just want to flag that we understand there is an inquiry in place into the tragic accident at Wallan, so I do not want to in any way traverse territory there. We also pass on our condolences to the families and friends of those two workers who lost their lives. However, more broadly around the ARTC contracts, are you satisfied that the ARTC is meeting its contract requirements?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I will ask Mr Staples in a moment to elaborate a little further. You are right, the tragedy that we saw in Victoria was certainly devastating. When I heard of the incident, I got in the car and drove down to Victoria overnight. Clearly there are two lives that have been impacted by this, and that is two families that have now had their lives changed forever. We also know that Transport for NSW as its highest priority puts its passengers and crews first. It is important to note that issues around that particular track—and when we are talking about ARTC, it is a matter that is currently under investigation. The regulator is currently undertaking an investigation into that section of track. If there are concerns in relation to that there are measures that are undertaken to raise it. I might get Mr Staples just to add a little bit further to that.

Mr STAPLES: I am conscious that you will be tight for time but I also acknowledge the loss of the two workers and offer my condolences of Transport for NSW and TrainLink. It has been a difficult 10 days or so since that incident occurred. I acknowledge the work Mr Allaway has done in leading that organisation through that as well, having lost a driver. What I do not want to do—I think, Mr Veitch, you indicated as well—is be drawn on the specifics of the Wallan incident. I think your question is more generally about the ARTC network?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It is very general, yes.

Mr STAPLES: I will answer and sort of remove from the Wallan incident. Since the early or mid-2000s ARTC has controlled the interstate network both to the north and the south of Sydney. The principal of that has been for the Commonwealth to give assurance to largely the freight industry about continuity of operations and control and so forth so that they can navigate the nation with confidence, both from a safety point of view as well as from a network control and prioritisation point of view. Hence its role in taking over corridors within Sydney that are dedicated to freight and so forth. The overarching driver of the establishment of ARTC as a commercial entity under the Commonwealth has been to deliver that freight imperative. Now, we obviously operate our regional train services over that network as well as the Sydney Trains network within the Sydney plus Newcastle, Wollongong, Blue Mountains area, then the Country Rail network, so we navigate three networks in delivery of our services. There is no doubt in terms of our engagement with ARTC we have, like we do with all of the networks—TrainLink will have been indicating performance issues along the way and so the issue of ride comfort and so forth is a challenge for ARTC because what you do for freight versus what you do for passengers can be different.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The ride comfort?

Mr STAPLES: Yes, from a ride comfort point of view. It has certainly been one of the issues that we have been in engagement with them over a substantial period of time. I think, to avoid further speculation on this, the thing that we would say is that separate to the Wallan incident, the rail regulator has asked ARTC to do an audit of the Sydney to Melbourne corridor in terms of the track and the condition and the way that they are maintaining. Can I say that we welcome that being undertaken. I think that is in the best interests of customers, community and the rail industry generally to go through that process to make sure that everyone has the confidence in the way that that has been looked at and we will participate in that, I think allow the experts to go through that audit and see whether or not there are things that could be done better as an industry overall to respond to that.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, if I draw on ride comfort, the phrase Mr Staples used, I am being told that there are drivers, not all, who are wearing kidney belts because of the bumpy nature of the track. Are you aware of that?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I am not aware of that but I would have to ask Mr Staples is he aware of that.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Has that been raised with you previously, Mr Staples?

Mr STAPLES: I cannot answer that particular question. All I can say is that we have certainly had engagement with ARTC over some time about ride quality for the regional services on their network.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Do we use train pilots in New South Wales?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I am not aware but I will have to double-check.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Part of our safe working systems.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes.

Mr STAPLES: I think you are drawing directly into the Wallan incident now and what might have been the causal factors around that, so I would rather not speculate. As I said, we have got three networks: John Holland has a contract to us for the Country Rail network, they are the accredited rail operator under national rail law; Sydney Trains for the Sydney Trains network; and then ARTC. So there are differences in operating practice, without a doubt, and that may be a conversation point for the future about whether there could be some normalisation around some of those sorts of things. We have to keep an open mind, but whether that is the reason for the incident at Wallan, too early to speculate.

The CHAIR: Does the Government have any plans to reinstate the rail services to Byron Bay?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I would have to take that on notice. You would have to respect that I am responsible for over 10,000 projects across the State in roads and rail, unless I can get Mr Staples or even Mr Allaway if they have any additional information about Byron Bay at the moment.

The CHAIR: It is a pretty high-profile discussion—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I know that we have invested very—

The CHAIR: —on what is going to happen to that rail corridor.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I know that we have done some work on the North Coast. That suggests in some cases as well that buses could be more effective. Some initial work has probably shown that buses could be able to support the community more. But we are always open to having a look at it further. That is some of the early discussions in relation to Byron Bay.

The CHAIR: If buses were put in place instead or a more frequent and efficient bus service, what would be the plans in relation to the rail corridor?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I have met with the mayor in that particular area as well in relation to the interchange too. Obviously there are plans to make some significant investment into that interchange. That will support buses in that local area. I know that your upper House colleague the Hon. Ben Franklin has raised the need for improvements to be made to that interchange. It is something that we are looking at quite seriously at the moment to deliver a short- to medium-term fix for the community. That is something that is well and truly being escalated through discussions.

The CHAIR: There are no plans to sell off that rail corridor for any other commercial uses of the rail corridor?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Rail trails sit under the Deputy Premier, so he is responsible for rail trails. You would have to direct your question to him. It would come to me if there were the need to change the nature of the corridor but that would need to come to me for sign off. It would have to go through the process of being up to the Deputy Premier, as he is responsible for rail trails.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I want to return to the question my colleague was asking about the mobile phone detection cameras. How many of these are deployed in regional areas as opposed to in the city?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: There are eight. In relation to exactly where they are as in regional, rural and metro I would have to take that on notice and come back to you.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And we might talk to the officials.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We will have it this afternoon for you, how is that? It will save us coming back.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So eight are deployed at the moment?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Correct.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Just remind us of the total?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Forty-five over three years.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So this is scaling up at the moment. How quickly will they all be online, because there is obviously a small range of detections at the moment? How soon before all 45 are online?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Three years.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, a couple of things following on from the questions around bushfires and roads. At the last estimates hearing I asked about Roads and Maritime Services [RMS] process for bushfires and replacement of fences. I did not suspect that we would be coming here six months later having gone through what no-one predicted. The assistance being provided to adjacent landholders around fences, can you remind us what is RMS's responsibility around fences and, secondly, what are they actually doing?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I think it is a bit of an open-ended question because it varies from one region to the next in relation to fencing.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Do you want to take it on notice and get back to us with an accurate response?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I may give you an answer; we can provide more for you. In relation to that, we also know there are groups out there like BlazeAid that have stepped up and are working with local communities. We have also had the Australian Defence Force [ADF] that has been on the ground in a lot of areas. Even around my area of Running Stream the ADF have been heavily involved.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: They are all doing a wonderful job. My question is, What is RMS's contribution to rebuilding fences?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I think our primary focus has been removing those trees that have fallen down and blocked a number of our highways, Kings Highway, Castlereagh Highway, Alpine Way. That has been our primary focus, and to make sure that the roads are safe. In some cases, even guard rails, as I said before with the previous question. It could take three months to two years in some areas to get it back to looking normal again as to what it was before the fires. There is an extensive amount of work that Transport support is providing and continues to provide as well.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It has been raised with me, certainly in one spot there was an issue around the roads into an evacuation centre arising from the fire season we have had. Is there going to be any work done to make sure that the road access to evacuation centres is capable of meeting the large volume of traffic? I think everyone underestimated how many people had to be moved from some of these places to an evacuation centre. Are you directing the public servants in your agency as part of the after-fire processes to look at roads into evacuation centres and what we can do to make sure they are capable if ever this happens again?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I think so. I think sometimes where the nature of the fire actually hits is also going to determine where an evacuation centre point is going to be. That can also determine where that might be at any particular time. In relation to that, we must remember too that there is an inquiry, so the inquiry itself I am sure is going to come up with a number of recommendations—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I would love that inquiry to have public hearings, Minister, because people would—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I think it is important to make sure that the right measures are taking place. I am sure the inquiry is going to identify a number of changes that need to be considered. Of course we want people to be able to travel safely to evacuation centres.

~BREAK MENDRA

Of course we want people to be able to reach out to them but Mr Staples can give you some further information as to what he has actually asked the department to be looking at right now in relation to some of those accesses safely to those evacuation centres.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, I would like to hear that and I will explore this further this afternoon but if you have a couple of brief statements around that, that would be good.

Mr STAPLES: I think probably your point is valid around the evacuation centres and the priority around that. What I would say is obviously we will wait for the review but I would also broaden that out. It is not just about evacuation centres.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: No, I know.

Mr STAPLES: If you can evacuate people completely out of a region—and we had that example post New Year's where we had a couple of days to evacuate tens of thousands of people out of the South Coast.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes.

Mr STAPLES: It is about looking at particular areas, the construct of those areas and what is the best thing to do. If you can get people out of an area completely, that is even better.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes.

Mr STAPLES: So we have to have prioritisation around that.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Okay. We can explore that a bit more this afternoon.

Mr STAPLES: Yes. I am sure you will.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, are you responsible for the regional airports? Does that fall within your remit?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It does, yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: This is bushfire related.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Or it does, yes—partly, yes. Ask me a question and we will see.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Ask it and we will work it out. Tumut aerodrome—no commercial airline goes in and out of there but it is used heavily or extensively for emergencies. In the winter, up until now, it has been used mainly for evacuating people out of the snow in the snow season. During the bushfire season Mr Graham and I had a chance to go and one day they had 65 flights out of there—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Sixty-five.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: —but they could leave with the water tankers only two-thirds full because of the nature of the aerodrome. The strip is not long enough and it is not wide enough. Pretty clearly during the bushfires it was one of the main aerodromes being used by the emergency services and when we were there. The day before, it was being used for the ACT bushfires because the smoke was blowing across the ACT and they could not use their aerodrome. They were actually taking it all out of Tumut. Minister, have you had a chance to look at the Tumut aerodrome? Secondly, do you acknowledge that it should be elevated to an emergency standard aerodrome so that it can be used for the snow and the summer seasons down that way?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I would have to probably check the status of that one because with a lot of our regional airports they are actually largely owned or managed by local government, okay?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Let's make that clear. The other thing is they are also regulated by the Federal Government. In relation to that particular question on that particular airport, I would have to take it on notice to actually determine what is needed there. That is the first I have heard of this one.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, what this highlights, as a part of coming out of the fire season essentially is that there is a need for a number of airports, aerodromes or runways, I think, to be designated as an emergency service level so that we can use them, we can guarantee we can get our aircraft in and out in the case of emergency. Do you not agree?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I think the fires have highlighted a number of changes that are needed. Let's be honest, at the end of the day the fires have raised a number of things about how different practices can be used into the future, how we can do things better, how we can actually address emergency situations. As I said, this could be something that we would need to have discussions further with the local council. If Tumut is actually run and managed by the local council—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It is.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It is? Okay. So it is actually with the council. But I am sure that the Government will have conversations with councils about looking at how we can actually provide emergency services better into those communities.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Really we are asking have you made representations? Clearly no, but are you prepared to make representations to this effect, given the importance, just to underline what we were told. If

those flights had taken off full as opposed to two-thirds full that would have been homes saved, property protected, fires out earlier. That was the view that was put to us on the ground.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: You are probably asking questions now that are relevant to another Minister.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am asking will you make representations?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I always make—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Will you look into it?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Hang on, Mr Graham. I will tell you now, my area was also impacted by fires so I make representations to other Ministers and to different departments about things that I believe should be considered by this Government. So I think the inquiry also is going to identify a number of changes that need to be adopted by agencies and government and various departments as well. I will raise things that are appropriate that are going to ensure that we combat these situations better into the future. Will we still have bushfires? The answer is yes. Can we do it better? I always say yes. You know, there will be bushfires again into the future and we will probably need to look at our practices again then, but the answer is yes. I think it is something that needs to be raised for emergency services.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: But it is also a question you might want to ask the emergency services Minister as well to consider.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Thank you. Just one last thing on that. The case presented to us by the Tumut or Snowy Valleys council was pretty compelling. Can you give an undertaking that you will go and meet with them and talk to them about this so that you actually are apprised of the issue yourself rather than just hear it from us?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes. There is an inquiry. There are people that are going around at the moment holding inquiries. There is a review. They are meeting with councils. They are hosting meetings across the State. I would certainly hope that they attend the inquiry that will be hosted down in their neck of the woods and also provide input into that. Snowy Valleys Council I have met with on roads and transport projects in the past. I am sure we will continue to meet and I am sure matters like this will be raised, but that would be the most appropriate forum at this point in time for them to raise it through.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you, Minister. I want to return to where my colleague was on regional train services in recent times—bushfires, floods and this tragic recent incident we have already talked about. I want to ask about the backdrop though to what has been going on over the last five years, and that is that running times have been getting significantly worse over that period. I am asking: What does that mean? How concerned are you? I will use one example, which is that the XPT service between Sydney and Melbourne has arrived on time only 41 per cent of the time so far this financial year. In 2018-19 it arrived 56 per cent of the time on time. Five years ago reliability was 72 per cent. It is down to 41 per cent. Times for trips to Brisbane, Casino, Dubbo and Grafton on average are worse than five years ago. How concerned are you, Minister, that this is a general run-down in the regional train service network?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Is it not good to also know that we are replacing the regional fleet? As you are aware, we are actually investing \$2.8 billion to actually build a new regional rail maintenance facility.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Those trains are three years away. What happens in the meantime? Is this going to keep getting worse?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Hang on. Because of the way this Government has handled its finances we are able to invest in new trains. You know that we are going to be replacing the XPTs. You also know we are going to be replacing the Endeavours and the Xplorers and a new regional rail maintenance facility is going to be built in Dubbo. We know that the XPTs have certainly been a much-loved train that have been well and truly used by people in regional and rural parts of New South Wales. The line in particular that you raise figures about, that particular line I know for a fact that freight resumed on that particular line a few days ago. I can tell you know that a passenger train was operating yesterday but due to the slowness of it, due to Australian Rail Track Corporation [ARTC] carrying out a number of investigations onto that track at the moment as well, the decision was made to actually put passengers onto buses to be able to move them down to Melbourne in a more timely manner so that they are not going to miss those connections that they have already booked in for.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Given what you are describing, is this going to get worse before it gets better? That is really what the situation is that you seem to be describing.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I can tell you there is a lot of excitement out there with people knowing that there is a new regional rail fleet coming.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, down the track, in three years' time.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Hang on—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But is this going to get worse over the next three years?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: You do not build them overnight. But this is a government that has actually signed them up already. We know they are being built. We know they are coming.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, I have some questions about that but will this 72 per cent reliability down to 41 per cent in three years get worse before those new trains arrive?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Look, what we will always do though is make sure that passenger safety is going to be our number one priority.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Understood.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Passenger safety and the safety for our crews will be the first priority.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: What will it mean for these figures? Will they get worse in the next three years?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I cannot sit here with a crystal ball and tell you if they are going to get worse. We would like to think that if people book a train they are going to be able to keep to a timetable. It is critical for customers to have that experience that they can travel on a train but we also know that they have got a connection, usually at the end point, whether it is catching up with family and friends, whether it is catching up with other connections. It is important that we have the opportunity to make sure that they are on time.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, if it is going to get worse over the next three years do you think passengers should be compensated?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It would get worse if you guys were in government, I will tell you now. The trains would not even be going. You would not have ordered new trains.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, you are in government, you are the relevant Minister—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: And thank goodness we are. We are going to be here a lot longer.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Do you think passengers should be compensated for how late your trains are running?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Do not yell. Do not yell.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Should we give them back some money, given what you are delivering?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Calm down. We always want to support the customer and obviously have the customer put first; obviously we are committed. If we can make changes, we do that. Where we see trains—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It is a simple question, Minister. I do not want a general wobble through regional New South Wales. Should we be returning some money to these passengers who are hardly ever arriving on time at their destinations? These people have got lives to lead. This actually has a real impact on people.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: That is why we also put in coach services as well. If there are delays from time to time you note that we put in coach services.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I have let you put that on the record, Minister.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Coach services as well.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Should we be compensating these people? That is my question.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: If we are going to compensate everyone—you were whingeing to me earlier about finances and now you are telling me that we should be out compensating people. Thank God you guys have not got hold of the purse strings in the State Government.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I was assuming you might run the trains on time at some point.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: What is the cause of the delays? You have said that you have ordered new trains. Is it the old XPT fleet causing the delays or is it the condition of the track?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We have already ordered them. We have actually signed up to those contracts. Momentum Trains are building those new trains. They have made no secret about the fact that these trains will be delivered in 2023.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Is it the condition of the track or is it the existing fleet that is causing the delays?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We are continuing to make improvements to the track. That is why we have programs like Fixing Country Rail. That is why we are putting in more loops so we can get more freight onto our tracks. We can also move—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: These figures show it is not working.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: You two are asking two different questions. Come on, what is going on?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: We are working well together.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It is teamwork over here. Just answer.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We always want the customer experience to be a good one. That is a priority. Of course I would love trains to be operating all the time on time. Is it practical? Is it feasible? No, it is not. There are circumstances from time to time that prevent that. That is going to continue to happen. At the end of the day, we are also looking forward to a new fleet that is going to be rolled out in a few years' time.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, with regard to the new fleet, why did you rule out tilt trains?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Tilt trains?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: They were not included. I want to know why they were ruled out. There must have been a reason, or reasons, why they were ruled out.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I am going to get Mr Staples to give you a short answer there, or even Mr Allaway.

Mr STAPLES: I would say on tilt trains and speed that in the faster rail process we are going through, looking at a number of corridors gives us the opportunity to look at more dedicated fleets specific to a corridor that can be tailored, whether that is a tilt train or a different train technology. The fleet that we have procured is largely to replace the operations of the services we currently have. We did not include it in this round but it would be fair to say that there will be consideration for future projects.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So they have not been ruled out for future. I guess that is where I was going with that. With regard to the very fast train or the faster train system, I believe there is a report with the Minister at the moment around those corridors?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: That is correct. I have seen a preliminary report. That has been presented now to me.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So the time frame moving away from this, you will give due consideration and at some point there will be actions around some of these corridors, is that correct?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Absolutely, but that is still a report that I have received that would obviously go through the processes for the department to look at it and then it will go to our Cabinet for final decision. We have actually announced over \$290 million as part of the investment into fast rail. I said to you last time that it is not about having a faster train overnight; it is about ensuring that we can actually have fast rail. It might be making improvements around the rail network, it might be putting in loops as well, it might be fixing up some of those stations which are going to be strategic when we are looking at the corridor for fast rail into the future. There were four corridors that were being explored. Professor Andrew McNaughton has done that work and I look forward to progressing it into the future.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Are those four corridors publicly known?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: They are publicly known. I can tell you what they are.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: There is one up your way?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: There is one out to the Central West, yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Some of this work is a substantial amount of work and investment. This is not going to be an overnight decision, is it Minister?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It will not be an overnight decision but the Government has actually got around \$295 million for fast rail. We have got investment already put on the table to be able to deliver and roll out a number of projects. This is a longer-term vision by the Government. It also shows that we are thinking beyond an election cycle. We are also thinking about the future and the way in which people are going to move from the regions into other centres as well.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Will there be a chance for the community and the public to have a look at that report, or a version of that report, so they can make some assessments and contributions and make comment around the four corridors that are being looked at?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: The first point I want to make is the fact that there are the four corridors: There is the Canberra corridor, Newcastle, Wollongong to Bomaderry and also out to the Central West. Professor Andrew McNaughton also as a part of the compilation of the report went out to each of those communities. He held forums, meetings; he met with stakeholders. He met with councils. He met with interested parties that wanted to come along and provide submissions for that particular report that has now been completed. That has actually, as you are aware, come to me. That will still be something that needs to go to Cabinet before it is released. But this is a government that actually releases reports for the community to see and I am sure that this is going to be a report that I am sure—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Not always.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You may have gone too far.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: When we are talking about faster rail into the future and even fast rail, it will be a significant report that will be, I am sure, welcomed.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Has the National Party walked away from the Bells Line expressway?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We are continuing to provide investment into the Bells Line as well.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The Bells Line of Road?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We know that the Bells Line of Road is something that has been spoken about. You and I both know it has been—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Can we just be very clear, Minister, for the sake of why we are here? There is the Bells Line of Road and there is the Bells Line expressway.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I know it is.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You and I, and probably Mr Farraway, would be very clear about that.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Me more than you.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: There are a lot of other people who would get them all intermingled and mixed up. I am talking about the Bells Line expressway—or the proposed Bells Line expressway—which was an election commitment by the National Party previously. I just want to know: Have you walked away from it?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We have actually committed \$2.5 billion into the Great Western Highway. The reason that we have committed \$2.5 billion into the Great Western Highway is because we see that that is going to be the short to medium term in addressing road safety and moving cars and freight more efficiently through the mountains.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The Bells Line expressway is not on the short- and medium-term agenda of the National Party.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: You did not let me finish. As a part of that \$2.5 billion, that was an election commitment that was given before the last election, we have actually progressed the work for the Great Western Highway. In relation to the Bells Line expressway, we have always said that this is a road that will take place but it is going to be something that is going to be into the future.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: How far?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It is something that is a long way off but what we have also done is we continue to provide investment into the Bells Line of Road. As you—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: How long way off is it, Minister?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Hang on. As someone who travels both of these roads, I can tell you right now the improvements that have been made into the Bells Line of Road. We are not going to see support from the Federal Government into a Bells Line expressway and to the Great Western Highway. In the short and medium term, the way in which we are going to provide safer and more efficient access through the mountains is on the Great Western Highway.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, we need to be honest then with the communities west of the Dividing Range, the communities that we all know—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: This was made clear at the election. I stood at a press conference where this was spoken about. We announced that this was our priority going forward. What we are continuing to do—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The Great Western Highway.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Correct. I was at the press conference where the Deputy Premier was; I was present. We indicated that we can keep talking about the Bells Line of Road expressway for another 10 or 20 years, but we are still going to be talking about it then. This is about delivering something now on the ground for not only those communities in the Blue Mountains but also for people when it comes to travelling out to the Central West. That is why—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So to be clear, the Bells Line expressway is not on the short- to medium-term agenda? Essentially, it is not on the agenda for a long, long time.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I think you need to be very mindful as well that the Government is still continuing to invest into the Bells Line of Road, continuing to make improvements. As you are aware, a number of years ago we put in about \$50 million and that was putting in six additional overtaking lanes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Safety enhancements.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: That was one of the main frustrations on the Bells Line of Road, if you get stuck behind a caravan—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Essentially, does the community west of the Dividing Range continue to agitate for the Bells Line expressway? Seriously, two weeks ago I met with a group of people who pulled out the Duncan Gay story again where Duncan is standing there saying that the National Party is going to build the Bells Line expressway. I said to them, "I think you will find that is not the case". It is not the case, is it? You are not going to build the Bells Line expressway.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I have made that very clear as I have been speaking that it is a longer-term project and in the short to medium term we are doing the Great Western Highway. The other thing on the Bells Line is we are continuing to invest in that road. We are seeing improvements over the Clarence Bridge, which is being replaced. There are millions of dollars going into that right now. There is planning work going around Scenic Hill, which is quite steep, for heavy vehicles coming down. We are continuing to invest into that road. Even anyone that has travelled the Bells Line would agree that over the last few years the investments that we have made into that road itself have improved the way in which people can travel through the mountains in a safer manner as well.

