

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 6 - TRANSPORT AND THE ARTS

Tuesday 19 August 2025

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

ROADS, REGIONAL TRANSPORT

UNCORRECTED

The Committee met at 9:15.

MEMBERS

Ms Cate Faehrmann (Chair)
The Hon. Mark Banasiak (Deputy Chair)
The Hon. Mark Buttigieg
The Hon. Stephen Lawrence
The Hon. Bob Nanva
The Hon. Nichole Overall
The Hon. Natalie Ward

PRESENT

The Hon. Jenny Aitchison, *Minister for Roads, and Minister for Regional Transport*

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 first hearing of Portfolio Committee No. 6 – Transport and the Arts for the inquiry into budget estimates 2025-2026. I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today. My name is Cate Fachrmann, and I am the Chair of the Committee. I welcome Minister Aitchison and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Roads and Regional Transport.

I ask everyone in the room to please turn their mobile phones to silent. Parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses in relation to the evidence they give today. However, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside of the hearing. I urge witnesses to be careful about making comments to the media or to others after completing their evidence. In addition, the Legislative Council has adopted rules to provide procedural fairness for inquiry participants. I encourage Committee members and witnesses to be mindful of these procedures.

Mr JOSH MURRAY, Secretary, Transport for NSW, affirmed and examined

Mr MATT FULLER, Deputy Secretary, Road Maintenance and Resilience, Transport for NSW, sworn and examined

Ms TRUDI MARES, Deputy Secretary, Planning, Integration and Passenger, Transport for NSW, affirmed and examined

Ms SALLY WEBB, Deputy Secretary, Safety, Policy, Environment and Regulation, Transport for NSW, affirmed and examined

Mr BERNARD CARLON, Chief of Centre for Road Safety, Transport for NSW, sworn and examined

Ms RAQUEL RUBALCABA, Acting Deputy Secretary, Infrastructure, Projects and Engineering, Transport for NSW, sworn and examined

Mr HOWARD COLLINS, Coordinator-General, Transport for NSW, sworn and examined

Mr ROBERT MACEY, Acting Chief Executive, NSW Trains, sworn and examined

Mr ANTHONY HAYES, Head, Regional Integration and Place, Transport for NSW, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Welcome and thanks for making the time to give evidence. Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.15 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. We are joined by the Minister for the morning session from 9.15 a.m. to 1.00 p.m., with a 15-minute break at 11.00 a.m. In the afternoon, we will hear from departmental witnesses from 2.00 p.m. to 5.30 p.m., with a 15-minute break at 3.30 p.m. During these sessions there will be questions from the Opposition and crossbench members only and then 15 minutes allocated for Government questions at 10.45 a.m., 12.45 p.m. and 5.15 p.m. We will begin with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Good morning, all. Minister, your Labor Government campaigned heavily on no more privatisation. That's correct, isn't it?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Media reports last month suggest that Transport for NSW is negotiating a two-year contract extension with a private company to provide bus services. Is this correct?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Thank you for that question. That's my understanding. But obviously, given the former Government privatised all of the bus services in New South Wales, it's very hard to just suddenly stand one up when we're new to this space. But I can get Mr Collins to give you more information about that.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: No, that's okay. I'm just confirming that it is correct—

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: That's my understanding.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: —that Transport for NSW is negotiating a two-year contract extension with a private company for bus services.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: So not a new privatisation but—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Contract extension.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: —ensuring that services are available for that community, given that they had been privatised by previous governments.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: In 2020, Minister, you made a post on Facebook, and I quote verbatim:

I have signed the pledge to fight for the NSW public transport system.

Previous privatisation experiments have led to service cuts, less bus routes, longer journey times, fewer bus stops, and more late running services.

Under privatisation, a private company will need to squeeze a profit out of bus services.

This is a broken promise to everyone in NSW.

There's even a photo of you smiling while holding a pledge that says, "Let's keep our buses public." By leave, I table that photograph.

Document tabled.