I do not think you should say one is done over the other, because we are doing both. We are doing the Great Western Highway, but the Bells Line of Road is still seeing a significant investment being made by this Government so that both of those roads are continuing to grow.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I just wanted the clarification on the expressway.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I want to ask about some other regional road projects which are proceeding about as quickly as the expressway we have just talked about in some instances. I have a list of 10 regional roads projects here, but I will give you one example. The Barton Highway improvements, which should have been completed by mid-2020 under the original planning, in the last forward work plan for roads will not be complete until quarter one of 2023-24. That is six months after the next election. Firstly, can you tell us anything about the Barton Highway improvements and why they are so late?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: As I said previously, this Government is investing in roads projects more than ever. Just this year alone, \$6 billion going into roads. We have got the Pacific Highway, we have got work on the Great Western Highway, Princes Highway, Silver City Highway, Cobb Highway.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am asking about one of those projects and I will come to some others. Why are the Barton Highway improvements so late?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We have just put out the review of environmental factors for the Barton Highway last week. We have had safety works that commenced in December of 2007. At the moment, we are asking the community—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You are supposed to be finished in a couple of months. Why is it so late? What has been the hold-up? Is it money, is it weather? What is the problem?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: At the end of the day, you can see that this Government is getting on and building the roads and highways across this State.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Not on the Barton Highway.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We have gone to the next stage, which is putting the environmental factors out asking for the public—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You are telling me about progress, but I am asking a different question, which is: What is the delay here? It is a simple question: Why has this been slow? Sometimes that happens. Why is this slow?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: When there are many projects operating it is about—everyone would like their road to be done tomorrow. This is a government that is trying to ensure that we are building as much as we can into the regions—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This was your Government's plan to be finished in a couple of months time. Instead, this will not be finished until—if it stays on time—well after the election.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: You cannot build it in a couple of months, let us be clear.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: What happened to the plan?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: As the Minister, I can tell you I committed to getting on with the Barton Highway. That is exactly what we have done. We have got the review of the environmental factors out right now. As the Minister, I am getting on with it and asking for the public to provide their submissions.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You are telling me about incremental progress. I am asking: Why will this not be finished, as it was promised, in a couple of months time? What was the hold-up?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Sometimes circumstances change in relation to big projects. We have a number of big projects across the State. I make no apologies for the number of projects that we have currently got—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is an incredibly woolly answer. That just sounds like you do not have the first clue why this project has been delayed.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: No, I have told you—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Can you tell us anything about this project?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes, I did. I told you that the review of the environmental factors is out right now asking the public to have their say and to make submissions in relation to that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Progress—why is it slow?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: And that needs to happen in the process of any major road, any major highway upgrade that is going to occur. So I would encourage you to get on board—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am clear on the steps that are taken to build a road. It is set out in the RMS work plan. I am asking: Why is this so delayed? Can you give us a single clue as to why this project is so delayed?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We are getting on with it.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You are not getting on with it; that is the point.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: You are criticising me now because we are at the next stage of getting on with it.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Why is this happening? Just tell me why. Just tell me why this is delayed.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We are getting on with it. We are at the next stage of asking the public now to actually provide feedback with the environmental factors that are out there. This is a government that is providing and building those road projects and this is the process that has to occur.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: But why is it late? There must have been a reason. Why is it late?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I think when you look at the capacity of the number of projects that we also have, it is capacity issues. There are issues around supply as well. We need to consider all these factors with the market as well. This is something that we do as a government.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Taking that point, how many regional roads projects are in a similar category? They were on the work plan and they have now been delayed, possibly because of those capacity issues you are referring to. How many regional roads projects are—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: But isn't it a good thing? How good is that, that we can actually—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It is not good if I am trying to drive the Barton Highway.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: How good is it that we can actually—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Are you serious? It is a good thing that they are this late?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: How good is it that we can be building all of these road projects across the State and we are—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You cannot be serious that it is good.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We are doing the Pacific Highway—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You cannot be serious.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We are doing the Great Western Highway, we are doing the Princes Highway, the Silver City Highway—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The Barton Highway running late is not a good thing.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: The Cobb Highway, the Newell Highway.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: How good is it that this is late? Is that your serious answer, Minister?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: All of these roads is what this Government is delivering in the regional communities.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is your answer to these communities? I will give you another chance to answer that question.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: There are four stages to this project anyway.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I have seen the work plan and I thank Mr Staples for handing you the note. Is that seriously your answer to these communities—"How good is it that this is late, because we are building elsewhere"?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: No, that is not what I said.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I will give you another chance.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: That is not what I said.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I will give you another chance.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: What they say to me is, "Thank God you're not in government because it would never happen." We would not even be putting up an environmental study to even consider. You guys would still be talking about it in 10 years, 20 years, time and it would not have even gone to the first base.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: My question—which you have not answered—is: How many regional roads projects are late?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: There are many projects that we have got happening and we will continue to invest in the regions. As you know, we have got our—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You just have no idea do you, Minister? You are the relevant Minister and you just cannot answer the question.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Hang on. We are fixing country roads. There is another \$543 million that is being delivered into roads. We have got our Fixing Local Roads Program.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am going to move on.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Hang on. You can actually—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, I have noted—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: You can actually mention—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I have noted all the information you are able to provide us and it is very, very little. We will move to your officials with some further questioning on that. But I will indicate we will certainly be asking about 10 roads projects that are significantly late in your area.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Give me the list and I will get them ready for you.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We will provide you with the list perhaps afterwards.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: On the same theme, Tabulam Bridge was originally announced at \$24 million. What is the final cost?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I would have to take that on notice, unless Mr Regan has that information.

Mr REGAN: We can come back with some further information on that this afternoon.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: About \$48 million?

Mr REGAN: We can come back this afternoon with details on that.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The RMS *Forward Work Plan Major Projects 2021* indicates that the bridge would be completed by quarter three of financial year 2018-19. The cost has doubled from the original announced cost of \$24 million to \$48 million. Do you accept the project is late, Minister?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We said we would come back to you later.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So it is late though, is it not?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Let me just check as to the reason why that one is late.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: And the cost. It is late and it is twice the cost. There must be some reasons for that.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We said we would come back to you on that.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You do not know.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: When I have over 12,000 road and transport projects, I am sorry that I do not have the specifics on the ones that you only want to bring up. But as a Minister who is responsible for road projects and transport projects right across the State—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Where we are going with this, as the Minister, when a project is over time and over budget? Are you not told?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I am sorry that you have a specific one that I do not actually know about.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You do not know when they are over time or over budget?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I actually deal with a lot of road projects.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: As the Minister responsible, you are saying you do not know when they are over time or over budget?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Hang on, I could ask you questions about roads. I am sure you would not even know where they are.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I reckon you could give it a pretty fair shake. Duncan used to come and talk to me about those. So what is the process? When a project is over time or over budget, when are you told?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I know with the Tabulam Bridge we have obviously had some issues around that particular project. We also know that a new contractor has been appointed as well in relation to that bridge, but I would have to follow up some of the other factors that could be causing delay. But we do have a new contractor, so that in itself has caused a delay from the previous contractor that we had.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: But when are you told that a project is over time and/or over budget? There must be a process where the department officials come and say, "Hey, Minister, we have got a problem." When are you told?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I am kept informed on projects right across the State in different zones, in different areas. The local members come to me as well, talking about their particular projects, which are important to them.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So you do know when they are over time and over budget?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: There are plenty of projects—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That are over time and over budget?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: And there are plenty of projects that we finish ahead of schedule and before time. So that happens.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But you cannot tell us how many?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: The Silver City Highway is ahead of schedule, so there you go. Have you been there? I know you have. I know you have not.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I have. You cannot tell us how many projects are over time. You just cannot tell us. Is that not something you asked Mr Staples?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We get lots of projects—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Have you asked?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: —briefings, updates all the time in relation to every project.

The CHAIR: That is all we have time for. Thank you very much, Minister, for attending the hearing. We are finished with your questioning. The Committee will now break for a short period and we will return at 11.40 a.m. for further questioning.

(The Minister for Regional Transport and Roads withdrew.)

(Short adjournment)

BARBARA WISE, Executive Director, Transport and Partnerships, Regional and Outer Metropolitan Division, Transport for NSW, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Welcome back to the public hearing for the inquiry into budget estimates 2019-20 – further hearings. We are examining the proposed expenditure in the portfolios of Regional Transport and Roads. In addition to the departmental witnesses who appeared in our earlier session, at the witness table now we also have Ms Barbara Wise, Executive Director, Transport and Partnerships, Regional and Outer Metropolitan Division, Transport for NSW, joining us for the remaining of the hearing.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I thank Mr Staples and his officials for being available for this. We are going to touch on a number of issues we addressed with the Minister and then move to some other issues as well. I might start with where we started with the Minister, on the regional seniors travel card. I want to ask about one specific issue, which is that budget cost that the Minister has now revealed—I think for the first time, to our knowledge—for veterans. I am asking specifically about the veterans' component. It is \$26 million, which he says will now be absorbed within Transport over two years. Mr Staples, where will those cuts happen? Can you give us any information on that?

Mr STAPLES: I am certainly happy to give you our position around that. I take one minute to recognise that the membership here is a little bit different to who we had here last time. Mr Fuller is still acting in the Deputy Secretary role for regional and outer metropolitan. Mr Regan has responsibility across the entire Transport cluster for projects. Sitting under Mr Regan is Mr Roy Wakelin-King. He is in a slightly different role to when he would have previously spoken to you. He is mainly responsible for projects, so when we are talking projects today in regional areas Mr Wakelin-King will be key around that.

We have Mr Allaway here still looking after TrainLink. Mr John Dinan is basically the person with custodianship of the network as a whole, so when we are talking about maintenance and our relationships with local government and so forth he will be helpful in that space. Ms Wise will be able to bring the community transport, bus network and public transport service in overall. It is a slight, pardon the pun, evolution as we have been making the organisational changes and getting things stood up.

In relation to your question, just to clarify, I think there has been a bit of a misunderstanding around the numbers. Our estimates for the veterans category is about 34,000 eligible people, which equates to about \$8½ million. There have been some different numbers stated. You would appreciate that this is actually quite a complex thing as we have been going through looking at all the different categories and eligibility. We have been working across the State and Commonwealth governments to understand the various eligibility categories. We have had to sort of work that through—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: There have been some different numbers, Mr Staples, but they have been provided by the Minister, and they were \$26 million. Are you saying the Minister was wrong on that number?

Mr STAPLES: I think it might have been a misunderstanding about what he was being asked to provide around that. What I can say for the department is that our estimates—and we work to estimates here, because ultimately things change—in providing advice was that it was about 34,000 eligible people. I think we probably provided a higher number initially, but as we have done more detailed work we have subsequently updated. We think there is a financial impact of about \$8½ million. In relation to your question—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Over what time period are you talking about? Is it \$8½ million over the life of the project?

Mr STAPLES: That is in a year of the project, but bear in mind this spans over two years.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So in fact it will be double that, you are saying?

Mr STAPLES: Yes, but if you are talking about it in an annual impact—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am talking about the life of the project, which is two years.

Mr STAPLES: That would equate to essentially double the \$8½ million to \$17 million.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Okay, that is good. I think to be fair to the Minister he was talking about two years, although even on that figuring he has got quite a different number to the one you are providing.

Mr STAPLES: That may well be based on some of the earlier advice we gave in relation to the categories. As I said, we did some preliminary work and then we subsequently continued to look at a—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is a very generous answer. I appreciate you giving that.

Mr STAPLES: In relation to the budget, I think you would appreciate when you look at the take-up that we have got some work to do—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Mr Staples, I am not asking about that. I just simply wanted to ask about the veterans figures.

Mr STAPLES: Sorry, I thought you were asking me about cuts.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The Minister has told us the veterans' component of the budget blowout will be taken out of Transport. Are you saying that any additional take-up—that is, if take-up rises above 40 per cent—will also be cut out of Transport?

Mr STAPLES: No. What the Minister indicated was in relation to veterans, that in the short term—he did talk about the budget process as well—Transport would absorb any additional costs in this financial year in relation to that, which I do not really consider to be a significant matter given that our overall operating expenditure is in the order of \$14½ billion. We get significant fluctuations in some aspects of our budget, such as revenue, so in the scheme of that it is within the range of variability we have within the budget.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But you are confirming now that cost overruns on the take-up rate will also come out of the Transport budget?

Mr STAPLES: No, I did not say that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Right. They will not come out or they will come out?

Mr STAPLES: We have worked really hard to get this program up and running. We have now got a significant take-up in terms of the number of people. We have got a budget process coming up for 2020-21 that gives us the opportunity, as you would be aware, a process with Treasury and then the Treasurer in the budget and our expenditure review committee to go through and look at all of the technical adjustments and other adjustments that are required to the budget. This would be dealt with through that process.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I might then ask you the question we asked of the Minister, just to be certain of what the response was: Are any other of the parameters for who gets this card under review?

Mr STAPLES: We have been asked to give advice to government around various categories, the numbers in categories and the dollars associated with those. The Government has made its policy position in relation to those and we are delivering on that program.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. The Government has moved on veterans but are there any other categories of people? We have talked about carers, people in receipt of disability payments and regional restrictions. To your knowledge, are any of those things under review at the moment, as we sit here?

Mr STAPLES: No, the only review that we are doing is the one that the Minister indicated. He was asked some broader questions around the way we are providing transport for people with disabilities and carers.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is separate to providing them a transport card, is it not?

Mr STAPLES: Yes, that is right.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So that review does not include the prospect of handing to one of these people who is not getting a card a transport card? That is off the table?

Mr STAPLES: He has asked us to provide advice on the effectiveness of the current support mechanisms we have for people with disabilities.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Just before I move away from this area, is there a line item that has been created within the budget or Transport for NSW so we can track this program, particularly over two years and then whatever may happen beyond that?

Mr STAPLES: Certainly we will track the real cost of this. There is a program, if that is what your question is.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes.

Mr STAPLES: Yes, definitely.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Can I just finish. The Minister was unable to tell us how many superannuation and annuity income earners might live in regional New South Wales. These were promised a card, in material that went to them. They have not received a card. How many superannuation and annuity income earners might live in regional New South Wales?

Mr STAPLES: I note the conversation you had previously when the Minister was here. We have done our work around what was put to the Parliamentary Budget Office in relation to that and the numbers, and to my knowledge those categories were not included. So I do not think we have done any work around that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: At no point have you been asked to even model providing to those additional categories?

Mr STAPLES: I am happy to take that on notice and see whether this afternoon we have got any information around what other scenarios—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I would be comfortable with that but I am asking at a top level. You would be aware if the Minister had asked you? I am happy for you to check, Mr Staples.

Mr STAPLES: We will do a check to make sure we are clear on what we have been asked.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But you would agree that there would be hundreds of thousands of people in that category in regional New South Wales?

Mr STAPLES: I am not here to speculate on numbers.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I will hand to my colleague then.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I would like to talk about some of the bushfires. First of all, I want to acknowledge there would have been across regional New South Wales a lot of your employees involved in a range of ways through the last fire season who also would have been impacted heavily. I want to acknowledge that. The first thing I want to ask is to do with road signs. We are still receiving information from people saying that the roads have been reopened, the speed limit initially was 80 kilometres per hour, that has been increased to the speed limit that it was prior to the fire but not all of the signs have been replaced, particularly the corner indication signs or the reduce speed for corners. This is a big task. But what is the process for replacing the road signs on our roads across regional New South Wales?

Mr STAPLES: I will get Mr Dinan to give you an outline on the process of that. Certainly the intention is that we go through every corridor and do an assessment. Obviously the community is keen to get their road back into full function as quickly as possible. But overall and certainly what I have witnessed myself is that our people on the ground have been quite thoughtful around balancing the road safety outcome with needing to get the roads reopened. Mr Dinan is pretty heavily involved, bearing in mind this started really for us back in August.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes, it did.

Mr STAPLES: This is not just a recent two- or three-month episode. We have had a substantial amount of work going on in the north as well. I might ask Mr Dinan to give you a bit more information about the process we step through.

Mr DINAN: Thanks, Mr Staples, and thanks for the question. In looking at what Mr Staples said, we have been responding probably since late August to bushfires, either bushfires cutting highways or back burns or both. It started up in the north of the State and moved down through the Great Western Highway area and then down to the southern slopes, as we know, around Christmas time. They have been quite devastating. That process has been ongoing and our first priority has been trying to keep the road open and trafficable. That has mainly required clearing trees and larger objects from across the road. In the path of those fires not only was there tree damage and roads closed but, as you say, there was a whole lot of roadside furniture that was damaged, be it guardrails. Some things on the Oxley Highway actually had retaining walls damaged we had to replace prior to reopening. So a large lot of infrastructure we had to go through. I suppose we have prioritised what we needed to replace to get the road trafficable, especially not only just for cars but also for heaving vehicles.

As we note, especially in the southern part of the State around Batemans Bay, particularly the east-west connections that got cut really put pressure on those other connections. So getting to your questions about signs, we prioritised those appropriately so we were able to reopen the roads. We were able to open the roads at sometimes lower speeds, which meant that some of those advisory speeds did not necessarily have to be up prior to that going. Though in some areas, the Kings Highway we were able to get reopened within about a week and a half of the road being handed back to us, just after New Year. In fact we got one of our local panel suppliers from

Canberra to come down and do an audit of what signs were in place, and they had all those signs back in place at the time of opening, which was a fantastic effort by our team but also really acknowledges the great work of some of our regional partners in those areas to do that.

Some areas have been a lot more challenging. Certainly the Gwydir Highway and Oxley Highway, large amounts of damage. We are still clearing trees, still working on other infrastructure. So the signs are ordered, the signs are progressively going up. Certainly on the Princes Highway I understand probably in the next four weeks all those signs will be up, especially the advisory ones, and we are really prioritising making sure that directional signs or tourist signs are back in place for Easter, noting that those areas were badly affected around their what was a really high-income time for them around January. We are really prioritising those. I have met with my teams over the last couple of weeks and they are all well aware of that. As long as we are able to get the signs manufactured, which I expect our partners will be able to do, we will be able to get those back in place at that time.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The process for expediting the procurement for the panels and signs, how do you do that?

Mr DINAN: We buy a lot of signs at any time. We have got a really good panel of suppliers. They are as aware as anybody in the community of the impacts here and are willing to help. It is just physically getting materials like reflective material and hours to do it. That is why I suppose I recognise our supplier in Canberra—I am sorry I do not know their name—they were particularly responsive in being able to do the audit, decide what was not there, and replace all those signs. Some of them they have in stock. But we have a number of providers across the State who we go through and prioritise signs. We have different response times on our panels. If we need to get something urgently we pay a premium price for or they might hold in stock. Other times we do it more routinely. I think it is a fairly mature process and one that we are working through and we are really dealing a lot with our partners.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: But the aim is—

Mr DINAN: Yes. It is not only us, it is councils doing the same thing as well.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes, that is fair.

Mr STAPLES: Can I say if there is any individual who feels that there is a place on our network where we have not got signs in place relative to the road speed, then just let us know and we will look at it. We would be very happy.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I think most people are appreciative of the fact that it will take a while. It is a pretty large task that has to be undertaken. Easter I think is an appropriate time. Regarding the replacement of the furniture and concept of betterment, maybe Mr Staples might be able to answer this. I am concerned when you replace like with like, the next bushfire, it burns again. Some of the furniture I understand, probably the nature of the materials used cannot be made fireproof or heat tolerant, furniture or structures, but are we looking at betterment wherever we can to improve and make sure that the next bushfire we do not lose as much?

Mr STAPLES: There are different levels to this and I certainly would say our objective will be as we respond and restore the assets that we will want them to be more resilient to bushfire. There are a couple of layers to it and certainly I think Mr Dinan can give some examples where we have had timber bridges, timber retaining walls where we are going back and replacing with different ones. I can ask him to comment on that. I think part of what you might be covering, which Mr Fuller will have a bit more information on, is around local government and what they need in terms of betterment and funding streams and the mechanisms around that, which is a little bit different. For us it is a conscious decision to get in and make those improvements as a bit of a no regrets because it is one thing for a sign to get burnt out but retaining walls and so forth are lengthy processes to repair. So I will ask Mr Dinan to talk a little bit further about that.

Mr DINAN: We have been very aware of the points that improve in the resilience of our road network. As Mr Staples has noted there are a couple of examples across our network—the retaining walls on the Oxley Highway, where we had timber sleepers in there that at the time were probably shown to be appropriate, but when the fire came through they burnt out. We replaced those in the first few weeks after that occurred with steel members so that they were structurally more sound and also were able to resist fire to a greater extent. It is kind of quite a wide issue in dealing with a number of bridges. We are certainly discussing with the Original Equipment Manufacturer [OEM] and other providers about replacing timber bridges with something that is a little bit more resilient—around steel and concrete. So there is that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Mr Staples, we may come back to some of those issues. Before we do can I return to the regional seniors travel card and ask: Are you aware that the issue of the misrepresentations made when certain people were told they would receive the card, did not receive the card and will not receive the card has been referred to the New South Wales Electoral Commission after concerns that it represents a serious breach of the Electoral Act?

Mr STAPLES: No. I do not think that is something for the department to be commenting on. I think we are fairly clear on what we believe the Government asks us to do.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am not asking you to comment. I am simply asking: Are you aware that this program has now been the subject of a referral to the Electoral Commission—

Mr STAPLES: No.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —because of a potential serious electoral breach?

Mr STAPLES: No. We are getting on with delivery of the program within the policy as we understand it.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Have you been spoken to, or has the Electoral Commission approached you as part of its investigations into this allegation of a serious electoral breach?

Mr STAPLES: Certainly I do not have any knowledge of that but I will take it on notice and see if we have had any correspondence with the department.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Mr Staples, this issue of localised recovery—each of the local government areas have their own issues, of course—are you aware of any local recovery officers that councils have employed that would work with RMS or Transport for NSW as a part of post-bushfire or post-disaster series?

Mr STAPLES: I am not quite sure if I am fully following your question.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Around the State, are there any local recovery officers being appointed by local government to assist in the rebuilding after the fires and now the floods?

Mr STAPLES: I will ask Mr Dinan. He probably has more on-the-ground knowledge of what is going on. But certainly my own experience from going out into the regions and being in places like the South Coast is the connection between transport—because it is Transport for NSW now, not Roads and Maritime Services—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Old habits die hard.

Mr STAPLES: —it is really well connected. In terms of specific appointments by local government, I think Mr Dinan can give more insight.

Mr DINAN: Thanks, Mr Staples. I am not aware of any of those. We have reached out to every council deliberately. We went around and visited them, inspected them with our own officers from our local government office, our local regional staff and OEM. We kind of went around as a group and touched base with every council individually to look at specific issues like were they aware of what was available, what type of damage they had, where they were having issues, and sometimes the betterment issue came up that we discussed at length. But I am not aware of any particular officers being in place. We have people we liaise with, unless that is what you are referring to.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: In regards to that, if there is a slowness in rolling out some of the infrastructure, the furniture and the councils had local concerns, how are those local concerns being accommodated? I guess what I am getting to is this: Is there a better mechanism that would assist in a more seamless response? It sounds to me like Transport for NSW is comfortable with the arrangements at the moment.

Mr STAPLES: In terms of us restoring our assets, we have got our own people on the ground. We have got a supply chain. As Mr Dinan outlined with the signs as an example, we have certainly dialled that up, in the same way that in the immediate response we brought more arborists on to help with tree-clearing and so forth but we have got a supply chain there to draw on. Obviously it is stretched resources across the State but as the fire moved south we brought more resources from the north to support the efforts in the south, for example, when that was all happening. I think it is a different matter for local government because they are not our resources but there are plenty of examples where we have got side by side with local government and supported them in doing things that maybe they would have done. Obviously they look after some regional roads and that as well where we may have gone and done some activities in that place just to get things moving.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Mr Staples, is Transport for NSW providing secretarial support to the road reclassification task force? If so, what is the staffing arrangement?

Mr STAPLES: I might ask Mr Fuller whether he has any details around that.

Mr FULLER: Yes. Thank you, Mr Staples. Yes, Transport for NSW will be providing secretariat services and any other technical advice that the panel would seek from us as part of our normal operation.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Have you established a set-aside unit or a standalone unit to support the task force or are you just doing it from within, in-house?

Mr FULLER: Effectively what is happening is that we have an area within our division that is referred to as planning and programs. That part of the operation will support the road reclassification panel in their review.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You will have staff travel with the task force as they travel intrastate on the roadshow?

Mr FULLER: Clearly they will need some support along the way across the State, yes, and we will do everything from travel and secretariat responsibilities through to seeking out people for support and advice from other parts of the department. So absolutely we will be helping and assisting them in that regard, yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I would like to go back to my question about the Tabulam bridge. The Minister said there was a second contractor appointed. Mr Staples, what happened to the first contractor? Why was there a delay? Why is the delay so big?

Mr STAPLES: Look, we would acknowledge that that project has been a delay and we are all disappointed around that. I had the opportunity to go out there last year and see that wonderful old structure but it is well and truly past its use as an asset for the community although we are going to retain a portion of it for historical benefit. But there was certainly a difficulty with the performance of the contractor. Mr Wakelin-King has certainly got some good firsthand knowledge that he can talk or step through with you about that.

Mr WAKELIN-KING: Thanks, Mr Staples. There are a couple of things I would like to just emphasise on that. Obviously the Tabulam bridge project, as Mr Staples said, is a really important project as part of the Bridges for the Bush program. It will really enhance the east-west connectivity on the Bruxner Highway. As Mr Staples indicated, we came to a position with the original contractor in terms of how the project was progressing. We entered into good faith negotiations and we were able to settle the arrangements with that contractor where they would conclude their services and then we would bring in a new contractor to complete the project. The details of those arrangements are subject to confidentiality of that agreement but suffice to say that we are continuing to deliver the project as quickly as we can.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Mr Wakelin-King, is the delay because you had to go through that process before you appointed a second contractor, or was it already quite delayed which was the catalyst for the discussion with the first contractor?

Mr WAKELIN-KING: If I could just add a bit more to that, sorry—what I was saying. My apologies. There are a number of factors that have contributed. Like any project where there are certain externalities that come into effect, which may impact on the program, we have just been talking about the bushfires. The Tabulam bridge project was not damaged as a consequence of the bushfires but we did have to evacuate the project team on a number of occasions, which resulted in certain extensions of time being lodged by the contractor. In addition to that, despite doing some investigations, we had some further Aboriginal heritage finds, which we had to stop work and do some detailed analysis, restoration and recovery of those heritage finds. If I say could this: There is a very good aspect to that where those artefacts have now actually been given to the local primary school—a large Aboriginal community in that region. So that has been a positive outcome of that.

In addition to that we have had flooding. By way of example in the recent rains we had, I was up there at the end of last year when the river, the Clarence River, was at its lowest record levels. Within the space of a short period of time at the beginning of this year we had significant rainfalls to the extent where we had to, once again, delay work because of that. To give you a sense, we had 1.8 megalitres of water per second flowing down the river, which obviously we need to pause work for in circumstances to that effect. So there has been a combination of factors. Yes, there was a pause while we had to change from the original contractor to the second contractor but we are looking—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: How many months was that?

Mr WAKELIN-KING: Sorry, I was about to say. We are on schedule, as a consequence of the revised program, to open this year. We are trying to recover as much time as we can so I cannot give you a specific answer. We are making up as much time as we can. The new contractor is performing well, we are delighted to say, and the team is working well to get the project finished as quickly as it can. They have got a provisional time scheduled but obviously the recent rains may have impacted on that. The other issue that I would like to emphasise, which is very important, is that we like to acknowledge both contractors in this regard. All subcontractors were retained and all moneys owed were paid. It has been a complex project affected by fire and flood and a number of other impacts, but we are hopeful to get it open by the third quarter of this year, weather dependent.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Does that totally explain the blowout in the final cost? It is because of all of those factors?

Mr WAKELIN-KING: A number of those factors that I have just spoken to will always put upward pressure on the budget and, whilst we make allowance for those with contingencies, some of them are what I would call beyond normal contingency planning. The extent of the fires was spoken about and the extent of the flooding. It has been a confluence of some pretty extreme events up there so that has had an impact on the budget, as well as those Aboriginal finds that I spoke about. These things happen in projects. I would say that, as a general rule, about 97 per cent to 98 per cent of our projects were on time and on budget. It is just that from time to time we experience some of these externalities, which is the case with Tabulam Bridge. I would like to emphasise the importance of that work, the effectiveness of the local community engaging with us and it will be a very good project for the local community in the east-west movements on the Buxton Highway.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Chair, I was requested by the Minister to hand up a list of the projects that we are intending to ask about. I think that will be helpful for this discussion. I might hand that up to you, Mr Staples, and to whoever you think it will be useful to have. I would like to ask about these 10 projects that are late and delayed. I will come to some of the specifics about that in a minute. I might just give you a minute to have a look at that list and start to get sorted. Before we do that though, Mr Staples, I would ask in general about late and delayed projects. I will not ask you to comment on the Minister's outburst—"How good is it?"—when asked about delayed projects.

I will ask about this: I was surprised that the Minister was not really able to comment on the number of delayed regional roads project. I would have thought, as a Minister, that is one of the first things he sees. I am asking you about it as secretary: Are these projects on track? How many are off track? Can you give us any information about how many regional roads projects are not on time?

Mr STAPLES: What I would say is that a very large proportion of our project programmed for regional New South Wales is on track and within budget and being delivered, as Mr Wakelin-King just indicated. I can give assurance to the Committee that there is very regular reporting from the department through an independent process with Infrastructure NSW about the deliverable program and then subsequently reported through to Cabinet. I obviously cannot talk to the specifics of those in terms of the Cabinet process and the Minister has visibility of those through that process. We are not one to go through quoting proportions of programs and so forth and where they are at, but we are happy to talk about any specific projects.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I might ask you about these specifics. Without asking about the specifics yet, what is the form in which you are reporting that? Can you be explicit? How does the agency say to Government, "Look, we are on track here". What is the form in which you are putting that? What is the report or—

Mr STAPLES: It is a Cabinet report so I cannot give you the detail of it. But, just a generic sense, it forecasts, it provides a status of where a project is at and obviously provides information about potential changes in program or potential risks around program and cost looking forward, some of which may or may not be realised. It gives some sort of forewarning. Obviously the onus is always on us where we identify a risk to see whether we can mitigate it in due course. I think Tabulam is a good example, where in the midst of the contract renegotiation and bringing a new contractor on we would have had a view about potentially a longer program than what Mr Wakelin-King's is now talking about but we have been able to mitigate that through work on the ground. We would be giving pretty good visibility around those in a Cabinet process.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This is budget estimates. I think it is fair to ask how many projects do you consider not on time in the Regional Roads portfolio?

Mr STAPLES: I do not have a specific number. I will see what we can find in relation to that and what we would be able to provide.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think that would be helpful. While you are doing that, we are asking specifically about how many are not on time. As of today at budget estimates, how many are not on budget?

Mr STAPLES: The challenge I am faced with that, to be honest with you, is just what advice we provided into a Cabinet process and what constraints I have got around that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I do not accept that because you should advise Cabinet—we are not asking about the advice you provided to Cabinet—you should also advise the Parliament through the budget estimates process. I hope the answers are the same. We are not asking about that advice you are providing elsewhere, but we have got to play our role. We expect to be informed as to what is your advice as the key official on this important question.

Mr STAPLES: I acknowledge the point you are making around that. I will have to take that on notice in terms of the specifics.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I appreciate it. We might turn to these specific projects and I might start at the bottom—the first one we were asking about to the Minister, the Barton Highway improvements. As I put to the Minister, we really expected this. I should say we are looking here at former RMS work plans and then comparing them to the most recent Transport for NSW work plans. That is why we are asking about these particular projects. The Barton Highway improvements should have been completed mid this year. Can you confirm that the current Transport for NSW current work plan does not see this project completed until financial year 2023-24?

Mr STAPLES: I will get Mr Wakelin-King to give you some more detail.

Mr WAKELIN-KING: Thanks, Mr Staples. It is important that the Committee understands that there are four stages to this project of which a number have been completed and are currently underway. The four stages consist of, firstly, a federally funded strategic business case which we were responsible for developing on their behalf, which is complete and that matter is now with the Federal department for consideration. There is the safety works which were associated with a number of aspects along the corridor, which include a relocation of bus facilities, rear line marking, some works adjustment to key intersections. Those works are largely complete.

There is further work to be done on intelligent transport systems [ITS] to assist motorists travelling in both directions, north and south, and also from the Hume freeway to Canberra to indicate travel times. Once again, that work is underway. The fourth component is the duplication of the parts of the Barton Highway north of the Australian Capital Territory border towards Murrumbateman. It is worth noting that the original announcement for all of this package of works was \$50 million from both the Federal and the New South Wales governments. That has since been increased by the Federal Government, which obviously as we go through the scope, management and the independent assurance process by Infrastructure NSW will also need to be taken into account. As the Minister mentioned this morning, we are on display with the review of environmental factors [REF] and we are also in procurement for—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Mr Wakelin-King, I am going to stop you there. Just to assure you, we are going to ask about these projects on notice so we will be interested in that. I thank you for that level of detail for this first one. All four of those stages were in the original plan, as I understand it, which was supposed to be finished mid this year. All four of them are now not going to be delivered until 2023-24. I am simply asking you to confirm: Is it correct that all those projects that you have described have progressed but will not be completed until 2023-24? Is that correct? To reassure you, that is what the work plan says.

Mr WAKELIN-KING: Three of those projects I would say definitely yes to that, which are the first three that I referred to. I would need to reserve my position in respect of the ITS just to clarify that, if I could take that on notice please. The issue where there has been a change is in the overtaking opportunities leading to the duplication, which has been changed as a consequence of the additional scope that I referred to and hence us needing to undertake further work in respect of both assurance and scope management, which would lead to changes to procurement and also next stages from there.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You are not disagreeing that the RMS work plan says this is now due 2023-24. There may be some additional scope and I invite you to be more specific on notice. Can you give us any information about the increased total budget for this project?

Mr WAKELIN-KING: I can advise—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You have referred to it somewhat.

Mr WAKELIN-KING: I can advise that the New South Wales Government announced \$50 million, the Federal Government originally announced a matching \$50 million. The Federal Government in its budget of May 2018 announced a further \$100 million, bringing their total contribution to \$150 million, which on top of the State's contribution makes a total of \$200 million.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We will come back to you on notice on some of these projects. What about the Pacific Highway/City Road intersection upgrades at Northcott Drive and Kahibah Road, Highfields, in the Hunter. I might ask about another project in the New England. The Belford to Golden Highway upgrade should have been complete this quarter coming. Again, it will not be complete until financial year 2023-24. Is that correct, that this project will not be complete until the 2023-24 financial year?

Mr STAPLES: Just to clarify, are you referring to a particular document in relation to that?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am referring to the document that is in front of you.

Mr STAPLES: Yes, but that is the list of the projects, but in respect of the dates.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am referring to the RMS Forward Work Plan.

Mr STAPLES: Do you have that document there?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, I do not have that document with me.

Mr STAPLES: I am just trying to understand the nature of your question. You are asking us to comment on a document that we actually do not have in front of us. It is very difficult for us to respond specifically.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am putting to you that is the view of the agency. I am just inviting you to clarify if you have any specific information on this.

Mr STAPLES: I think we will take it on notice because at this stage we have not got a document to respond to. I am concerned that we might misrepresent a response. I think it is important that we understand what we are actually talking against.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am happy to do that in relation to these 10 projects, all of which on the current work plan are overdue in respect of time. If you could clarify when the completion date is for these, can you give us any information on the completion date for any of these 10 projects as we are here today?

Mr STAPLES: I do not think we have that level of information to hand. I think it is best we take that on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I will invite you to provide the budget overrun as well, as compared to the original work plan as to today, for these 10 projects.

Mr STAPLES: You obviously put that to us; I understand that question.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am putting it to you now. I accept your view that you do not have the information to hand. I have given you this list, but if you could clarify those two things on notice, one, compared to the original RMS work plan, how late are these, when will they be complete? And, two, how much as to cost also?

Mr STAPLES: I am not trying to be difficult. What we can do is give you the date for completion as it is forecast at the moment; we can certainly do that. But you are asking me to compare against a document that I am not sure that I know what you are referring to.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am asking you to compare it to other RMS work plans. I will explain what the heart of this issue is, which is Mr Wakelin-King is turning up and saying 97 per cent of projects are on time. I am interested in your view. I ask you to comment on that. I accept that is true, but part of what is going on here is the projects are being slid along into work plans where the dates change. As we have gone back to look at what the original dates were for when these projects should have been delivered, they are significantly earlier. Here are 10 examples. That is why it is not enough to say: When is this due? Is it late? It is not in the current work plan, but it was not when you look back at previous work plans.

Mr STAPLES: The point that I am trying to understand here is whether you are referring to publicly committed dates or whether you are talking to internal working dates, because that is a substantially different question for us. We will move programs around. We will have time and dates on internal documents to work to, but if you are asking me to provide a date against a publicly committed date, we can do that. But if you are asking me to compare against an internal program date, we may have chosen to move that, and without knowing what

that particular document is, I cannot tell you why we have done that. We can give you the project and the question around when the forecast completion date is at this stage. That information we can definitely provide relative to a work program, as you refer to it. I cannot give you that reference point. I am just trying to be clear up-front so that I do not mislead you.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I do not want to delay proceedings, so we are going to move on. I accept you have put the position you have. I might come back to give you some more specific information about the best way we would consider you might be able to help answer this question.

Mr STAPLES: Sure.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am not simply asking about a comparison with the Minister's press release and publicly announced dates there. I want to know why these are projects, and here are 10 examples, sliding slowly backwards in delivery. Here are 10. How many more are in this category? I accept where you are heading. In finishing, before I hand to my colleague, the view that Mr Wakelin-King has just put, about 97 per cent of these projects overall are on time and on budget under your current classification. Maybe they have shifted a bit in the plan, but under the latest plan is that about right, for these?

Mr STAPLES: I am not going to comment on a specific percentage. I think part of the danger here is that you are asking me about an internal program or an external public commitment. We are largely delivering our projects to program. There are certainly examples that you might call out where we have made a public commitment. Tabulam Bridge is good example where we made public statements around that and we are late. If we are internally late, that is because we are re-prioritising and re-sequencing our program all the time. I am not concerned about those sorts of changes. That is the nature of a large capital program that we are delivering. In respect of the publicly committed dates, the program is largely running to plan.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Mr Staples, just moving onto another item, has there been a corridor study completed of the Sturt Highway through the city of Wagga Wagga in recent years?

Mr STAPLES: I might have to ask Mr Fuller the best place to direct that question. I personally do not know of that one.

Mr FULLER: What I can say is I know that there has been a corridor and movement study for the city of Wagga Wagga and also a regional plan. Whether that is a specific Sturt Highway plan, I do take that on notice. But I know there is certainly a lot of work being undertaken at the moment for a regional plan and a Wagga Wagga corridor and movement study, yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The reason I am asking the question is that Marshalls Creek Bridge, which essentially has two lanes in both directions coming from the Sturt Highway down to a one-lane bridge and then it goes back out to two lanes either side, I was going to ask if the corridor study had picked up the fact that that bridge does need either widening and/or replacing.

Mr FULLER: I am aware of the bridge that you are talking about and I know that has been discussed at a local level. We would have to take the information on notice just to understand how it fits into the corridor plan. I would be surprised if it has not been considered.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: If you could take that on notice. The date of that study you spoke about, the movement study, when was that conducted would be handy as well; the date that was concluded.

Mr FULLER: Sure.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: At the last budget estimates Mr Wakelin-King spoke about the Gobbagombalin Bridge intersections at either end. As you would know, there is now a new primary school being built at the suburb at one end of that particular bridge, which I think increases the traffic flow coming off what is colloquially referred to as the Gobba Bridge—because most people cannot say Gobbagombalin—into that suburb. What is the status of that particular roundabout at the northern end of the Gobbagombalin Bridge?