The CHAIR: We have copies, so we will be distributing to relevant witnesses.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I am just confirming, Minister, that's you, yes?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, it is, actually.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Great photo.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Thanks. That was COVID—no make-up. Great job, thanks.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Given your and Labor's very public position, this contract extension with a private operator, to use your own words, is a broken promise to everyone in New South Wales.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Thank you for the question, Ms Overall. I do note that there's no commitment from your party to do anything about fixing the mess that was created with the privatisation of bus services. Our Government has undertaken a bus taskforce. We have put in planning. We have put in, in the last budget, over \$450 million extra to provide additional bus services to the residents of New South Wales. We made a commitment not to do further—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: And in doing that, Minister, you are extending private bus contracts, yes, in order to deliver that.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Overall, we are extending an existing arrangement. It is not a new privatisation because we need to ensure that the services, such that they are, are still available for the community.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Indeed.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We look for every opportunity to keep things in house and bring things back in house. If you look at our record on labour hire, we've reduced it significantly. We are trying to do this work. But unfortunately, when privatisation occurs, it's very difficult when we're going through contractual negotiations across the State on bus services to just suddenly start operating services again when your Government totally dismantled the public bus system in New South Wales. We'd have to start from scratch.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Let's look at your record, then, Minister. Why was the decision to extend these private bus operations kept secret until the story broke? Did you go to the public and let them know that this extension was going to occur?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Overall, there are commercial negotiations that have to take place here, and this is very similar to when the former Government had to extend contracts to ensure that you had continuity of service.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: But your Labor Government says, "No more privatisation", Minister.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: "No more", I think is the text.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: "No more".

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: "More" as in new privatisations. It's very clear.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: The mental gymnastics there and backflips, Minister—

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Do you agree—

The CHAIR: This is the first point of order. Let's hear the first point of order of the day.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: We might just clear this up now, Chair. The procedural fairness resolution is pretty clear about courtesy to the witness. That was pretty argumentative and a touch of irony there, and I'd argue that's not courteous to the witness.

The CHAIR: I will uphold the point of order. We encourage quite good debate. I'm pretty lax in terms of a chair, but let's try not to be rude to the witnesses in the first 10 minutes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I fully agree, Chair. Minister, do you agree that the voters of New South Wales deserve an explanation for Labor's blatant untruthfulness in making a major promise to get elected and then breaking it the moment you're in government?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Overall, I completely reject the premise of that question. I don't think the public would expect us to stop bus services to go through a full setting up and re-establishing of public bus services, which would take an enormous amount of time to do, because your Government dismantled the public bus system. The important thing here is that communities have public transport. They rely on that to get to work,

to get to school, to get to health, to get to all their appointments. The important thing is we have to maintain continuity of service. This is an extension of an existing contract.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: A private contract, absolutely. Will this top-secret contract extension with this private company lead to service cuts, less bus routes, longer journey times and the company squeezing profits, like you stated so emphatically in 2020?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Again, I think it's really important to look at the work we've been doing in bus service planning and ensuring that we have more services in New South Wales for residents. There's more than 1,000 new bus services that we have put in place since we were elected, and we have been really trying to do enhancements. Look at some of the services we've rolled out. For example, in Dubbo we made sure we had connections going to retirement villages, to hospitals and to recreation facilities.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you. If I may—

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We had them going to services that people needed to get to, unlike a lot of the services that had been planned when you were in government, which didn't actually get that—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can I ask a quick one on that contract?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Sorry, I can't answer that question for Ms Overall now? We've finished that one?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I think you've sufficiently done that. Did that contract end come as a surprise to you? I think you had two years from the election and the contract doesn't run out until 2026. Was that a surprise to you?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: No. I might get Mr Collins to give you more detail about that part and what we can say.

HOWARD COLLINS: I think we're talking about Region 6, aren't we, which is the contract in Greater Sydney?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Transit Systems West.

HOWARD COLLINS: It is out of alignment with all the other contracts. It was one which was let earlier than all the other Greater Sydney contracts. In terms of recommending it to the Minister, it was at a time—as you know, bus taskforce—when the bus industry was in crisis. One of the reasons why it's commercial is—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm not asking about whether it's commercial.

HOWARD COLLINS: I'll explain because I want to give you—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm just asking whether it was a surprise. That's all I need to know.

HOWARD COLLINS: It shouldn't be a surprise. It was there.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you.