Mr STAPLES: I might ask Mr Wakelin-King to talk to that, given he has discussed it last time.

Mr WAKELIN-KING: Work is continuing on assessing the options for the improvements of those intersections, and also the same would apply for the Marshalls Creek bridge. We are looking to finalise those options as soon as is possible.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Which means when?

Mr WAKELIN-KING: I would need to take the specifics on notice, but we are looking at options in terms of how we could design those intersections and make sure that we can get the right option chosen for the upgrade.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: What are the options for the particular intersection on the northern end of the Gobbagombalin Bridge? What are the options that you would be looking at? I am just cognisant of the geography here.

Mr WAKELIN-KING: Yes, sure. There would be a number of options that would be considered. I would need to, obviously, take them on notice. But all of them would be aimed at enhancing the traffic efficiency for those intersections, taking into account the growth that you have mentioned—not only about the school but broader growth more broadly.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Then, at the other end—the southern end of the Gobbagombalin Bridge, the one on that floodplain there, which has been elevated because of the bridge—what is going to happen there? That is a slightly different scenario.

Mr WAKELIN-KING: To be precise, we are looking at this as a single package of works. That is why we are doing a number of options for them to see how that would best impact on the network, to get the best possible outcome for that. That work is ongoing and I am happy to provide some specifics on those.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes, please. Is that also part of the traffic movement in the Wagga plan through the city of Wagga Wagga? That is all part of that?

Mr WAKELIN-KING: They will contribute to that plan but they are not, obviously, the sole aspects of that plan.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Thank you. Moving on to another city, the Coffs Harbour Bypass has been an issue for quite some time. What is the status of the works moving along on the Coffs Harbour Bypass?

Mr STAPLES: We have been up and engaged heavily with community around the environmental impact statement [EIS] and everything, so we are very enthusiastic to progress that through and make sure the community understands what we are building. Mr Wakelin-King has been pretty intensively involved in that in the past six months or so, so I might get him to talk to the specific program that we are working to.

Mr WAKELIN-KING: As Mr Staples has said, we have exhibited the environmental impact statement at the latter half of 2019 over an extended period of time. We have now concluded that. That matter is now before the Department of Planning and they will be considering all submissions that have been received in relation to that. Obviously it is a matter for the department, and indeed the Minister, to determine that matter and I cannot bind them to the time frame of that. Notwithstanding that, we have gone back out to the community with some adjustments to some of the design that we put out in response to that, particularly around some of the interchanges. We are also continuing our investigations in preparation for, hopefully, a positive determination by the Minister so that we can, in the first instance, carry out early works whilst we move towards major construction.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The issue around tunnels as opposed to cuttings—as the Hon. Sam Faraway will know—is the vexed issue in Coffs Harbour. The decision has been made to go to tunnels. Is that correct?

Mr WAKELIN-KING: Yes, that is correct. Both governments have announced that it will be three tunnels: one at Gatelys lane, one at Shepherds Lane and one at Roberts Hill—approximately 300 to 400 metres at Gatelys and Shepherds and about 200 metres at Roberts Hill. That is what is in the project application via the EIS that has gone to the Department of Planning, and that is what will be considered and a determination will be made on that basis.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That is good, thank you. Let's move to another city—Dubbo and the River Street bridge. There have been a lot of announcements just lately—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: These are all National Party seats.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes. I get about, don't you worry. When the Minister says, "You don't know the roads," he might want to do the research. The most recent announcement on the second stage of Boundary Road works is it is set to get underway. This is the River Street bridge stuff, essentially; that is what it is referred to. What is the process for engaging with community in this most current stage?

Mr STAPLES: I might ask Mr Fuller to talk about it first. I think we may get some help from Mr Wakelin-King as well, but I know Mr Fuller has been engaged in that one.

Mr FULLER: One of the things about Dubbo is that the Building a better Dubbo package is a series of five programs of work. It is not just the bridge at River Street. Four out of the five of those are underway. It will advance, including the maintenance work that has been undertaken on the LH Ford Bridge, which is soon to wrap up in the next month or so. So it is a significant package of work that has had some very good consultation across the community. As we have gone through those, in each and every one of those projects—whether it be the intersection between the Newell and Mitchell highways or the intersection with the Mitchell Highway and Fitzroy Street—we have made some amendments and taken the opportunity with the consultation from the community to even improve on those projects further.

That has been the case with River Street, as it has been out in the public through the review of environmental factors [REF] process very recently. As you say, there have been a number of announcements made about the range of feedback that has come back. I will ask Mr Wakelin-King in a moment to talk about the specific improvements we have made to that project. One of the things, very pleasingly, is that along with that community consultation we have also now garnered very significant support from the broader community—in particular, the business community. The announcement was undertaken last week about those improvements and about the outcomes of the consultation. That was very well attended by a range of very key stakeholders in that Dubbo and regional community, including the chamber of commerce and the Real Estate Institute.

Even businesses that are directly impacted by the bridge and will be displaced—we will be working with them to relocate them—have come out in strong support for the River Street bridge project. So we have certainly turned a very large corner, we believe, in the regional community of Dubbo. I might ask Mr Wakelin-King to refer to those improvements that have been requested and we are working with for the River Street bridge project.

Mr WAKELIN-KING: There have been a number of design refinements that have been announced as part of the submissions report that was recently tabled and is available to the public to respond to. Can I just make the observation that we have dedicated periods of specific consultation around either a submissions report or an REF, but that does not mean that the public cannot engage with the process on an ongoing basis. We have dedicated contact lines and email addresses for which the public can reach out to and ask any questions on. We were particularly focused on ensuring that landowners, people who are directly affected or people who have general inquiries can contact the project team at any particular time and we will respond to that. I think we really need to understand that it is an ongoing process; it is not just isolated to specific events.

We have looked at the intersection designs, particularly around Thompson Street, and also as we look at the alignment up towards River Street from the main west rail line—I do need to emphasise that the main west rail line is a key constraint that we need to work around—and then as we come round to the bridge itself and then through to the intersection with Darling Street and ultimately the Newell Highway from there. We are looking at how we can optimise the design speed, as well as also the safety attributes of the overall project itself. It is also important to note that, as part of the package for the whole of the Dubbo improvement that Mr Fuller has mentioned, we are upgrading and enhancing the capacity of the Newell and Mitchell highways in Dubbo, just south of the River Street project, to ensure that the efficiency on the new bridge, around LH Ford Bridge and particularly through that major intersection is enhanced as well.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The delivery of this project, as I understand it, is funded by the State but the council is involved. Is that right?

Mr WAKELIN-KING: It is funded by the State. We are working with council. The New South Wales Government made an allocation of \$100,000 to council to look at a bridge option south of this project connecting West Dubbo with Dubbo, which is an issue that has been raised previously. But this is solely—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That was my next lot of questions—what we could do about West Dubbo.

Mr WAKELIN-KING: This is solely in a State-funded project to date.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Sorry?

Mr WAKELIN-KING: It is a State-funded project at this time.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So the involvement with council then is around the West Dubbo connectivity?

Mr WAKELIN-KING: There is a broader strategic study, which Dubbo council has done and did some time ago. It looks at a range of factors—not just obviously this particular project but a range of issues about the future of transport in Dubbo, which is appropriate for council to do: look at its local streets as well as its local

regional streets. One of the issues it has identified is, in the future, a connection between West Dubbo and south of the CBD, so the State Government has made a contribution to local council to investigate options for that.

The CHAIR: We will now break for lunch and will return at 1.40 p.m. for further questioning.

(Luncheon adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back to the public hearing of the inquiry into budget estimates in relation to the portfolio of Regional Transport and Roads. We will commence again with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I will return to where we were discussing the late regional roads projects, just to clarify where you might be able to helpfully answer these questions on notice. If you have any guidance for us we would appreciate it.

Mr STAPLES: Before you start, there were two things I said I would try to come back to. I have got some information about the questions about correspondence from the Electoral Commission on the seniors travel card. I do not have any records of having received anything around that. You asked the Minister about the eight cameras for mobile detection, in terms of their location. I think they are all relocatable cameras. I think the Minister indicated it was a three-year program to put everything in position, so the fixed ones are yet to be installed. During the warning period they operated within Sydney as well across the North Coast, South Coast, Central West—they moved around the State as a general thing. That is probably as much as I have got at this stage. Essentially, they are all relocatable. They have been moving around.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you for those two bits of information. In relation to these delayed regional roads projects, we have supplied to you a list of 10 projects the Opposition is concerned about that are delayed from the original plans of the Government to build these. Firstly, can you give us any extra information on those 10 projects at the moment? Have you been able to assess them since we have provided them to you?

Mr STAPLES: No, not if you are looking for the specifics in terms of public completion dates and so forth. I think the one thing that we did reflect on was whether or not some of the information in the public domain around work programs and so forth that we have gone out for industry might be the basis on which some of the information you are talking around. I can get Mr Regan to talk a little bit around that in terms of what the nature of that information is and the context of it, because I think it is actually quite critical to what has been put forward and why at what point in time, which was I suspect a couple of years ago.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I would be happy for Mr Regan to provide some of that information.

Mr REGAN: With the scale of the capital program that we are operating both within Transport now but previously also within Transport and RMS, one of the really strong things we try to do with industry is to be up-front, or to the extent we can, around the likely forward pipeline of projects. Over the last few years RMS in this context, and now Transport, holds an event with industry with different levels of involvement from different contractors, advisors and technical parties to give a sense of the forward pipeline as at the time we see that we can provide them information as to where individual projects are up to—in particular, what stage they are at; so whether they are in detailed design, procurement, construction and also the extent to which they are funded or unfunded. We set those out by different categories across the State, by different regions or by different types of projects.

We do that in the context of looking forward four or five years with quarterly updates which are designed to be indicative to give industry a sense as to what work is likely to be taking place in different areas so that they can manage their workforce planning and also manage their procurement activities, their bidding activities, know what is coming when, in what order. In doing so, they are better placed because we also include in that information to industry what kind of form of contract. Some contractors are looking for different types of contract. It is our attempt to try to give industry as much forward knowledge as possible as to what might come.

Last year in October we did that on an integrated basis across Transport and RMS and Sydney Metro, across the full portfolio of projects. In prior years there were different presentations to industry from Sydney Metro, from Transport and from RMS. August 2018 was the last of the RMS presentations to industry. That was associated with a document which may have been, although we are not quite sure, the one you were referring to, which is titled *Forward Work Plan Major Projects 2023*.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, correct.

Mr REGAN: That sets out, as I mentioned, across hundreds of projects where our view was at the time.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I can confirm that is the document I am referring to.

Mr REGAN: You will note also at the bottom there is a footnote:

The information provided is subject to change (including as to funding, acquisitions, planning approvals, rail possessions and procurement method).

That is important because this is not the statement of commitment of dates in a public date context; it is more for industry. We actually invite feedback from industry on that pipeline and we take on board that feedback. So in some cases industry has given us a view that there are too many projects of a single type in a single area or that they are not spread out in an appropriate manner, and we take that into account. The secretary referred to before the break the way we manage that is at a portfolio and a program level. What we are trying to do is keep the level of work as relatively consistent as we can in the market. There are obviously ups and downs based on what Government has committed where. We also manage our own cash flow and timing issues within the program and generally within the overall public dates that have been announced. We do move things around within that program, as required. I think that is probably some context for you as to what the dates are.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is useful. I am aware of those issues you provided guidance on. I think it is helpful for the Committee discussion. Firstly, I observe that it is quite important, given the supply and the constraints we have already talked about, to make sure that the infrastructure sector is in harmony with the plans for the agency. Actually putting this information out to industry is crucial in the way you are describing, is it not?

Mr REGAN: That is certainly the intent and that is something that we have had a lot of discussion with industry about in trying to give them greater certainty. It can be challenging at times, because that does mean having to take a view as to what future decisions may or may not be taken officially within government. So we try to include in that an indicative sense as to where we think we are going, but recognising in that that annual budget processes and the like do impact when investment decisions are made. It does mean that from year to year if you were to compare the equivalent documents a couple of things: firstly, some things will change because of that change in timing, change in prioritisation; or, alternatively, it may reflect more up-to-date information on the ground as to what is happening on those projects.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, but Mr Regan, it will be accurate at the time it is published will it not?

Mr REGAN: It is accurate to the best of what we can put forward on an indicative basis. But there are a couple of other factors. One is a definitional one as to what is included in each project or each program. Sometimes the programs have additional stages or a different scope that is added. Also, it is impacted by where, sometimes the definition just is what is included in which section and what type of contract, what is funded, unfunded can change. But it is something that we find helpful for trying to create that picture and as far as we understand we believe it is helpful to industry to give them that guidance.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, and I can certainly understand why you would want to do that. It is accurate at the time of publication. I want to be clear, given the questions that were raised before, this is information which is also publicly available; this is on the agency's websites?

Mr REGAN: Yes. We presented to industry and we make a copy of the high-level document available on our website.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. You may not have been asked about this or this level of detail at budget estimates before, but this is an important update for industry—although I would also argue the dates in this document are important for the public to be aware of if, for instance, it looks like some of these dates are moving. It would certainly be of interest to the industry but of real interest to the public too.

Mr STAPLES: I think what it is important to clarify there is that each project will have an engagement process with community and, depending on where we are at on a project, we will be pretty considered about what commitments we make on time. If we are in an early development stage and there is still a wide range of scope options being considered, we cannot necessarily give a definitive completion date because the scope may vary quite a bit. So we will commit to the early stages of the engagement process and then progressively move along.

In the meantime, what we might do to industry is say, "Here's what we think it might look like", but the footnote, whilst a short sentence is actually very, very important to the fact that there are a lot of other things moving around on a project to make the change. So when you say "accurate" I think I just want to clarify it is an assumed piece of information for the industry, to help them work through, but behind each one of these is a precision that that is exactly the program we are working to.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You will have the opportunity to contribute to these individual projects on notice, Mr Staples, but if a set of these work plans is published in order and a project is to be delivered at one point accurately at the time projected and then is months or quarters or years later in another work plan, you would accept that is a legitimate project to question on those?

Mr STAPLES: I accept that it is the process working in the way that we intended, which is that we put it out there and we get feedback from industry. Also, Mr Wakelin-King has given a couple of examples of projects and other external factors have come along which have influenced those.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. I would welcome specifics on those.

Mr STAPLES: It would be a very different thing if we were asked to give clear commitments that this was a completion date for a project, which this is not intended to be—a commitment to a community or a set of stakeholders about their expectation of a completion date. I think that is the thing we have to be very clear up-front around.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Mr Regan, your comments around the procurement process, is there any region that poses greater difficulty for procurement than others?

Mr REGAN: In terms of the level of depth?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes.

Mr REGAN: Clearly there are sort of different capacity constraints in different parts of the State, depending on either (a) other works that are going on either in the transport sector or in other infrastructure at the time and then there is the general proximity of workforces. I would not say that there is any one area that is more difficult than others, but you do not have the same level of workforce available on the ground the further away you are from major centres. Yes, that creates different challenges. In the Sydney context, you have got a very big workforce but you have also got a lot of projects going on at one time, so it is a sort of supply-and-demand balance in each area.

It is a key factor though in why we try to give industry a sense of what might be coming in what area because there is an opportunity then for them to look to deploy workforce, retain workforce, give their workforce forward notice of where opportunities might be. We have the same issue within our own agency as well in terms of trying to ensure that we have got pathways for people in different areas so that they can look for other work opportunities down the path when the project that they are on comes to its conclusion. The challenge is a supply-and-demand one and certainly the more remote the location the harder it is to get a large workforce there.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Does that break down into even project types? For instance, road construction requires a different set of skills to, say, bridge construction.

Mr REGAN: Yes. I think there is a bunch of factors that impact that. Road construction, including the style of road that is being built and the scale, certainly over the last 15, 20 years the North Coast of New South Wales with the Pacific Highway upgrade and very, very significant large-scale infrastructure going in there, the larger contractors are operating up there with big workforces and utilising support from local contractors. In some other areas, bridge replacements in more remote areas, you do not have that depth and you do not have the same pool of contractors to go to in order to get a competitive sort of bid process. So it does vary by type of contract and by type of construction.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Mr Staples, I might just outline what I think will be helpful in relation to these 11 projects. Feel free to give us any guidance, though. What we would like to know is: For the 10 projects plus the Tabulam Bridge that we have provided to you, can you tell us the completion date of those projects? Can you tell us what the budget is for those projects? Can you tell us if there have been any changes to the budget and any changes to the scope of the project? That is for the 10, now 11, projects. That would seem to us to be a sensible way to proceed. Are you comfortable with that?

Mr STAPLES: I am happy to see whether Mr Wakelin-King has got any specific information available because he looks after projects. Otherwise, we will take that on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. I am comfortable on notice.

Mr STAPLES: We can certainly provide that to the Committee.

Mr WAKELIN-KING: Thanks, Mr Staples. If you like, I will work through the list. Cessnock Road, flood immunity, it tests as high, which as the name suggests is about improving flood immunity in that particular region of the Hunter. The project shortly will proceed to tender. On current plans, it is on track and within budget.

There have been some complexities around both environmental considerations, contamination and also Aboriginal heritage in that area, which has forced us to do some further analysis, but by and large it remains largely on time and on budget.

The Golden Highway at Mudies Creek, it is important to note that this is close to the defence facility there at Singleton, which has required us to enter into a licence agreement with the Department of Defence. There have been issues that we need to take into account, including unexploded ordnance in that area. That is part of also a broader program of upgrading the Golden Highway so there are a number of projects that fit within that overall package, which we will get to in terms of the Belford to Golden Highway upgrade. At this stage, subject to that, it is largely within the budget and scheduled time frames but, as always, taking into account any other externalities that come into effect. The Pacific Highway on the intersection upgrade at Northcott Drive and Kahibah Road at Highfields—excuse the pronunciation if I have got that wrong—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I will. You have, but I will.

Mr REGAN: It is Ka-high-bah.

Mr WAKELIN-KING: My apologies.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It will read the same.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is right. It all comes out smoothly in the end.

Mr WAKELIN-KING: We are in the process of concluding the review of environmental factors for that. We will be going into detailed design. There have been a number of issues we have needed to take into account from a community perspective, which has been particularly important as part of the REF process. I need to take on notice about specifics of time frames, but by and large within current budget. Belford to Golden Highway upgrade, which is part of that broader Golden Highway package and program that I referred to previously, we have had to make some changes in design in relation to this project. That has been particularly important to take into account local landowner considerations and their requests and concerns.

I would like to emphasise we have worked very well with local landowners there. In particular, there is an abattoir right on the corner there of the New England Highway at Belford and also the Golden Highway, which, in good-faith negotiations with them, we have made adjustments to the design. So they have been very helpful in terms of property acquisition in respect of allowing us to accommodate that additional design within their property. Of course, we have gone through the normal acquisition processes in there but that has been a very cooperative process. So we are largely on track with that program. We will be finalising the design and completing procurement activity as soon as is practical.

North Moree heavy duty pavement and North Narrabri to Moree heavy duty pavement, these were funded through planning development only. This is part of the overall Newell Highway Corridor Strategy, which I should note is being developed in consultation with the Federal Department. We are looking at the challenges around heavy duty pavements in that part of northern regional New South Wales, which as you may be aware is challenged by soft soils, in particular the black soils. We are making sure that we get the design right there, which is particularly important in context if we are to build sustainable heavy duty pavement for the heavy vehicle industry. A question was asked earlier about average heavy vehicle usage on highways and I did flag that the average rule of thumb is about 10 to 15 per cent. For the Newell Highway, as Committee members may be aware, that is one of our busiest heavy vehicle corridors and that can go up to about 30 to 33 per cent. That is a particularly important corridor for the heavy vehicle industry, which is why we need to make sure we get this detail right.

In terms of Kings Highway Nelligen Bridge replacement, which is part of the Bridges for the Bush program, this has been what I would like to describe as a positive story around the engagement with the construction industry. We went out with a tender process and we got some very helpful feedback from industry in terms of design which has resulted in what I would describe as very helpful and good collaboration in some respects about reconfiguring that design. We are about to go back out to the market again as a consequence of that. That will have an impact on schedule but I think this is a very good example of how through engagement with industry, which both Mr Staples and Mr Regan were talking about, via that procurement pipeline document and engagement more broadly, that it will yield a superior outcome in the context of this project.

On the Cobb Highway approach roadworks to near Echuca, this is in effect the new Echuca-Moama Bridge on the Murray River. A really important point to note here is that this is, if you like, a tripartite agreement between ourselves, the Victorian Government and the Federal Government for a complete package of works for this bridge. Our responsibility, which is stage four of that project, is an intersection and approach roads on the New South Wales side to the new bridge. The bridge itself is being delivered by VicRoads so we have needed to

work very closely with them. They have had what I would call reasonable challenges with their tender process. We are working very closely to make sure our works coordinate with theirs. I am not in any way, shape or form being critical of VicRoads. We have had a very good partnership with them, particularly up and down the whole Murray. We have got 32 bridges and crossings that we work collaboratively on in that regard. We have gone to tender and work has commenced on this project and, by and large again, largely within budget and within schedule.

On the Burley Griffin Way and Irrigation Way intersection upgrade at Yoogali—I think I may have briefed the Committee on this at the last Committee meeting. This is a very complex project because of utilities. At this location we have irrigation channels, we have got every key utility, obviously—telephone, gas, electricity—that we have to relocate. As the Committee may recall or may be aware, there is a railway line that is also impacted by these projects. We are working very closely with council. Council has asked us to take into account some redesigns, which we have been working with council on and we have reached agreement on. We are working to conclude this project as soon as possible. It is one that I will need to get a latest update on for the Committee and therefore I will take that on notice. Barton Highway, I think I have briefed the Committee at length on this particular matter and we are currently not only at the REF but also in procurement for an alliance partner. We are hopeful of awarding that contract soon and commencing. This is for stage four which is the duplication works north of the Australian Capital Territory [ACT] border.

I would like for Mr Staples to highlight here that there is a very critical approach we are taking with this project and that is that we are taking a more outcomes-focused approach. What I mean by that is we are asking industry, we are mandating some minimum safety and other specifications and we are asking industry to come back and innovate to see how we can get best value out of this project, hence the contracting pathway has been an alliance model. You may be aware of the New South Wales Government's 10-point plan for engagement with construction industry. That has been something they have been asking for for some time, to allow them to bring their expertise into the innovation field. That is not always necessary or appropriate but in this case we think it is a good opportunity, so we are exercising that. That has been, I would like to say, well received by the industry.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Mr Wakelin-King, they are good reasons to run through this process. That has been outlined for exactly that reason. I would describe that as a reasonably glowing description and we will look forward to the details on notice about these being on time and on budget. How do you explain though that over time, as these work plans have come out, the dates of final completion keep rolling forward? Let us just pick one example so you can talk us through that so we understand what is going on here. Let us start with the Cessnock Road flood immunity. That was originally supposed to be finished in the final quarter of 2021. That is the completion date the agency published. You are now saying it is on track except that it is not going to be complete until 2022-23. How do those two facts marry?

Mr WAKELIN-KING: A couple of things, if I may, in relation to that. If I understand, the document that you are referring to relates to the question that you are asking—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes.

Mr WAKELIN-KING: My assessment of that document says that project staging for this particular project was yet to be identified. By that we mean how we are going to approach it, at what point will we commence construction and at what point will we be undertaking certain works? That said—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Let us keep it simple here though. The plan was to finish at the end of 2021.

Mr STAPLES: I think it is a really good example of the point you are making when you look at it. It is under the Cessnock Road flood immunity at Testers Hollow?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes.

Mr STAPLES: Okay, so the status of that is No. 3. "No. 3" means planning funded but delivery not yet confirmed. That means that it is still in a development stage. That means we would not have a detailed work program at that point in time. Then you move to the right and it has got a purple bar, then move down and it says, "project stages not yet available", which suggests it is still a very indicative preliminary indication that we actually have not got the detail development of the program. I think that is a really good example of provisional information for industry about our thinking. It has not gone into the project when we developed it. We have had feedback from industry on how we might build it, we have looked at the detailed scope and the planning process. Yes, these dates are shifting around but I think that they are entirely plausible.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think it would be helpful if you could provide exactly the information on notice about these projects.

Mr STAPLES: Yes. We will take it on notice that you want completion dates and budgets for each of those projects.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. Let us just clarify what those are—completion date, budget, change in budget, change in scope. Those four things for those projects.

Mr STAPLES: That list of projects plus Tabulam Bridge?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I need to ask you this, Mr Staples. You are wanting to compare this to the public dates that are put out by the Government. I welcome any information you provide about the public dates for these 11 projects as well, if you could include those on notice, but when is an instance where what we are telling industry and what we are telling the public are going to be different?

This is just another example of information going out at a lower level of detail. These are public documents. The public would have an interest in knowing these projected completion dates too.

Mr STAPLES: I think what you are dealing with here is different schools of thinking on the way to go about involving these projects. What Mr Regan was outlining before is the shift on our part to have a more open engagement with industry as we are working through the development of programs. That comes with risk of creating an expectation. The alternative is that we do not put any of this out because it is misinterpreted or misunderstood and turned into a clear public commitment, in which case we do not tell industry what is coming down the pipe, in which case they sit there and wait until the e-tender document comes out. Then they realise and they have to scramble.

What we are faced with is a real challenge about not wanting to over-create an expectation within community, but wanting to have a more partnership and engaged approach with industry where they can plan their resources, which is part of the commitment we have made overall across industry, not just within Transport.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think that is useful guidance for us. We might move off this.

Mr STAPLES: I understand your point.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am conscious of the time we have taken. That is helpful guidance. What we might do is proceed with the specifics of these projects. If you want to provide those on notice, that is useful and then we will continue this discussion at future estimates.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Moving on to something completely different. As I understand it, the Australian Rail Track Corporation have conducted an asbestos audit at some time in the last five or six years. Is that correct?

Mr STAPLES: ARTC did you ask?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes.

Mr STAPLES: I am not sure that we would have that information necessarily.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Do you feed up into those sorts of audits around buildings and whatever else?

Mr STAPLES: ARTC are the asset owner—or asset custodian would probably be the best word—for the interstate rail network as well as the major freight lines within the Sydney metropolitan area. Our visibility of asbestos and so forth would be through the lens of any interface and any interaction we would have in construction around those corridors as an operator—whether there are any risks to our operators, in particular TrainLink, that might be operating on that network. But we would not necessarily have visibility of all of the detail of that.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That information then would be important in your workplace health and safety [WHS] obligations to your staff though?

Mr STAPLES: My expectation is that they would provide us any information that we need to manage the safety of our employees.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Usually with asbestos there are management plans put in place around a structure that has been identified as having asbestos. As a part of the process for your employees when they go into an ARTC building, is it beforehand they are told or do they turn up and see the sign on the door or wherever the asbestos signs are placed so people know how to treat those buildings?

Mr STAPLES: In some instances it would be Sydney Trains employees that might be interacting with ARTC, but there may be instances where TrainLink encounter that as well. I might ask Mr Allaway whether he

has got any knowledge in relation to how we work on that. Certainly, the expectation would be that we would not be putting our staff in there without knowing what the hazards are and that they are appropriately dealt with. That would be the normal working practice. But I will just ask Mr Allaway whether he has got any specific examples to give you.

Mr ALLAWAY: All I would add to Mr Staples' comment is, yes, we would not allow any of our staff to go into an area where an individual or a bunch of individuals would know from ARTC in advance that there was asbestos in a building. There are processes in place for all operating agencies, including NSW TrainLink, where we use what are called safety notices and those safety notices go out on a regular basis if there is any change to any of the material aspects of the buildings that we go into, which would include asbestos.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Mr Staples, I just want to go back to the XPT replacement fleet in regional trains. What is the expected lifespan of those trains once they are received?

Mr STAPLES: I might refer that to Mr Regan, who has got overall leadership of the delivery of that program.

Mr REGAN: The new regional fleet that is under construction at the moment, different components obviously have different lives, but we would expect at least a 35-year lifespan. Most rolling stock is bought with a design life that then extends beyond that and you swap some of those components out during time. But certainly 30, 35 years is the normal period when we purchase a fleet of trains that we would expect we would still be using them. Obviously some fleets go on longer than that—40, 45 years—but they are built to that sort of time frame. Normally at mid life, around the 20-year mark, it would be refreshed—technology refresh or interior refresh on fleets of trains is quite normal around that mid-life period.

The contract that we have purchased those trains on includes the supply of the trains and then maintenance of the trains through about half of that initial design-life period, so a 15-year maintenance period as well. We do that so we are going to make a decision around what kind of refurbishment might happen mid life and then put in place further arrangements for the maintenance for the balance.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The reason I ask this is actually to move back to the tilt train and Mr Staples' response to an earlier question. If you are looking at a 35-year or thereabouts total lifespan, come forward, 15-year overhaul and review of them to see how they are travelling, would we use that 15-year, 20-year point as when we seriously have to start thinking about the replacement fleet, because the procurement processes that take place take a bit of time? Is that what we are going to do? Do we use that as the catalyst for the identification of a replacement fleet?

Mr STAPLES: Probably a couple of things I would say to that. Firstly, tilt train purchase is not just about buying a train that tilts—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That is where I was going.

Mr STAPLES: It has actually got to do a lot with the track it operates on and a need to operate all those sorts of things, so it is an overall corridor strategy. My reference before to fast rail would be we are purchasing this fleet at this point in time, which is essentially a similar number of trains to the XPT fleet at the moment that we have got. What we see with fast rail—and obviously I cannot speculate on the strategy that will come out from government—there are a range of options there from using this fleet to choosing one corridor, whether it be Sydney-Canberra or Sydney-Newcastle or whatever corridor it may be, to put a new fleet into that.

At the time we go to put that new fleet in, then we would look at, in respect of the purchasing, higher-speed rolling stock, whether it be rated to run at high speed but also potentially have tilt train technology. But what would have to go with that is a substantial track upgrade of the same. The other thing is if we are trying to run these trains on existing corridors, and one of the reasons we have our on-time running issues is the faster these trains operate while you have got other systems such as freight trains running, it creates a real bottleneck on the network. Simply to put a tilt train into our current network would not deliver much travel time benefit. It needs to be part of a broader fast rail package.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That is what I am trying to say, Mr Staples: The new trains are coming, they are going to be reviewed at the mid point, about 15 years, but that corridor upgrade you are talking about essentially is a straightening of the corridor as well because we have historic train corridors that are a bit bendy.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Your party has been complaining about the upgrade in the Blue Mountains.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Seriously, if you are going to move to a faster train you are going to have to do some work on the corridor. It is just straight forward. There are too many bends and the nature of the bends and curves. That is a significant and long-term investment, just in the corridor. Would that be correct?

Mr STAPLES: When we look at the fast rail program—and I think the Minister indicated there is still a Cabinet process, so I will not talk about what is coming out of that—if you think it through, there has been a lot of high speed rail investigations over the last 20 or 30 years in Australia, particularly the east coast of Australia. Those studies range anything from, as you say, upgrading the track, making it a bit straighter, strengthening the track form so you can go around curves at high speed with the existing rolling stock through to introducing a faster rolling stock on the network and upgrading those tracks, through to making decisions to actually build a new track independent of the existing one and putting a dedicated rolling stock on there.

The benefit of moving to that latter form is that you then are not running with freight and other services on there, so you suddenly get the freedom of running at much higher speed. All of those options still sit there in the future and obviously governments will consider those in part of the fast rail strategy. Professor McNaughton was brought in as an independent to look at that with some fresh eyes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Mr Staples, that also then comes to the ride comfort—I think that was the phrase you used earlier. Is the issue that the freight trains clearly require a lower ride comfort standard for passengers, as opposed to something that would be purely designated passenger train only that would provide a smoother ride for passengers? Would that be correct?

Mr STAPLES: Yes. I think I said earlier that the national rail regulator has asked the Australian Rail Track Corporation [ARTC] to conduct an audit, particularly on the Sydney to Melbourne corridor, where we have probably had the most significant issues with ride comfort for passenger services. We are really positive about that as bringing a focus to whether or not we can get a better outcome for passenger trains on that corridor.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: What is the time frame for that, Mr Staples?

Mr STAPLES: That is probably a matter for ARTC. We have not been given a time frame on it at the moment. It is a regulator engagement. We are essentially a stakeholder, as opposed to the driver of that investigation.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I want to talk about ride comfort. I mentioned this earlier, about the train drivers talking about some—not all—having to wear kidney belts. Do you get many complaints from your employees working on these ARTC rail line corridors, particularly, about the comfort of the ride up front?

Mr STAPLES: I know that Mr Allaway has spent more time up the front of the trains than I have, although I have done a few rides. Certainly the drivers that I have met with have given feedback around things that they think could be better on the network generally, as you would expect them to do.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That is a good thing.

Mr STAPLES: Yes, it is. It is really good. They are very passionate about what they do and I acknowledge the great work that they do. But Mr Allaway may be able to give a few more specific examples of feedback about that.

Mr ALLAWAY: Yes. I have travelled on a number of different services and the ride quality is differing in different sections. I think it would be incorrect to say blanketly on one particular maintainer it is worse in all areas than others. But we do encourage, and our staff do professionally give, what is called "track condition reporting", and that is always fed on to whichever infrastructure controller there is. We deal particularly with ARTC, John Holland and Sydney Trains and there is a track condition reporting mechanism that we use to give to that infrastructure controller, which they would need to take on board about what they want to do in future investment.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Mr Staples, with regard to the pilot driver arrangement as a form of SafeWork insisting on rail operators to run railways, in New South Wales—this is an ARTC question—have we used pilots at any stage on ARTC? You may have to take it on notice.

Mr STAPLES: Yes, I will take that on notice and I will see whether I can get something back to you this afternoon. But whatever we say, I do not want it to prejudge in any way what the process might have been at Wallan.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes, that has got nothing to do with it; just New South Wales.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I want to turn to the regional seniors travel card to revisit an additional set of issues that were more appropriate to be asking of the agencies. The first set of those are about the role of Westpac in the implementation and running of the scheme. Could you describe to us what exactly is the role of Westpac in this game?

Mr STAPLES: They are essentially the merchant card provider, providing the banking backbone for the system. Service NSW is the front office in terms of where you go to get access to the card, and then the cards are issued with a New South Wales Government brand on it. But it is essentially a Westpac product because they are the banking proprietor.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. The view was put to me that it is essentially a preloaded Westpac card with a government logo. Is that a fair representation of it?

Mr STAPLES: Yes, but I would also say that that contract is essentially managed for us with Treasury, so it might be better to direct the specific nature of that arrangement with Treasury. Obviously the objective here—the policy objective—was to provide the \$250 for particular uses. We have worked with that but we have also worked really closely with Service NSW and NSW Treasury in delivering that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Understood, and we will certainly raise some of these issues with Treasury but, from a Transport point of view, if you can answer as best you can. I will ask, firstly, are you aware if public money is being given to Westpac for providing that service?

Mr STAPLES: There is certainly a contract with Westpac. I think this is probably where it is best directed to Treasury in terms of the nature of that agreement.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, we will follow that.

Mr STAPLES: You would expect that there is some fee arrangement payable to Westpac to manage that, but I think the Treasury secretary could probably give you a better understanding of the nature of it.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Similarly, for the tender process that was conducted for that, we are best to direct to Treasury?

Mr STAPLES: How we came to choose Westpac? Yes, I think Treasury would be best to provide you that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Were you consulted in your role as Transport secretary about the choice of provider?

Mr STAPLES: Personally, no, but I know that my team in Transport were involved in that process. I would not want to say that we were not; we were definitely involved.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Which sounds appropriate, I would have thought. So you would have had someone on the tender panel, presumably?

Mr STAPLES: I do not know the exact nature of how that engagement was brought on, but I can assure you from the conversations I had internally that Transport for NSW people were certainly involved in bringing them on board and making sure that we got the things that we needed in terms of timing of the program and the appropriateness of what the fund could be used for. Obviously, one of the key things is what can you use that card for, so it has limitations on the types of outlets that it can be used at and for what purpose.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, and I do want to come back to those. What protections are in place, though, for individuals using this card and their private financial data? What can you tell us about that?

Mr STAPLES: I am sorry, I do not quite follow.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This is a Westpac financial product that a citizen of New South Wales is being provided by the Government. How do we know their financial data is protected?

Mr STAPLES: I would have to take that on notice in terms of the detail on that, but clearly we would have gone through a due diligence process around it. It may be best that Treasury provide that response, because they obviously do a lot of the transactional work for us. But I will see what we can provide from the department.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That would be helpful. This may be closer to your interests, though, Mr Staples. If I purchase fuel at a particular site, from a Transport point of view, does my information about my transport habits flow back to Westpac?

Mr STAPLES: As in the individual identification?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes.

Mr STAPLES: No, the intention of this set-up is to make sure that the funds are used for the appropriate transport things—whether it be fuel, whether it be to catch a bus, whether it be to catch a coach, a train and so forth. There are controls within the card to prevent you making a transaction or buying something that falls outside of those categories. But it is not seen as a data mine, certainly from a government point of view—as a means of getting access to new data. That is not the purpose of this data.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am unconcerned if the Government sees it as a data mine. I am interested in whether Westpac does.

Mr STAPLES: I would suggest you direct that question to NSW Treasury. I am happy to take it on notice and see what information the department can provide as well. I am not trying to avoid it.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, and feel free to keep answering this in whichever way you choose. Who is the first line of enforcement? Perhaps it is a provider who might not be supplying something or an allowed provider but a disallowed product. Is Westpac or the Government running that first line of checking?

Mr STAPLES: It is not a manual checking. There are transaction types that qualify or not around that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It is a system, yes. Whose system is it? Is it Westpac's or is it the Government's?

Mr STAPLES: It is Westpac's because Westpac provide the transaction service. If people have issues with that, their place to go is Service NSW and then Service NSW will work back with Westpac.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You have answered my question: It is Westpac's system, by which you would conclude that Westpac do have access to all those transactions. It would be impossible for them not to.

Mr STAPLES: Yes, but I would not want to imply from that that it automatically means that people's private information about transactions is being used in any way. As I said, I will take on notice what information—you clearly want to understand what privacy protections there are.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes.

Mr STAPLES: I will take it on notice to see what we can provide as a department around that, because that would have been a definite conversation for my people with Treasury around that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am sure that is right.

Mr STAPLES: To the extent to which you are not satisfied with our answer, then I would suggest maybe it is a matter you could raise with the Treasurer and the Treasury secretary.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We certainly will. In doing that, you might want to ask about the privacy protections in place for the transactions. If they are flowing through the Westpac system, presumably they have access to it. What protections are in place? But also on application, when people are applying for this card, does any of that information or does the information about the financial or other details of another citizen flow to Westpac?

Mr STAPLES: Service NSW is doing the validation of whether or not someone is entitled and then off the back of that a Westpac card is issued. It is not Westpac making the determination around who should or should not get this card.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think that is helpful. The follow-up question is really—and we will direct this to Customer Service but if you can tell us anything feel free to—where government is handling the application what information flows to Westpac? Some must.

Mr STAPLES: We will see what we get this afternoon, in the next hour or so, that might help clarify that a little bit today and we will take anything further on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Great, thank you. On the question about vendors, how many vendors at the moment are able to accept the card as a payment?

Mr STAPLES: I will have to take that on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Is that something that Transport handles or are we better asking that elsewhere?

Mr STAPLES: Let me take that on notice and I will try and come back to you this afternoon.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You have talked about some vendors being allowed, some vendors not being allowed—that is understood. I ask though about some vendors that might have products that are allowed—they might be selling fuel—but other products that you would not want this card to be purchasing, such as buying a Lotto ticket. What protections are in place to police that?

Mr STAPLES: The intent of the program, as you would well know, is that the card only goes to the purchase of transport subsidy.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. So what is the system in place?

Mr STAPLES: Part of the process of Westpac is providing a level of control about how those cards are used, in terms of vendors, but then within a particular business the type of purchase that is being made. That is the advantage of having a card as opposed to cash—that you know full well that it can be controlled and monitored. Will people try to abuse that? Quite possibly. Will we have instances where that has not been appropriately done? Quite likely. What we will need to do is if we identify that, and if anyone has any examples of that, the sooner we hear about that the sooner we can assess whether or not further controls are required.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But what you are telling us is Westpac is really the front line on detecting those instances?

Mr STAPLES: Yes, and that is why we have gone with an obviously experienced bank.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: For instance, if one of the merchant category codes is 5541—service stations with or without any ancillary services—if that merchant category code is entered that should be allowable. It is obviously a very broad category code. Are you concerned that is not specific enough to prevent the sort of misuse that you might be concerned about?

Mr STAPLES: I understand what you are asking is how are we getting assurance that this is going to the appropriate categories. I will take that on notice just to give you a little bit more insight on what we have done in the background to give ourselves some assurance around that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Okay, thank you.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I want to go to fast rail. As I understand it, \$4.6 million has been allocated for a fast rail project in the budget, of which about \$300,000 is being allocated across the forward estimates. How much of the \$4.6 million has been spent to date?

Mr STAPLES: I just want to be clear on that. In total, for fast rail?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes.

Mr STAPLES: We have got a \$295 million allocation overall for corridors to Canberra, to Newcastle, to Wollongong-Bomaderry and to the Central West. They are the four corridor areas. Some \$80 million has been committed to develop the Menangle to Yerrinbool section—so that is Sydney to Canberra. We have also got a substantial amount of money set aside for Sydney-Newcastle—I think it is about \$80 million—and then there is \$125 million set aside to physically do works in the Berry-Gerrigong down to Bomaderry area in terms of passing loops and so forth to give more capacity in that particular corridor for the Shoalhaven. In answer to your question, our total budget allocation is \$295 million at this point in time, which is spread across various components of detailed investigative work as well as physical work.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Is there any Commonwealth money in that, Mr Staples?

Mr STAPLES: There is in one of those. I will just have to clarify which one it is. I think it is the Sydney-Newcastle corridor that has got Commonwealth contribution to it.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I am happy for you to take that on notice to make sure we get that right, so we do not make a mistake.

Mr STAPLES: Yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The high-speed rail, fast rail—

Mr STAPLES: Just to be clear, Mr Regan has confirmed that it is \$10 million from the Commonwealth for the Sydney-Newcastle corridor.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That is just for the Sydney-Newcastle? Thank you. With regard to the strategy and the panel and moving forward after the report, as I understand it there is currently a report on the Minister's desk that he is sort of working his way through, applying due diligence and getting it to Cabinet?