HOWARD COLLINS: The Government knew that this was going to be a challenge. We looked at all options, and our recommendation to the Minister was that in view of getting it aligned with the other contracts and in view of the short period, the best thing we can do is continue the contract on the basis of consistency.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Can I clarify?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I think we've got an answer on that. Thank you.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: But I just want to clarify that this is a Western Sydney contract, so it's not actually within the remit of my portfolio. I'm Regional Transport and Roads, just so everyone is clear what we're asking questions on.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I was just clarifying about the privatisation situation there, Minister, but let's move on. *The Sydney Morning Herald* is this morning reporting that the Auditor-General is investigating whether grants awarded from your signature fund, the Regional Roads Fund, which we discussed at last estimates, are compliant and in accordance with legislative requirements. Is this true, Minister?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Sorry, is what bit true?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That the Auditor-General is investigating your signature Regional Roads Fund.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes. There's a standard investigation that the Auditor-General does on grant funds. They state very clearly on their website that this is:

assessing whether TfNSW designed and implemented the RRF grants program in compliance with the Grants Administration Guide, key principles of the administration of public expenditure and relevant legislative requirements.

It also clearly stated that it was selected for audit as part of its continuing focus on the administration of grants. If we look at why they have such an interest in this, we look at the bushfire recovery grants under your Government, where 26 of 27 were in Coalition-held electorates.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Minister, I draw you back to *The Sydney Morning Herald* article. Did you read it this morning?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Seventy-five per cent of New South Wales ClubGRANTS were in Coalition electorates. More than 68 per cent of the refreshed and new grants went to government.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Thank you, Minister. I don't need a history lesson.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ninety-six per cent of the stronger community—I can keep going with all of these.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'm sure you can. This is the second Labor election funding scheme examined by the audit in a matter of months—of course, the first being the Local Small Commitments Allocation grants. Such audits—of which you were giving a great history there—are conducted to ensure New South Wales taxpayer funds are being spent efficiently, effectively and in accordance with the law. That is the object of such an audit, isn't it?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: That's right.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Have any anomalies been uncovered? What is the Auditor-General concerned about with your Regional Roads Fund?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: The Auditor-General is undertaking the investigation. It's up to them to do that. I'm not inserting myself into that or making any pre-emptive statements about what the findings might be. I welcome the scrutiny of the Auditor-General on any of our government programs.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: You welcome it? Excellent. How much is the allocated funding for the Thornton road and rail bridge?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: There was an original allocation of \$15 million. To give you some context on that project, it's one that was started under—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: As long as it's brief, Minister.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: So I'm only allowed to answer questions the way you want them answered. Is that what you're saying?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: The question was how much is the allocated funding.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: There's been some complexity around it. When the bridge was promised back in 2010 and started under the former Labor Government—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Started or was it an election commitment?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: It was started and it was under construction in 2010, to have that process happening. The former Liberal Government said they would do the duplication. They didn't do the duplication. At the time the initial part of that project was delivered, it was \$12 million. We made a commitment from opposition that we would put \$15 million towards it because we didn't know at that point what the costing would be. Obviously, in opposition you don't have all the benefits of the costings there to do it.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Just to clarify there, Minister, it was an election commitment of \$15 million that you made?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Towards the completion of that, yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Prior to—

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Prior to the 2023 election, yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So with no process as such to determine, it was just a figure that you came up with out of thin air?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: If we go back to the whole purpose of the Regional Roads Fund, it was to catch up on things that had not been completed under your Government in 12 long years.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Well, according to *The Sydney Morning Herald* it's a slush fund, Minister.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: At last budget estimates, Ms Overall, I remember—in fact, I think I've got it here; I've dragged it out of the vault—your press release, which you helpfully tabled.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That's very kind.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: You were complaining that we funded, in the Regional Roads Fund, a project you announced without funding. That was what this fund was about. It was about identifying funding projects that had not—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: It was about funding projects that you promised prior to an election before getting in. We have had this discussion.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: So did you not want this one funded for your former electorate? Is that what you're saying?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: We had this discussion at last estimates, Minister. If we can move on to finishing explaining how much the allocated funding is.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'm telling you that the purpose of that fund is to catch up on projects that communities across the State have been missing out on.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I don't need the purpose of the fund, Minister. How much is the allocated fund for the Thornton Road bridge?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: So \$15 million was promised at the election. In the most recent budget, once Transport has been doing that planning work, they made an estimate that it will cost up to \$50 million.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Who made that estimate?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Transport for NSW, as part of the work they've been doing on the business case et cetera. They have advised me that it will take up to \$50 million to complete that.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Up to?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes. We had the communities working on it. It's at gate two at the moment. They are looking at all of the processes to make sure that the project can be completed. Part of the real genesis of this fund was projects which were half completed or done in a small amount, or there were significant parts that were left off and unfunded and no-one ever went back to it. That was what this fund was about. An example is Tuross Head. I think Ms Ward, when she was the metropolitan Minister—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'm just talking about the Thornton Road bridge here, Minister.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Well, it's another project of the fund.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So \$50 million is the latest figure?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Why does the department website say \$45 million? Are you short \$5 million?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: That's what the allocation is at the moment, because that's what we're spending this year.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So it's \$45 million, not \$50 million?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Well, it's up to. There's a balance there.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: But the website says, "\$45 million approved".