Mr STAPLES: It has been a collective effort across New South Wales Government and Commonwealth Government as well as within New South Wales itself, particularly Department of Premier and Cabinet. This is not transport for Transport itself; it is actually really about regional development and providing support for regions. It has been a joint effort across a number of ministerial portfolios, of which Minister Toole is obviously a key Minister. Minister Constance has an interest in this as well, given it comes in and out of Sydney. Yes, it is in a Cabinet process at the moment. There is a range of options for government to consider around that, and then how we position that from a communications point of view and an engagement point of view will be dependent on the decisions they make in Cabinet.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Is the Australian Capital Territory Government involved in any way, particularly with the Sydney to Canberra corridor?

Mr STAPLES: As I said, they would be engaged as a stakeholder. I do not think they are a lead in the study itself. They would be a key stakeholder.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It is an interesting little scenario at the bottom of that, at the Canberra end of the Canberra railway station that Mr Allaway would well be aware of.

Mr STAPLES: There is lot of historical discussion about whether it should go to the airport, whether it should go to the existing station and whether it should go to the city centre. All of those sorts of things emerge.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I am certain they are discussions that will be raised. I am being very sensitive about this one. This question is actually about roadside memorials and if there is a policy for the construction and maintenance of roadside memorials. I think they are a good thing, to put it on the record, but I think post the fires people want to go and reconstruct some of those memorials. Is there a publicly available policy for people to go to so they know what they are doing when it comes to roadside memorials?

Mr STAPLES: I appreciate you are being sensitive to it. Obviously for everyone who drives past one of those, it makes you take a breath and pause and reflect on the impact that that has had on a family or even a wider community. I might ask Mr Dinan just to give you perhaps a working practice on how Transport has gone about dealing with that.

Mr DINAN: There is a public policy available on our website. It is very general in nature—deliberately so. A lot of the memorials are fairly individual and we try not to be too prescriptive, even though we get representations from people to make them standardised or make them smaller. A lot of people have an interest there. However, we do try to respect, as you say, the individual nature and the point of strong emotional attachment people have to those things.

When we have a memorial that comes in, we will usually be approached by one of our local officers or our teams and we will usually go on site and suggest a possible space where we could have the memorial. It may not always be at the site of the accident, which may be too dangerous, but we usually try and get it that people can go and access it at other times, which might mean at anniversaries and things like that they can go and get there. We will make some space available. Again, staff members are fairly sensitive to that. They work with the family on what we think is an appropriate size. Some of them you may have seen up and down the highway, with some very generous ones from some truckies I remember driving past. But, that said, I remember driving past them and getting the memory of that person.

There is a policy. We try and be quite respectful. It is interesting from time to time when we do reconstruction work, we might find a memorial. We try to move it and we try to do that with the family. Sometimes we even have to go through local papers to access the family, who may have moved on or it might have been over a long period of time, but we also try and do that in a very sensitive way and work through that with the family. I suppose the issue around the bushfires has not arisen with me.

It could come from one or two areas, like a family wants to reinstate it, which we obviously would allow to occur and work with them. If we find the memorial, we will try to work with them to identify the family and work through that. Some of our regions have databases on them, although some of them end up in the road reserve without our knowledge. That said, if we do find them we treat them with the same level of respect, even though we might not have them on our database or have a contact to do that. Picking up on your point, there could be some damage that we will try to work with the families to support and remain that memory for those families.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Just to be very clear, in no way am I saying they should not be there, I actually support good roadside memorials and congratulate you on the way that you handle things in a sensitive manner. I am thinking about things where people may well be in their own houses and situations at the moment post the bushfires, and the next time they turn up to pay respect to a loved one they realise that there has been

some damage to a memorial and want to go about doing some work to it. I make sure that people are aware there is a process to follow to help people get through that exercise.

Mr DINAN: That is available on the website and we are happy to support it.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It is also about their own safety.

Mr DINAN: It is, very much so.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Some of these roads are quite busy and getting access to a memorial itself, I do wonder sometimes how that may take place.

Mr DINAN: We try to influence the family to get it to a safe spot.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Up on the Bells Line of Road some RFS members were singled out as heroes because they fought the fire around one of those memorials and stopped it from being incinerated.

Mr DINAN: Where those young guys were killed.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Good on them.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We have asked at previous budget estimates hearings about the issue of the XPT centre pins. I want to get an update on where that issue is up to?

Mr STAPLES: I appreciate your ongoing interest on that. I think for just over three-quarters of our fleet centre pins have been replaced. We expect from planning that by the end of April all of those will have been replaced.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Are we then going to secure a supply of centre pins in case of additional fault or need for replacement?

Mr STAPLES: I think the benefit of the process we have been through is that we have now got a supplier with confidence and the quality controls in Australia to be able to do that. We do not have an expectation that we will need to do more replacements, but obviously as part of the maintenance regime we will continue to monitor the centre pins and do the appropriate testing on them if required. We have got a supply chain to be able to draw on for that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: How many trains will be replaced that have not yet been replaced?

Mr STAPLES: You want the actual number of trains?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes.

The CHAIR: We will take a quick 10-minute break. We can pick up on that question when we come back.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back. We will recommence with questioning from the Opposition.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you, Chair. We were asking about the XPT centre pins.

Mr STAPLES: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You were telling us how many.

Mr STAPLES: Yes. I said about 35 per cent. In fact, it is actually about 85 per cent now—so 16 of the 19 castings have been replaced with three to go.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Of the three to go, are they currently on the rails or off the rails? Are they in operation?

Mr STAPLES: I would have to take that on notice, but I think we talked about this last year in relation to the assurance program that we had in flight, which is that we were doing regular monitoring of the centre pins to identify any early signs of wear that would warrant them being taken off. So I think with the testing regime we were continuing to run XPTs. We had a period there where we did not run some because we had a few where the testing regime identified sufficient wear and risk that we would not run them, but we are not in that position now.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: What is the safe working life of the XPT centre pins that were withdrawn?

Mr STAPLES: The safe working life?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Presumably for most of these components they would have a safe working life. What is the assessed safe working life for those centre pins that need—

Mr STAPLES: I would have to go back to the original design of the train for that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes.

Mr STAPLES: I think the important thing is probably, at this age of train, to worry less about what the theory of the life is and to really rely on good current practice of testing and monitoring the system that we have to make sure that we are on top, which is essentially what has happened here. We have identified that early and then we came up with systems to monitor to give us the assurance that no train was going out there that was at risk.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Let me put to you the question in another way, which again you are welcome to take on notice. Was the issue here that this was an unexpected fault that developed, detected and is now well in the process of being replaced, or was it a case of operating these centre pins beyond their assessed safe working life?

Mr STAPLES: I am not aware of them going beyond any assessed safe working life, but these are, as you know—and we have said this—trains that are towards the end of their life. There is more intensive monitoring regimes on any asset of this sort of age.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am comfortable. If you could take that on notice, I would appreciate it.

Mr STAPLES: You also asked about piloting before. I have actually got some information. Mr Allaway can probably provide a little bit more specific example about some practices that TrainLink have here in New South Wales.

Mr ALLAWAY: Yes. I think the question was originally: Is it only in the ARTC area? The word "pilot" is used quite a lot in different rail circumstances, so NSW TrainLink do on rare occasions use pilots, say, in the Sydney Trains area as well. Generally speaking, the term "pilot" for NSW TrainLink is another qualified driver or somebody that knows that section, which the current driver is unfamiliar with, and they will stand up the front of the train and pilot that individual through. It is not something unique just to the ARTC area. From my experience, it is not a term that is unique internationally either. It is used internationally as well.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Just while we are going back to previous questions, I did ask about asbestos on big buildings. If I can just quote from the ARTC's *2017/2018 NSW Lease Annual Condition Report, July 2017 to June 2018*, and I will quote sections on which to base some questions. It states:

ARTC conducted an Asbestos audit in 13/14 and some buildings/structures have been identified containing asbestos. Issues identified by this audit have been raised with Country Rail Contracts. ARTC and Country Rail Contracts are yet to formally agree to a Management Plan relating buildings/structures that contain asbestos.

I am not sure who Country Rail Contracts are. Can you shed some light on who that is?

Mr STAPLES: I have to take that one on notice, I am afraid, in terms of the specifics on that. But I do not think it changes anything we said before about the operator side. But that is something in the lease agreement by the sounds of it, which we will take on notice.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I just thought it was important to give you context.

Mr STAPLES: I understand that. Thank you.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: There has been quite a bit of publicity and statement around the Singleton bypass. The Hon. John Graham and I were both up there last Friday and it was raised with us some of the community's concerns around the current proposal. One of those is about connectivity of Singleton itself to the bypass—that is, people coming from Newcastle cannot access John Street in the current design. Leaving Singleton would be okay but coming from Newcastle to Singleton becomes a problem, as I understand it. I guess what I want to know is: How locked in is the current design? Is there a process for people to feed into that, including the council, about making sure that there is decent connectivity between Singleton and the bypass?

Mr STAPLES: I will hand to Mr Wakelin-King to give you an update on that. Obviously that whole Lower Hunter region is really important from an overall transport point of view. There is huge growth and completion of Scone I think is a really good step forward. But we are into the detailed planning for Singleton so Mr Wakelin-King can give you some more specifics in answer to your question.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Thanks.

Mr WAKELIN-KING: Thanks, Mr Staples. The Singleton bypass has just completed its display period for the review of environmental factors. Some metrics to help the Committee understand just the level of interest, if I may: Really important is that we have had good community feedback. I was up there earlier this year and witnessed some of that firsthand as part of the display and engagement process. We established an arrangement where people could not only come and drop into the sessions but also visit online. We invested quite heavily in interactive displays and allowing individuals to go to specifically where they would like to at the ground level to get a sense of what the design looked like and also what the potential impacts would be.

As a consequence of that, we have had 11,000 of what we call unique visitors to that site. So 11,000 specific visits and over 25,000 page views. What was really pleasing to see was that people not only visited the site but they played the video, which was a fly-through video of the proposed bypass, which really demonstrates a good level of engagement from the community and we are very appreciative of that. We also had over 800, nearly 900 document downloads so people were really interested in getting that much information. Obviously as a consequence of that we will be taking all of that information into account whilst we will be preparing a submissions report where we will call out the specific issues that have been raised.

These are some of the issues, neither positive nor negative, but these were the issues that were raised: the design of the bypass itself; issues understandably around noise, both in terms of during construction and during operation, understanding how that is going to be treated; vibration; speed, particularly around Whittingham and around that area, which is an area we are very focused on ensuring is continued to be invested in from a safety point of view; and also impacts during construction. In terms of the issues about connectivity at key points along the bypass, we will be taking all of those issues into consideration.

There are some, what I would call, counterintuitive comments about connecting at Putty Road, for example, because the primary flow is from the Goulburn Highway. If you are heading eastbound towards Newcastle you would not go up to Singleton and then come back down the New England Highway; that has been something that we looked at initially. There is also access to Singleton in the major commercial area there, which people are interested in particularly for heavy vehicles. We have received that feedback and how they can efficiently access that. We are now taking that all under consideration and we will look at that and if we make any refinements—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So you are satisfied that specific issue, though, has been significantly raised in the process?

Mr WAKELIN-KING: Yes, certainly it has been well ventilated and people, particularly the heavy vehicle industry, who were interested in understanding how they can officially access that particular site. We want to get it right, obviously, hence the process we are going through. We will get a submissions report as soon as we can and we will continue to take it through as close as possible to shovel-ready status.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Thank you, Mr Wakelin-King. Mr Staples, the other thing that was raised with us on Friday around the Newcastle bypass was the time frame for the receipt of submissions. I know there was an extension of time through to a couple of weeks ago—

Mr WAKELIN-KING: This is Singleton, sorry?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: This is Singleton bypass. That was raised with us as being, because it was over the Christmas period, as an inappropriate time frame available for people to take in the volume of information and then prepare their submissions. Was that raised at all, the request to extend beyond what was the extension period?

Mr STAPLES: I would have to ask Mr Wakelin-King whether he has any visibility on that.

Mr WAKELIN-KING: The actual period closed yesterday.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yesterday, 1 March.

Mr WAKELIN-KING: The normal period is four weeks usually for the display of an RAF or documents of a similar nature. We usually extend over the period of Christmas and New Year. We usually extend that roughly to six weeks if we are going out not too long before Christmas and we usually extend that into early February. I will come back to you with the exact timings. Apologies, I do not have it to hand.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That is okay. You can take it on notice.

Mr WAKELIN-KING: I can perhaps get it before the end of the session. I think we provided sufficient time. If I may go back to my earlier comments, the engagement is ongoing whilst the formal submission period has closed. Obviously people can make enquiries and we post regular updates on our website accordingly.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Okay, thank you for that. Also raised with John and me on Friday were some matters relating to Scone and the bypass there. The first question they put to us is: Do we have any information around the overpass as opposed to the bypass? I think originally there was a proposal for an overpass and they just want to know, is that off the table.

Mr STAPLES: I will ask Mr Wakelin-King again.

Mr WAKELIN-KING: Obviously the bypass was officially opened on Saturday, which was ahead of time and on budget, if I may.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Well done.

Mr WAKELIN-KING: We are working with the local council in terms of the opportunity for place making in the town and that was mentioned at the official opening. There was a proposal some time ago put forward by council, I understand, for a second crossing over the railway line in town. That is a matter that is before council to give consideration to it. It is certainly not a matter at the moment, at this stage, that is part of the project.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: They also raised with us the issue that when roads are handed to councils after a bypass construction that the standard of the road be fit for purpose. Essentially they felt that the road that was handed to the council after the bypass construction was not actually fit for purpose. What is the process to make sure? Because this does happen, you create bypasses in every regional community. I come from Gundagai and 44 years after the bypass at Gundagai they just finished doing up the main street, which is the old highway.

Mr WAKELIN-KING: The ordinary course of events is that in the event of a bypass, the bypass becomes the highway and the original highway, in this context the New England Highway, would be handed back to the council. We make a provision in that hand back to support the council—either we do some works or we provide an allocation of funding for the council. We normally do that by way of an assessment of the maintenance diary for a period of up to 10 years and we either carry out those works ourselves as part of the project or we provide a grant to the council to that effect. In light of the New South Wales Government's announcement around the reclassification process, and that process is on foot, we have put on hold any handover. We are doing some investigations of what may need to be done and we are working very closely with council to that effect, but there will be no handover at this point in time until a resolution is made in that regard.

We will obviously continue to maintain the road until such a decision is made in that regard. The only other thing I would add to that is that we have also worked with council on the bypass strategy. We are very conscious of towns, and this was once again articulated during the official opening. Some people in town to get concerned about potential loss of passing trade. We have been working with the local community and council on what we call our bypass town strategy, which is to promote the town and the value proposition that the town brings to the region. We will be placing, among other things, signage in their to draw people's attention to the fact that Scone is one of the horse capitals of the Hunter region. It has a very strong and proud history around it horse breeding.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It is a beautiful part of the world too.

Mr WAKELIN-KING: Indeed.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Speaking of beautiful parts the world, Mr Staples, Brindabella Road. Snowy Valleys Council has been in touch and provided a very good document, the Brindabella Road upgrade business case, November 2018. It has been circulating that again. Has the department undertaken any work on the upgrade of Brindabella Road from Tumut through to Canberra?

Mr STAPLES: I might ask Mr Fuller for the best place to direct that question. I am not sure myself.

Mr FULLER: I have not seen it. I will have to take that on notice. I am aware that the print document is around, but we have not really done anything.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I think there is a renewed—

Mr DINAN: Interest?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: —interest in the Brindabella Road project as a part of a post-fire strategy for this part of New South Wales. They want to maintain jobs, but also to get the Canberrans to come across and spend some money in our beautiful part of the world.

Mr DINAN: Certainly our south-west regions are aware of the document and even though they are fairly preliminary, the discussions, we would certainly be able to take on notice and give you more feedback on that.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Okay, thank you.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I might turn to one other specific project and that is the set of issues that have been raised largely about safety on Hillsborough Road. What update can you give us about Transport for NSW plans for Hillsborough Road and the set of issues that have been raised by the community?

Mr STAPLES: I might just ask Mr Fuller to see whether he has any information in relation to that or whether he needs to take it on notice.

Mr FULLER: No, other than being aware that Hillsborough Road is a pretty major corridor sort of connecting Warners Bay up into Charlestown area in Newcastle. I am not aware of any recent correspondence we have had in terms of safety upgrades, but we can certainly take that on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think that is what has caused the issue to be raised: the fact that those have not occurred. I might put a couple of issues to you to guide your response on notice. Could you let us know where plans are up to, when is the Lake Macquarie traffic study going to be released and where is the spending up to? In particular, there are issues around a couple of the sets of traffic lights there, particularly at Hillsborough Road and Macquarie Road roundabout and also at Hillsborough Road and Chadwick Street. The timing on those traffic light upgrades are the things that are most agitating the community.

Mr FULLER: Okay.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Reportedly, one local campaigner has sent 123 pieces of correspondence in relation to this matter, so there should be a file. I will turn to a couple of the responses to the supplementary questions. Thank you for the answers we got in a range of areas; those were very helpful. I want to pick up, firstly, on one of the issues my colleague was asking about, which was the replacement of signage after the fires. What is the expected expenditure on the replacement of signage as a result of the fires?

Mr STAPLES: I do not think we have that specific cost here with us. We could almost go corridor by corridor and have to work that through, so we will have to take that on notice to see what we can make available for the Committee.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You have provided us that cost in previous years, so I appreciate that on notice. In 2018-19 it was \$4.4 million each year over the past five years. It is really to get a bit of a sense of, compared to that, what the—

Mr STAPLES: You can expect that it will be substantially more than that this year.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I understand. What is the scale of the increase and what is the opportunity for cooperation with local councils? We are having this view put to us that was referred to, that if we can coordinate purchases, if there is some ability here to do this together with the local councils and their own signage, they would like to take advantage of that.

Mr STAPLES: I might get Mr Dinan to talk to that, because we have been working pretty closely with councils. He might be able to give you some insight on the sort of approaches we have taken in relation to joint procurement.

Mr DINAN: We have been reaching out to councils to assist in some of their procurement. Some of it is quite large—around bridges, for example. Probably we have not got down to the level of detail of signs at this stage. There are already contracts underway for State government procurement, which councils can access. But specifically on each of the councils working through the signs, I understand your point about the scale of the change and some efficiencies that may be available from that. We have not probably got down to that level of detail in our discussions with councils. It is probably more about that initial response on the larger pieces of infrastructure that are still outstanding at this stage.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: There were 17 contractors employed last year to do the signage work that was part of what our needs were there. Is that going to be one of the issues as we replace these signs—a lack of contractors available to do this work? Or are you comfortable that those supply issues will be able to be overcome?

Mr STAPLES: I will ask Mr Dinan to respond to that.

Mr DINAN: I have not heard that the supply would be a problem. Obviously the scale will take a little bit more time, but suppliers are not indicating that is an issue to us. If it did come up, we would work with both them and the councils to see what we could do, either getting other suppliers in or working out an appropriate arrangement for critical signs to come first and then others to follow after that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you. I was less happy with this answer, which was about the new train sets. We were asking how many stations on the network will need to be lengthened to accommodate the new 10-car train sets.

Mr STAPLES: Just to clarify, are you talking about the new Intercity fleet?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am talking about the Central Coast & Newcastle line and the Illawarra line. It was the specific question on those two lines.

Mr STAPLES: I just wanted to clarify. To date we have been talking about the new diesel replacement for the XPT. The question you are referring to is actually the new Intercity fleet, which is replacing the V sets.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The answer was that the information is publicly available. What is the answer? How many stations will need to be lengthened to accommodate the new 10-car sets?

Mr STAPLES: I will find out what is publicly available and come back to you.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think we would be happy with just those two lines.

Mr STAPLES: So the Central Coast and—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Newcastle, and the Illawarra line. The other question on notice I asked was in relation to the on-demand bus trials in Eden and Candelo. We have covered this at previous budget estimates hearings. The agencies were very helpful in supplying information through the course of the hearing. I was entirely comfortable with that. I then asked, though, on notice how many people had caught the bus at Candelo as part of this trial. I think it might have been a \$300,000 trial. The answer you gave me on notice was to refer me back to the transcript. The question I was asking was not how many trips were caught, which you provided rapidly in the course of the hearing: 38 trips was the answer. My question was, how many people caught this bus. There were 38 trips. There are media reports of a single couple catching this expensive on-demand bus trial. I want to know how many persons caught this bus. If you can tell me now, I am open to it. I am comfortable if you take it on notice.

Mr STAPLES: I certainly do not have that information in my head or to hand, but Ms Wise may have some information about that.

Ms WISE: While these services are generally booked, we might be able to go and seek that information from the operator. We would not routinely collect that information and it is not part of the information that is published. I would be concerned, if it was a very small number, that we would not breach anybody's privacy. We can certainly see what we can get from the operator down there. I would point out, though, that the patronage on all of those Sapphire Coast on-demand services has increased significantly since the changes were made in July of last year. In December, in fact, we had over 1,000 people using that service, so it is going very well now.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am happy with those caveats, if you want to go away and collect what information can be collected as a result of the monitoring of this trial to answer the question: How many people caught this bus?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That was a trial, and we have got a lot of trials. What is the definition of a trial being used by the department? Is it for a short period of time? Is it an ongoing period of time? I want to get in my head what the definition of "trial" is so I do not ask inappropriate questions.

Mr STAPLES: It is not a fixed, hard rule on timing. I think it is more an indication to the community or the customers that this is not a permanently committed-to service and that we are trying something different here, so treat it in that way and understand that we may make changes once we get feedback.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So there would be a feedback process and a review?

Mr STAPLES: Yes. For the on-demand pilots, I think we went through it. We explained at the last hearing about the process we go through, about six-monthly review, I think a shorter-term review in between with the operator about how it has been taken up, whether there are adjustments that can be made to improve some of

the customer outcomes and so forth, and then a more thorough review at one year and two years about whether or not something has come out of that that would warrant it becoming a permanent service.

I understand the perception around that, but I think it is more a signal that you have actually got to get these things out into the community and into customers to see whether or not they really work. It is all very well for us to sit behind the scenes and theoretically think that it is going to be the right thing, but there is nothing like getting in the real world with these concepts and ideas. Whether it be an on-demand bus or whether it be an automated vehicle, I think you will see us using the word "trials" quite a bit and "pilots".

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Okay, we will get used to it. Mr Staples, I just want to go back to questions around the bushfire recovery. This is a pretty specific issue, but it is a significant and substantial issue. The Dunns Road fire burnt between 40 per cent and 50 per cent of the softwood plantation in that part of the State. It is quite a substantial hit, about an \$800 million economic hit to the Snowy Valley's economy every year for the next 20 years. One of the issues is that they can still harvest what is referred to as black timber—that is, the burnt softwood. There is a very small window, between eight to 12 months, the locals are telling us, that they can get that wood out of there and it can still be harvested and used.

The problem is that coming into winter in that part of the State there is a lot of rain and snow, which shortens the window. What that means is there is going to be a lot more heavy vehicles hauling pine and softwood timber out of the mountains and down into the mills at Tumut. Acknowledging that there is a lot of work to be done around getting the roads back to a safe enough standard to have them reopened, and the road signage and the furniture, these particular roads in the mountains, in the alps, the high country also need to be got up to speed so we can actually get the trucks there to meet the requirement to harvest that black timber, the burnt timber. What work is being done with the council to make sure that that is the case, that those roads are at a standard that will take a lot of trucks out of the mountains in a very short period of time?

Mr STAPLES: I understand the context. I will ask Mr Dinan whether he has got any specific detail on that matter. I think you highlight an example of a lot of little things that have come up for us in terms of requests from local businesses and communities about things that we could do to support. We have certainly been endeavouring to do that, both on the North Coast and the South Coast in particular and even out in the Central West. I will ask Mr Dinan whether he has got any specific knowledge of the matter you were raising.

Mr DINAN: Specifically, we have been assisting council with reopening that road over time. We have done that over probably the last month, assisting them with getting more tree-logging crews down there. On that specific harvesting of the timber, I am not aware of it so I would have to take that on notice. That said, we did assist access to some forestry areas in Eden in probably late January, early February for a mill to start reopening and things like that. I would have to take that on notice and specifically assist work with Snowy Mountains council, but it is something that we could probably put in some strategy to assist.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: We were there a couple of weeks ago and you could already see the number of trucks coming out of the forests with the softwood. There were two intersections that were specifically raised with Mr Graham and me when we were down there. I live there and he came down to visit my patch. There has been a substantial amount of work conducted at this intersection already. It is the Batlow-Wondalga Road and Snowy Mountains Highway intersection. It has got some unique issues. There is a bridge over the Gilmore Creek and poor vision essentially in both directions on the Snowy Mountains Highway, but certainly coming out of that Wondalga Road, which is where the trucks will be coming with the timber. They will come to an intersection and they cannot see, so they just nose on out—they pretty much roll the dice every time they come down to that intersection. With the volume of traffic, there is going to be an accident. As I said, there has already been a substantial amount of work done there and money spent in probably the last five or six years to do it up, but it is still a dangerous intersection. What can be done in this time frame when there is going to be increased trucking traffic at this intersection? It is for the safety of everyone.

Mr DINAN: I could not answer that specifically. There are some strategies. We have construction sites, We could get something similar to that where we manage larger amounts of truck movements. I would have to look at that site specifically.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Can you take it on notice?

Mr DINAN: I will.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It is really important. Once you understand what is going to happen with the volume, you can just see. If you could take it on notice—

Mr DINAN: I certainly understand your concern and, yes, we could certainly have a look at that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It really is just an issue over this 12 months. They are going to be operating at three times their capacity, going flat chat with trucks up and down there. Then there is a real risk it will turn off altogether. It is a temporary problem but quite a drastic one.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The other intersection, which I did raise at the last estimates hearing, is the intersection of the Gocup Road with the Snowy Mountains Highway. I was advised that there was actually some work to take place that would assist. There is no line delineation at that intersection. You come up the Gocup Road and you do not know that you have to give way at this intersection. Seriously, people think they are on a main road coming up the Gocup Road. They do not know that they are about to hit the Snowy Mountains Highway and they are actually going to have to give way. As they come around the corner to the intersection they cannot see until it is too late. They just shoot across. Until something is done with the intersection—a roundabout or whatever—there needs to be regular marking of the road pavement so people know they either have to stop or give way. If someone can take on notice the need to go and have a look at this intersection particularly because, again, the harvesting of the black timber is going to put an increased number of heavy vehicles at this intersection under speed.

Mr STAPLES: I think all I can do today is acknowledge the issue you have raised and the concerns around that. We will take it on notice and give some sort of response, but in the meantime we will also get the people down in that region to have a look at that.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Thank you. The NRMA put out a very good report on a regular basis. They do a survey where you rate your road, essentially. People go on and rate their road. It is a good body of work. I am just wondering what happens to it within the department. How is it treated? What happens to it? This is a body of work the NRMA undertakes on behalf of its members. Some 23,400 people across the State voted. I think it is actually a good body of work. What happens to it?

Mr STAPLES: I am aware of the work that they do. I cannot speak personally. I would ask Mr Fuller and Mr Dinan whether they have got any knowledge of how we engage with the NRMA and what use we may make of that information.

Mr FULLER: We obviously engage with the NRMA on a whole range of things. It is not something that the NRMA has come to us with recently. We will certainly reach out and find out where it is with that and see whether that feeds into the work that we are undertaking for statewide planning.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I guess that is the question: Does it feed up into the planning processes of the department?

Mr FULLER: I would have to take that notice. I am not aware that it has in recent times.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I am moving from bushfires to drought. As the Hon. Shayne Mallard says, eventually I will get to locusts, but at this point in time let us talk about drought.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: That is in Adam Marshall's session.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Touché. That is very good. This is about the work that has been done within what is now Transport for NSW, the number of trains that we have with the capacity to cart water into communities that are running short, but also any work that the former RMS has done with its own fleet to see if we have tankers that could be converted to be used for the delivery of even just raw water, let alone potable water, into communities. Since the budget estimates process last time, has any work been done along those lines?

Mr STAPLES: I will ask Mr Fuller to give you a bit of advice around that. Obviously we have been pretty active around the drought generally.

Mr FULLER: Absolutely. There has been ongoing work across government that has been led by the Coordinator General, Regions that we have fed into about the requirements of water in each of these regional centres. We have done some work, particularly with our partner in John Holland, which has put forward a proposal as to what it could do if it was required to cart water into regional centres that are accessible by rail. We have provided that into the central drought response, if you like, and that remains available as a current piece of work that it has made. We have talked about the potential and possibility for us to access that quickly via the procurement we undertake with it through our country rail network. Certainly that is something that we have worked on.

We have assisted some local government areas with both RMS fleet—more as you say for raw water, because obviously potable water is a different story—but also we have reached out and offered support even if it was to use our fleet. A recent example that comes to mind was for the Uralla community prior to Christmas when

it announced that it had to turn off its supply because of the treatable levels of arsenic in the supply. We said to them, "Look, if you need an urgent requirement for assistance with a fleet to transport potable water"—whether it be flatbed trucks and things, we were on standby and at the ready to do that. We certainly continue to work right across government with our response and how we might assist that.

Mr DINAN: There was also an opportunity where we took some drinking water into Tibooburra, an area in the unincorporated area where we maintain the road. We acted kind of as a de facto local government in that area and assisted them. It is just indicative of one of the things that we have done over the drought period.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: If I can clarify, when you say you took water into Tibooburra, that was on road?

Mr DINAN: Yes, it was.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Was the RMS involved in the delivery of the water or just getting the road to a standard so that private contractors could deliver the water?

Mr DINAN: I have advice in front of me that we arranged the water to be delivered but I am not across the total level of detail on that. We could have been able to get—some of our hired plant contractors are also water carters, like potable water carters, so we may have been able to access that.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: For the sake of clarity, can you take that on notice?

Mr DINAN: Yes, I will do that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I have some safety questions that I want to turn to but I might jump back, Ms Wise, to your answer. Thank you for those updated patronage figures for this particular on-demand bus service. Can you also update us about the amended cost, if any, for this new reject trial? What is the total cost?

Ms WISE: The Sapphire Coast trial?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes.

Ms WISE: In terms of the total contract price, I do not believe what was published at the time would be current. That said, we may not actually reach that depending on if we continue the trial all the way through to the end of the two-year period. We make an assessment every six months about whether we would continue the trial. The next time that this one is to be assessed is over the next couple of months. Because it is due currently to finish, it would have its third period ending in May or early June.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am struggling to understand what you are saying. You are saying you accept it will be more expensive than it was originally planned, is that correct?

Ms WISE: No, I am not suggesting that at all.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The trial has been expanded but that might happen within the existing budget, is that what you are suggesting?

Ms WISE: That is what I am suggesting.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That was because it was such a small take-up originally?

Ms WISE: I am not following, I am sorry. What does the take-up have to do with the—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This trial, as we know, had a small number of people. We do not know how many people caught the bus but 38 trips were taken over the—

Ms WISE: Canelo.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —course of that particular route. It was not cancelled, it was expanded.

Ms WISE: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But you are saying it was expanded but that might occur within the—

Ms WISE: Existing budget.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —existing budget, and I am asking is that because so few people caught the bus in the first nine months?

Ms WISE: No. What I am suggesting is that if we continue the trial past the third period it would take it to the full budgeted amount. If we cease the pilot within the next few months, in line with our six-monthly checkings, then it would potentially cost us less than that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Have both those options been discussed in the department?

Ms WISE: We would do that when we evaluate it next, which is coming up in the next month.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: They are the two options that you look at?

Ms WISE: We will look at all the routes that are on that Sapphire Coast program at that time over the next month or so, and it will be as part of that evaluation process. My team will work with the operator and survey community members and so forth and it will be at that time that that kind of stuff is discussed. I certainly have not had any discussions with my team about that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: What are you telling us is the date for that review point? You are saying in about a month's time?

Ms WISE: It will be over the next month or two because the finalisation period for the third term would be, I think it is the end of May or the first week of June.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Mr Staples, I want to return to the questions we were asking the Minister about a range of safety measures that are now on the agenda under active consideration by the Government. The chief one of those I was asking the Minister about was the point-to-point cameras or the average speed safety cameras. I am interested in you giving us some background about how they are operating at the moment, what the history of them has been, you or any of your officials. I might start by asking how many of these are active in New South Wales?

Mr STAPLES: You are talking about the point-to-point for heavy vehicles?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes.

Mr STAPLES: I will have to take on notice the number and the corridors they are on but we can get that information and provide it to you. I know they have been in place for some time and obviously they are there for speed but also for monitoring and providing information to our heavy vehicle inspectors about the use of the vehicles, how long they are travelling for and so forth. So that was the genesis, to provide a better oversight of the trucking industry around making sure that drivers were taking appropriate breaks and those sorts of things as well. It is not just about speed.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Accepted.

Mr STAPLES: But it has got a broader application. Mr Fuller tells me he has got some of that information.

Mr FULLER: There are actually 25 average speed cameras that cover an enforcement length of 726 kilometres of road.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Can you tell us what corridors they are on? Because I think the Minister, or one of you, made the point they are on some corridors, not others, which I think is a really good point. Can you tell us which corridors they are on?

Mr STAPLES: We can take that on notice. They are spread right throughout the State, I know.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: When you say 726 kilometres of road, what you will be measuring is the distance between the gantries, is that right?

Mr FULLER: The combination of point to point in accumulation across those 25 areas, yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: How long on average are they then? What is the average distance between the gantries?

Mr FULLER: We can take that on notice. There might be some variation on those according to local conditions.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Almost all of these are on regional corridors. Are all of them on regional corridors?

Mr FULLER: We will take that on notice as well but I certainly know that a majority are in regional areas.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am very happy for you to take it on notice but are you aware of any that are not on regional corridors?

Mr FULLER: Not off the top of my head. We will take that on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is fine. I am happy for you to take it on notice. Can you tell us how many offences were issued, say in the last year for speeding through these cameras?

Mr STAPLES: We will take that on notice and see what we can provide.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am comfortable with that. Can you give us perhaps any anecdotal description of how that has changed? For heavy vehicles—and we started on this discussion in what was a reasonably hurried exchange with the Minister. I am open in this calmer atmosphere to revisiting it.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It is all Shayne's fault.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: It was not the Minister who was making it not calm, I can assure you.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am not pointing the finger. The good point was made, this has improved safety over time. I wonder if you can give us any information for heavy vehicles what has the impact been on the safety side?

Mr STAPLES: I do not have it specifically to—I do have this information. Across the heavy vehicle average speed enforcement length there has been a—I do not have the time frame over which this reduction is—22 per cent reduction in casualty crashes involving heavy vehicles in those corridors; a 44 per cent reduction in fatalities from crashes of heavy vehicles in those corridors; and a 4 per cent reduction in serious injuries. They are some of the stats I have got at hand. I do not have the time frame over which that is.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Presumably over the course of the program though?

Mr STAPLES: Quite possibly. As you can see, quite significant reductions.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think the Minister started referring to those figures, so I appreciate you reiterating them in a—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Clearer way.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, it was not, it was equally clear; there was just more distraction. So they do not apply to cars and they have never applied to cars in New South Wales, the operation of these cameras?

Mr STAPLES: That is right. For cars we have got fixed speed camera locations, we have got speed and red light cameras and we have got the mobile detection cameras as well. So obviously there is a range of programs there which have given similar reductions at intersections and at locations where they have been applied to.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: And they are for trucks too.

Mr STAPLES: Yes, those cameras apply to both, to all vehicles.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: And motorbikes.

Mr STAPLES: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But I do not think you can tell us how many cars are speeding under these cameras in New South Wales in the last year, can you?

Mr STAPLES: No. I would not have that information available. I should say around locations that you asked before I think they are all published on the website.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Sure.

Mr STAPLES: You can actually locate those.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Sure.

Mr STAPLES: But in terms of information on cars, no, we are not. It is not being used as a policing mechanism so we are not collecting that data that I am aware of.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Do the cameras detect those cars? Will they take photos?

Mr STAPLES: They would certainly be detecting them because there actually has to be a back-of-house analysis as to the nature of the vehicle and it has gone through number plate identification, and so forth. There would be a monitoring process of some sort.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: They monitor the car. They would detect the number plate of the car. They take an image of the car to do that. Is that correct?

Mr STAPLES: I am not sure exactly how it captures the information but we can soon find information on the means by which we capture that information, if you like.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, so maybe how that information is captured and whether that is retained. That is captured in some way at the start and captured in some way at the end, or measured in some way at the start and measured in some way at the end.

Mr STAPLES: Well, it is captured at each end.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes.

Mr STAPLES: It is basically a data point. Then for a heavy vehicle, where I know what happens, there is a cross-correlation of matching data from start and end and then there will be an analysis of the journey time relative to what would be expected if you travel at speed, so it gives you a pointer straightaway. That also feeds into heavy vehicle monitoring around what truck drivers are actually doing—are they following appropriate shift patterns and those sorts of things as well? These are over quite substantial distances.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. Understood.

Mr STAPLES: I think it is important that this did not start out as a speed program alone. It actually started out as a broader program about oversight of the heavy vehicle industry, which is partly now done under the regime of the heavy vehicle regulator nationally, which is a good thing. But, yes, it is more than just point to point speed.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I accept that entirely although the additional policy decision was made by the New South Wales Government to not retain that data about cars travelling under these gantries. That is correct, is it not?

Mr STAPLES: I will take on notice what we have got in relation to data, but certainly obviously it is not a policy for fining motorists for—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, correct. I agree with that. That is not my question though. I agree with your characterisation that it is not a policy for fining motorists. I am asking a separate question about whether the policy was to not hold back data about what we can tell about traffic behaviour of cars.

Mr STAPLES: We will see what data is actually available—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. I was not sure whether that policy decision was made by the New South Wales Government as these came in—this is in relation to data. It has always been the case that we are not fining cars. When was that decision made in relation to data?

Mr STAPLES: Yes. I will clarify that. I am not aware of any recent change—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Correct.

Mr STAPLES: —in the data capture and what we are doing around that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, it is certainly not recent. I am asking did it happen at the start or was the policy decision made subsequently?

Mr STAPLES: My expectation is that we will find that we have been doing what we set out from the very beginning. Look, I really appreciate the Committee's interest around this and it is really good to be talking about road safety. For us as an organisation, and as I know both Ministers are very keen through this summit, is to really get a broad conversation going across the community. The number of lives we are losing across the nation, not just in New South Wales, on the road network is far too many, without a doubt. Whether it is the policing approach, the vehicle technology, the investment in the road network, adjusting speeds and so forth, all those things have to be put together as a package.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. If you can provide some of this information, certainly it would be helpful from our end and I think, given the discussion has started, you can be certain it will be put to good use in our discussions. I have a final question on those point to point cameras. You are distinguishing between certain

types of heavy vehicles in the process you have described with the photos between the gantries and recreational vehicles that put them in the heavy vehicle category will not be having their speed tracked. Is my understanding of that correct?

Mr STAPLES: As in a caravan, are you talking about?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Or a recreational vehicle.

Mr STAPLES: I think it is very much the true heavy vehicle—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, but somehow the system has to distinguish between those. If you could describe how that is currently occurring in these cameras?

Mr STAPLES: Certainly.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I will follow on from that with asking about the 100 kilometres default speed limit on New South Wales roads. I am comfortable if you want to take some of these on notice but I wanted some general background and to know what proportion of roads in New South Wales are on the default speed limit of 100 kilometres per hour.

Mr STAPLES: Are you talking about State roads or are you talking about roads in total?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am happy to be guided as to which I should be asking about.

Mr STAPLES: It is not usually my role to be asking you questions so I am just trying to clarify.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is okay. Feel free.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That is okay. Seek clarification.

Mr STAPLES: I just want to clarify what you are seeking. We will see what we can provide with what is available to us.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The thing that would be helpful is—if you could just give us some guidance and if you want to break it down—how many roads are on the default? What is the process now for not being on the default road speed, if you are at or around 100 kilometres an hour?

Mr STAPLES: I do not know whether Mr Fuller or Mr Dinan has anymore background on that but they are signposted in this. I think what you are referring to is actually the full un-signposted roads, of which there is a number but hopefully that is a really small portion because most of them—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Well, I am not sure if that is what I am asking about but I might ask this question then because the Government has floated a proposal about changing the default speed limit on New South Wales from 100 kilometres an hour. Does that refer to non-posted speed limits? I took it to refer to the fact that 100 kilometres an hour is most roads. There are a few now at 110 on very safe roads where you are going a bit quicker. Is it the default speed limit for the purposes of being the maximum?

Mr STAPLES: I think there is a little bit of a misunderstanding about what is in public commentary. Firstly, the 110 kilometres an hour, that applies to certain types of road, typically motorway, typically separated carriageways where the risk of having a collision—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Unless you are in that category, it is 100?

Mr STAPLES: The Government has just basically taken the lead. Both Ministers have put out a release about a road safety summit, to which I think you have been invited. There is no policy position or policy proposal from the Government about adjustment to speed or the application. There has certainly been commentary in the media, I acknowledge that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It is on the agenda in the Minister's press release, though.

Mr STAPLES: Yes. There are conversation points but that is not to say that it is about an un-signposted road speed. There might be some roads out there today that are signposted at 100 that someone might suggest be reduced to 80. Minister Toole this morning talked about the fact that he was not talking about a blanket reduction here; it was more a case of looking at some of the roads that are currently 100 and whether it would be appropriate to be 80.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Can you take on notice what is referred to as a default speed limit? That is not a specific road having its road speed lowered. It is the default speed limit that has been referred to in the Minister's press releases. I would like to understand exactly what you understand from an agency point of view when we talk about the default speed limit of 100. If it is not a specific project, what is it? But I would be happy for you to seek clarification and come back. That could be quite important.

Mr STAPLES: I think from our point of view what would be really important in any change is to not take generic approaches but to really look at corridors on their merits and the appropriateness of their speed.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I accept that, yes. I am really just looking for some general background but whatever you can provide will be helpful and we will certainly put it to use.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: On the safety line of questioning, the Saving Lives on Country Roads and Liveable and Safe Urban Communities—that is the funding program—are those projects reviewed after being finished? Is there a period of time when we go back and review the figures to make sure that the intended use of the funding has actually achieved its goal—that is, to save lives on the road, or do we spend the money and we do not go back and review?