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, that's right. It says, "\$45 million approved".

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Are you \$5 million short or are you going to be using that \$5 million to top up something else?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We will be working through it. We're at gate 2. We're not completing the project. We're working through it.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Your announcement says \$50 million—and you've just confirmed \$50 million—but it's actually \$45 million.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes. Transport has the \$5 million for that available internally, I'm advised. So that's where that will probably end up coming from.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So that will come not from the Regional Roads Fund; that will come from Transport for NSW?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Potentially, yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: It's a commitment of \$45 million from your signature Regional Roads Fund, with an additional \$5 million, topped up from Transport for NSW.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes. Just like a whole lot of other projects which have multiple—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Did you state that in your announcement, Minister, that that is the way the funding would work?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I don't think the people of Thornton are terribly worried about where the money might come from.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I think they might be after this.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I think they're really worried about getting through Thornton. When you were in government, you took the cap off development north of that bridge. You put 20,000 people in that area, and it is an issue of resilience for that community. They are struggling just to get to work, to pick up kids from child care, to get to appointments or to get to uni, because your Government sat on it for 12 years.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Let's just get to that, then. You're talking about Thornton and the good people of that electorate. What is that electorate, Minister?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: It's Maitland.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So your electorate, Minister?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes. I'm really pleased; I have to say thank you to Mr Layzell for his re-endorsement of the way that I've been serving my community.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: He's a great member. He serves the Hunter extremely well.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I didn't quite get a billion dollars out the door like he did at the Upper Hunter by-election when Pork Barilaro gave him some money, but—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Point of order: We're talking about being courteous. Anyway, I'll move on. Was a business case presented for the Thornton Road bridge?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: My understanding is all projects that were State projects over \$10 million had to go through an assurance process with Transport for NSW. This was canvassed at last estimates.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Was there a business case for Thornton Road bridge?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: When?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: You're the Minister; you tell me.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: There was one originally, when we were in government.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Was there? When?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: In 2010.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: We're not talking about the Dark Ages of history, Minister. Prior to this election—

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Tell that to the people of Thornton who can't get to work, who can't get to school or who can't get to medical appointments.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: This was an election commitment from you.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order: Ms Overall is asking a question that goes to prior to the last election. I would argue that is not relevant to the terms of reference of this inquiry—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: To the point of order—

The CHAIR: The member has not finished.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: —which is the estimated expenditure from the Consolidated Fund for the 2025-26 financial year. What might have happened in 2020 is not relevant to this inquiry.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The Minister quite plainly offered that up in her answer and sought to go back to that time. I think we should just move on in the one minute that's left.

The CHAIR: I won't uphold the point of order. We do allow wide latitude in terms of asking the questions; it was completely within order. Ms Overall can continue.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Was a business case presented for the Thornton Road bridge—the project—at any time, Minister?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Working through the gateway processes now, and have been in that process—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Business case—yes or no?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Because we're in government now. We weren't in government when we made the commitment.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: It was an election commitment when you made—yes. Before you decided that you would allocate such money.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Are you making any election commitments for 2027, Ms Overall?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: What about a benefit-cost ratio? You know, actual spend and if it's good value for taxpayers—did that occur, by any chance? Was that looked at as part of this gateway process?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: My understanding is that these have to go through the assurance processes with Transport for NSW. They are all done in a standardised way, and that's the way that they are completed.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So tell me, then, if there was no business case, how was this extra \$35 million approved?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: My understanding is the business case is going through in February, but the issue that we—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Going through in February next year?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, my understanding is.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: February 2026. Although this commitment was made prior to March 2023, you have allocated an additional \$35 million to it and you're going to have a business case completed by February 2026?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Overall, I go back—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So at the minute you're taking pot shots at the fact that it may cost up to \$50 million. Is that correct?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Overall, your Government failed to invest in the fastest growing regional community in New South Wales—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: And no benefit-cost ratio either.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: —which had been contributing an enormous amount of money through stamp duty through new housing developments; you failed to invest in that road. When I was in opposition, I asked the former Minister, Mr Toole, to come up to the area to see it. He was going to, but then Mr Farraway got the role and he never came up there.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Point of order—