Mr STAPLES: Obviously that is a really important part of the overall road safety plan that we have. I will ask Mr Fuller whether he can give you a bit of detail on how we assess that.

Mr FULLER: Thank you, Mr Staples. Obviously as you are aware, there are some pretty significant commitments by government on Saving Lives on Country Roads and also the liveability and safety in urban communities through active transport and some of the other things that it includes. With all our projects there is obviously a formal kind of review in terms of benefits realisation and an understanding of, "Has the project delivered its original objectives as it was set out in terms of the criteria, meeting what it was set out to achieve?" As a broad picture, all of the major projects that we undertake go through what is referred to as a gate six review for benefits realisation. In that will be an assessment of those rotating statistics.

As well as that, at a regional level our teams are very attuned to looking at some of the statistics and how they relate to not just one project but as a program or how they relate to particular corridors. If I use a recent example, some of the great work that we have done through this program and some of the other maintenance undertakings on Picton Road as an example. Our team were very pleased that over the last 12 months there has not been a fatality on that section of road. That gives you some indication at a regional level as well. They are very focused and tuned in to particular corridors and looking at those, not just the individual projects as they stand in isolation. I do not know if you want to add anything to that, Mr Dinan?

Mr DINAN: No, probably all our major routes that we looked at when we looked at the Great Western Highway upgrade east of Katoomba there has been a 75 per cent reduction of fatalities at Picton Road, for example. Mr Wakelin-King has probably got some statistics on the Pacific Highway. So, to your point, they are all major upgrades and we are very focused on making sure they are delivering safety outcomes. They are the larger projects but we also do it on a number of our smaller projects and monitor each of those routes very carefully. If the fatality or accident statistics start to rise, we certainly review what we are doing very quickly to see whether there is anything more we can do.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: What is the time frame for that? I guess that is what I am after. These projects—particularly Saving Lives on Country Roads, projects completed—how long do we monitor is to see if it has actually been working or not?

Mr DINAN: It is essentially at the end of the program, which is generally the next 12 months. The problem is that statistics are a variable thing so that I would not like to be held to that just for the 12 months. The Picton Road example is a good one: \$60 million worth of investment probably over the last five to 10 years. They have been going down so it was initially a \$50 million program, some additional funding in the last three to four years to get an outcome in 2019 without a fatality, which is a great outcome. It is continuing monitoring and perhaps improving as we go through, but I can assure the Committee that we are very focused on road safety and look at reviewing those programs for efficiency and effectiveness.

Mr STAPLES: One thing I would just to add to that is the danger of doing year-on-year comparisons of data. If you look back 20 years we have had a substantial reduction, which I think across government and agencies we should be really pleased with. But every death is a tragedy. When you look at that data there is a lot of, within different categories and within annual numbers, quite a bit of noise of up and down. That can be a whole range of factors. It could be the weather in a particular year, it could just be luck in a particular year as well.

In the late 1990s there was a spike in the toll and yet here we are several years later with significant reductions. It is really important that when we evaluate these programs we take a long-term view. Obviously if we put a project in place and immediately after we are still getting significant events then that is a call for us to need to go back and do something more significantly. But, on the flipside, if nothing happens we do not immediately declare victory either because these things can take some time to emerge.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: A long way to go. I know you are all going to be surprised by this but I am going to ask some questions about weeds. At the last estimates I asked about how much is being committed to and spent on weeds on our roadsides. Anyone in the regions would know this, but after the bushfires the first thing that comes back—

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Foxes and blackberries.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Weeds.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Exactly, blackberries in particular but other weeds as well. At the first show of rain, people say, "Oh, it is lovely and green" but you actually get down and have a look at it and they are all weeds. On a lot of those burnt roadsides now is the time to get in and conduct some activity around the blackberry regrowth that is just starting. Have we made an allocation of funding so that we can get in and undertake that work before they explode again?

Mr STAPLES: I will ask Mr Fuller and Mr Dinan and see whether they have got any more information about that.

Mr FULLER: I might ask Mr Dinan on any specifics but obviously vegetation management broadly is part of what we do in regional maintenance space across the network. I am not aware whether we have increased immediately there after the fires, but obviously because there is probably a bit of a rebalance with our program and the fires will have affected things, maybe there is an opportunity there to look at what we are doing with vegetation management.

Mr DINAN: Thanks, Mr Fuller. We do have an allocation for vegetation management and weed spraying for road safety purposes. Weed management within the road reserve is usually a council responsibility and they access it via their rural lands protection and things like that. I would have to take on notice about exactly what we are doing there in this period of time. I think both councils and us are probably reeling from just recovery at this stage, but certainly take on notice perhaps the appropriateness of doing it perhaps between now and some time in the future. I do not have anything specific on that at the moment.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Okay. They will be the first things that grow back and they will grow pretty quickly. A lot of people do not realise but they used to make smoking pipes out of the blackberry cane. It could hold flame and resist flame so it is the first thing that goes back. The canes are still there when you see the burnt territory and they are now sprouting green. If you do not get onto them now you have lost that battle.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: The blackberry killer.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: They will come back stronger and worse. Most of the fuel load, particularly down my part of the world but I dare say in other parts, it was not the litter on the ground, it was the weed growth and the blackberries. I reckon you need to spend a bit of time on this. I know the last time Mr Wakelin-King provided me with a wonderful table, which I have in front of me, around how much has been spent over the various years. Some of these communities are going to be looking for work as well in the short term because there have been job losses—2,000 job losses—down my way because of the fires at this point in time.

Maybe we can employ some people as contractors as part of a stimulus program to get onto this over the next 12 months. If you could take on notice what you are doing right now across the State specifically in weed management because you are right: It is the corridor but it is also along the side on the shoulders.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: And train lines.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I think that would be good. Also along the freight lines because they will have the same problem.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I might just ask some questions about the mobile detection cameras in regional areas.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Just coming through.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, I just have to do a quick bit of maths. I was just adding up.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: You have got a whole team in a back room writing your questions for you.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You still need a calculator.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: He is a numbers man.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I was interested in asking about these cameras in regional areas but, firstly, the Government does not have specific signs saying there is a mobile phone detection camera coming up but it does have generalised signs saying that mobile detection cameras are active in New South Wales. How many of those signs are currently up on New South Wales roads?

Mr STAPLES: I have to take that one on notice. I do not know the number of general signs, just like we have a number of general speed signs as well warning about speed cameras

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, that program has obviously been operating for some time. We are now trying to change people's behaviour rapidly.

Mr STAPLES: Yes, and we are obviously not relying purely on signage alone. I think there has been plenty of commentary publicly. We have been using marketing programs to educate and raise awareness. Rest assured for us that success here is if we get zero results out of the cameras. That is what is successful.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, but it is a key lever—you would agree with that; having the signs up reminding people that these cameras are about? There is a policy argument about whether they should be specific or general; there is no argument that having signs up, having general signs up, helps remind motorists it is a good thing.

Mr STAPLES: Certainly it can be there as a reminder. I would expect people who go through their licensing process actually know in getting their licence that it is actually illegal to be using—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am advocating the Government's position here. I am simply asking you, how many of these are up?

Mr STAPLES: The point I would make is that we should rely alone on the science. We are using a multitude of channels to educate people through social media channels, marketing campaigns—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Mr Staples, we are in agreement here. You are being very defensive. It sounds like there might not be a lot of signs up.

Mr STAPLES: I will take on notice number of signs that are up.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Very good. That would be useful and I would also like to know—given we are in regional transport—how many of those signs are in regional areas? If you take it on notice, if you could provide that breakdown? Some 31,300 people were, during the three months that these cameras have been operating, reported in the media as having been detected. Is that figure accurate, firstly?

Mr STAPLES: That does sound correct. I am just checking on that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That was the number that ran in the paper yesterday.

Mr STAPLES: Yes, that is correct.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: How many of those were in regional areas?

Mr STAPLES: I do not have the breakdown between Sydney and regional in relation to those.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So, perhaps on notice? You have told us where those cameras were operating in regional areas so I accept they have been roving widely into regional areas. How many of those detections occurred, on notice, would be useful?

Mr STAPLES: So 31,345 were detected in the warning period. If you want us to split that into Sydney metropolitan—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. That would be useful.

Mr STAPLES: —and the rest of New South Wales, we can do that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you. There are eight cameras now operating but only 9.2 million checks—yes, there are 9.2 million checks performed over that period with eight cameras. That is going to ramp up to 135 million checks per year under this program.

Mr STAPLES: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And that will be operating in three year's time, is that accurate?

Mr STAPLES: Yes. We have a three-year program to roll out a network of fixed and transportable cameras. We have started with eight transportable and we expect the overall program to increase, based on the volume of roads where we expect to do these, about 135 million—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, checks a year.

Mr STAPLES: If you annualise the 9 million, because it was a three-month pilot—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Exactly.

Mr STAPLES: So it is nine times for, 36 million. That would be the equivalent annual based on what we have. So clearly we have more cameras coming to help support that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So that will ramp up. So we will be doing about 15 times as many checks once the program is fully up and running. Is that?

Mr STAPLES: No. The 135 million is not annual.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Sorry. You are annualising, yes. So 15 times more than we have been able to do in one quarter. That is an accurate way—

Mr STAPLES: It is about four times—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, four times per annum.

Mr STAPLES: —more than what we have done in the three-month—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So 15 or 16 times more than we have been able to do in a quarter?

Mr STAPLES: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No driver got a fine, but that would have been about \$1 million in fines?

Mr STAPLES: I have not done the calculations on fines, but you know what the quantum is. It is \$344, if you are in a school zone it is \$457—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So again these are—

Mr STAPLES: —five demerit points.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —what I assume were Government figures reported in the paper yesterday. It was reported as \$10.8 million over the quarter. My view is then that once we are up and running fully, it is 15 or 16 times that amount per year is what we are now expecting. These are probably more accurate figures than the trial, that we are now expecting—

Mr STAPLES: What I would caution against is forecasting revenues out of this because the intention of this is to drive down the use of mobile phones. So if this program is effective, we will start to see a reduction—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We have seen a reduction I would say.

Mr STAPLES: And we should continue to see a reduction as this goes out at scale. The commitment the Government has made is that the revenue goes back into road safety programs. But in terms of the amount of money, I think it would be dangerous to speculate because—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Well it requires that caveat that behaviour might change significantly, but it would be in the order of \$150 million, \$160 million.

Mr STAPLES: Let us be really clear. The way to avoid a fine is to not pick up the phone.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I agree.

Mr STAPLES: It is really straightforward. Keep your eyes on the road.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: It is like you are seeing random breath testing as revenue raising.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It goes to the scale of the funding in the road safety fund though, does it not? Is that amount bigger or less than the amount going in from fixed speed camera fines?

Mr STAPLES: More generally, we have the funding from speeding goes to road safety programs.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, into this same fund.

Mr STAPLES: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Does it not?

Mr STAPLES: Yes. The Community Road Safety Program.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That would be less than that. I have not checked recently, but that would be less than that figure that we are currently getting in from, say, fixed road safety speed cameras.

Mr STAPLES: For all of us working in road safety, the preference here is that we do not have to collect the revenue through fines. By all means I would rather argue with Treasury for the money and then we have lower fines because we have appropriate behaviour, whether it be speed, mobile phones, whatever it would be. This is not about revenue to fund programs. This is about road safety outcomes.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Absolutely.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thanks for that information. You have clarified a range of those things.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: There is a campaign running around adult change facilities being put into the rest areas along our highways, strategically being placed along our highways. These are laydown facilities where you can change an adult. There are some communities where councils have constructed these. I just want to know what work is being done within the agency around a program to implement adult laydown change facilities in our rest areas?

Mr STAPLES: Thanks for asking that question. The rest area strategy and increasing our customer focus is really important for us in terms of providing the appropriate facilities for people to be able to stop off on their journeys. Mr Dinan can provide you with a bit more information about what we are doing on your specific question about the laydowns.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It is very specific, yes.

Mr DINAN: Thanks, Mr Staples. So just to reiterate, we have a widespread rest area strategy and we are very focused that it is a customer touch point as people move along the road, one that people are very sensitive about. The laydown facilities for disabled adults, there is really only one that has come to light in the last couple of weeks, as we have become aware of what Wagga Wagga has done around the Marveloo transportable system. On the back of that, I have some of my staff looking at it whether we can get something into our rest areas. Some of the challenges initially appear to be being able to access water and power. So we are, firstly, looking at what is available with the Marveloo, and also then an appropriate location. But we are thinking of trying some on our major routes, which would be the Pacific Highway, the Hume Highway and the Princes Highway. Hopefully we can get those out in some trial period by about Easter, as people start to travel a bit more.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So based on the Marveloo at Wagga Wagga? Or another style?

Mr DINAN: Based on the Marveloo. The same product. I think it is made out of one of the Victorian councils, Geelong or Ballarat or one of the councils that manufactures them. I understand that they are not for sale, you just lease them. So we are wondering if they have some in stock that we are able to get those. If we find the trial is successful, we may then go to the market to get a product like that. Whether it is the Marveloo or something like it. We are also looking around at like a Coates or Kennards to see whether they might have a similar product that they may use at festivals and things like that. We are looking around to get something so that we are able to let people who are travelling with disabled adults to go through what would be an appropriate location to change people as it requires—you would be aware at the moment some of those adults might be laying on the floor of the toilets that are provided, which certainly seems inappropriate.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes, it is inappropriate. The rest area strategy, as that is rolled out, how are we working out which rest areas we are improving and enhancing? What is the process for developing that? How do they fit into the strategy? The second thing is, you mentioned water and power. Are we looking at putting power into some of these—solar or whatever. Are we looking at getting power into some of our rest areas on these busy State highways?

Mr DINAN: Probably both of those items, those utilities, are challenges. It ends up becoming horses for courses. Some rest areas are close to both. Usually water is probably the bigger challenge, a lot of the time we have lights. Or as you have noted, we could go to something a little bit more sustainable around solar power and

use some other situation like that. It is very unique to the location about what is available. But we think we generally need—ideally if we are able to link up the sewer, water and power, the rest areas are of a higher standard. As we go down to have more septic tanks and tank water, that is probably—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The more remote they become—

Mr DINAN: That is right, and we go from there. But they are sustainable. The other thing is that the more remote they are the less the required facilities, but they are used less so they become more appropriate, I suppose.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: As a matter of interest, how much money has been set aside for the rest area strategy across the forward estimates?

Mr STAPLES: I do not have that. I will have to take that on notice.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That is how much has been allocated. How much has been spent to date, say, over the past couple of financial years on the rest area enhancement? Can you take that on notice?

Mr DINAN: We will take that on notice.

Mr STAPLES: We will take on notice expenditure for the past two years and what is in the budget going forward for the rest areas. Just while we have the microphone, Mr Regan has an update on the question you had around the new Intercity fleet and the station upgrades for the South Coast and Sydney-Newcastle Central Coast line.

Mr REGAN: You were asking me around the number of stations that have platforms extended for the longer 10-car new Intercity fleet trains. On the South Coast line—that is Port Kembla, Wollongong, Thirroul, Waterfall as well as Bellambi and Kiama—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Was that a total of five?

Mr REGAN: That is six on the South Coast line. On the Newcastle Central Coast line it is Hamilton, Adamstown, Wyong, Gosford and Sydney Terminal. That is another five to be extended. I think to put a bit more context, we are still doing detailed planning on the stopping patterns for the longer new Intercity fleets. In time, other platforms may be extended either as part of this program or in future programs. But works at a significant number of other stations are going on to enable the longer trains to stop but with selective door openings so that the doors will open only to the extent that the train is at the platform. Those stations are not the only stations where the longer trains will be able to stop. They are the ones that are being extended during the current program. If you understand that distinction—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. In the platforms that are not being extended, will all of them require selective door openings or are some of them presumably long enough?

Mr REGAN: Some of them are long enough; others are not intended to have those longer trains stop at them. There is a combination of treatments: either lengthening—you will see that most of the ones to be lengthened are very major stations where we would want all doors opened due to volumes—or a selective door opening approach at the others where there is a lower volume.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Could you tell us on notice—apologies if you have already provided this—the number of stations then that as these come online currently have trains stop at them that will not have trains stop at them?

Mr REGAN: Yes, we can take a look at that. I am not sure any will fall into that category. But we can take that on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: If the answer is zero I would be reassured.

Mr STAPLES: We are not intending to not stop trains at any of these stations. It will just be the service application we provide. Mr Allaway can make some more comment.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You are telling us, without being on notice, the number is zero. Thank you. Just before we are handing to the Chair, is the Central Station Sydney terminal extension going to be dealt with as part of the overall redesign of Central Station or is that work required separately to that?

Mr REGAN: They are interrelated but for a number of platforms it is our intent to extend anyway. Some of them already have the required length and some will be extended in addition. Then we are looking in that more medium term about future reconfiguration at the minimum length of platform.

Mr STAPLES: Some of that work has already physically been taken at Central. We took one more question on notice about the dates of the review of environmental factors of the Singleton bypass. The exhibition was from December to 1 March. Mr Wakelin-King took the update on only that.

The CHAIR: I have a couple of questions on community transport. How does the pricing get determined for the fares in community transport?

Mr STAPLES: I will ask Ms Wise.

Ms WISE: With community transport, a number of programs are funded. Also some of the community transport operators operate a more commercial service as more of a social enterprise-type of arrangement in order to subsidise their operations. There is a Commonwealth Home Support Program aimed at keeping elderly people in their home and out of higher care arrangements. That is the largest program that we have that we administer a part of within New South Wales in community transport. There is also the Community Transport Program, which is a State government program administered by Transport for NSW. It is about \$15 million a year. The amount of the Commonwealth Home Support Program that we administer in New South Wales is about \$72 million.

There are separate community transport contracts directly with the Commonwealth with those operators. I can speak to only the stuff that we administer. There is a pricing framework, which is really around—they tend not to refuse service if someone cannot pay but it is really in line with the Commonwealth directions around what someone can afford. So generally it is about what people can afford to pay. You would appreciate that you could have several different people, if it is a larger vehicle like a bus, who are all paying different amounts because they also have National Disability Insurance Scheme participants in the bus who might have a different price. It is not something that the State government regulates. It is handled under the various programs.

The CHAIR: When you say "handled under the various programs", do you mean it is part of the service agreement or service contract as opposed to it being something that is entirely at the discretion of the provider?

Ms WISE: The Commonwealth sets the framework around how they are to charge for services.

The CHAIR: For all? Even under the—

Ms WISE: Under the community transport program, I believe our contract refers them to that as a useful guide. However, often they do have a lot of discretion not to charge as well, particularly if it is someone on a very low income.

The CHAIR: My office gets quite a lot of inquiries from people in different regions, trying to understand how the community transport works in their region or why it seems to be incredibly expensive from their perspective. There are also some inconsistencies in pricing. For example, they will talk about a couple who will be charged a flat rate as one entity, as opposed to two separate passengers who are not a couple and just happen to share, who get charged separately. Are you saying then that it is going to be a case-by-case scenario as to how that operator is running things?

Ms WISE: It will depend. I would probably like to refer to the Commonwealth guidelines. I am pretty sure they are published. We can probably get you some information about those in particular. But I am pretty certain that the Commonwealth likes the operator to take into account their costs in providing the service. Obviously different community transport providers have differing levels of efficiency and higher costs associated with providing their services, depending on where they are, how many vehicles they have and whether they use paid drivers or volunteer drivers. A number of things would factor into how much it costs a community transport operator to provide those services and, therefore, how much they are charging people. It works a whole lot more like a deregulated service than a straightforward public transport service, where the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal determines the fares.

The CHAIR: In terms of the New South Wales Government's contracts with providers under the community transport funding—that \$15 million pool—are there ever conditions in that standard contract that direct where that funding can be used? For example, it cannot be used on repairs or on buying new buses or whatever it happens to be.

Ms WISE: The Community Transport Program itself, I believe we do not permit fleet replacement; it is not for capital, it is for the provision of the service. Our focus is for them to focus on providing more services for people and that is the intent of the program.

The CHAIR: So if a provider had previously put aside some of that funding to then replenish the fleet before it was at a point where it would require quite a lot of repairs, how is it now going to get this money to be able to replenish its stock?

Ms WISE: They do use the Commonwealth Home Support Program funding to do that and it is a much larger proportion; it is about \$72 million of the stuff that we administer. As I said, the Commonwealth also separately contracts with a bunch of these operators with the same funding program and they use that funding to replace their vehicles.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I will have to go and have another look at it. I can understand why people are a little confused as to what the—

Ms WISE: You make a good point. The Minister referred earlier this morning to a meeting he had with the agency last week on this very issue. One of the things we have been asked to go and look at is how can we make sure that the community understands the offerings in this space, and we are certainly intending to do that.

The CHAIR: That is all we have time for. Thank you very much, government officers, for your attendance today. The Committee secretariat will be in touch in the near future regarding any questions taken on notice and also any supplementary questions, which I understand will be due from Committee members two days after we receive the hearing transcript. That might be a little bit later than you are used to.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.