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: They had no regard for the people of Thornton, and it's very concerning.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Minister. You're now eating into crossbench time. Ms Ward on a point of order.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I was loath to interrupt but going forward, it's going to be a long day. I ask that courtesy is extended to all sides. This is about the current budget estimates. It is about the current period of this budget estimates for this Committee to examine. I don't think it's useful for us to trawl back through history,

as much as the Minister might want to. I'm not directing her answer. I just ask that we confine questions and answers.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: To the point of order—

The CHAIR: I won't uphold the point of order. We can move on. The Minister is able to respond how she wishes. If she wants to bring up the former Government's moves in any way, that is more than appropriate. To continue on with the \$334 million Regional Roads Fund, I just want to get clear in terms of those business cases. *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported today that on the 30 projects which were allocated funding there was no business cases beforehand. With election promises, clearly an issue is there, but that's for another time. Are every single one of those commitments now subject to business cases? If the business case has a not so great benefit-cost ratio or blows the budget out, what happens then? Do they continue to go ahead because they're election promises?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: The Regional Roads Fund was really set up to try and fit gaps which had been in under-costings. Some of those projects already had extensive business cases because they had been funded under other State, Federal and even local council government funding. Some of them had come through, for example, the RLRRP, a betterment program that was a State and Federal funding program. This was to top up, to make sure that the project could get completed, because we had in the first couple of years, and even in the last years of the former Government, significant cost escalations in pricing on construction projects and roads in New South Wales, so the fund was to allow contingencies. If you look at it, the Coalition had an election commitment which didn't actually have any outline of what they would spend the money on.

The CHAIR: Just to be clear, if there are new business cases generated—or regardless, in some ways. Regardless of the final figure of these pre-election promises by Labor, they will be built. Is that correct? Is there any scenario where anything doesn't go ahead because it's actually too expensive once the business case is settled?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I think that's part of what the business cases—so businesses cases are done on the State projects, and then there's quite a number of council projects which they have lead on. The business cases and the terms of the State projects do have to go through those assurance processes and, obviously, we have to make sure that they are financially viable and all that sort of stuff. But the issue is—for the council ones, they are working through them.

The CHAIR: That's fine. That's all I need. How does the Transport for NSW Speak Up hotline work? What are the protocols for that to ensure that people are able to have faith in that hotline?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'll get Josh to answer that.

JOSH MURRAY: The Speak Up hotline is something that we—through the rest of our EAP services, we contract a service by professional providers of the hotlines and then they're embedded into our governance processes for investigations.

The CHAIR: *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported that the whistleblower of the case that's currently before ICAC—in terms of the potentially corrupt Transport for NSW officials and contractor. It has stated that that whistleblower did not have any confidence in the person who answered her call. What has been the response from Transport for NSW as a result of that statement?

JOSH MURRAY: We are looking into that. Obviously, the allegations raised in the ICAC over the past six weeks have been incredibly concerning to the agency. We take them very seriously. On behalf of the leadership team, we share the public and the Parliament's concern about the allegations that have been raised against those individuals. Elements like the effectiveness of the Speak Up hotline, and the reporting also that has been suggested by some of the businesses who have given evidence that they didn't feel as though they had a clear pathway through to talk to people in Transport, is something that we have already begun looking at as this evidence has come to light. We are working very closely with the commission in terms of the evidence that it is providing.

The CHAIR: This is the fourth ICAC inquiry into Transport for NSW since 2019 into various activities and allegations. What is Transport for NSW actually doing to restore confidence that taxpayers' money isn't being wasted and, in fact, handed over to potentially dozens, if not more than dozens of people, in the State instead of actually going to the projects? What is Transport for NSW doing?

JOSH MURRAY: Thank you for the question. We have a very comprehensive program underway to meet not just the elements that are coming forth in the Operation Wyvern hearings that are currently continuing but meet the needs of the reports into the previous three investigations. As you mentioned, they have all been tabled since 2019 and many of them, including the current inquiry, have legacy tales a lot longer than that in terms of the engagement of some of these individuals within the organisation.

Certainly, a lot of the elements that have been common to these investigations relate to the way the organisation has grown over the period of time in question and the number of procurement systems in particular that existed. Even two years ago, there were eight different procurement areas within the organisation. As a result, each of those had supplier management software—multiple versions of each—that they would be using through the process. In answer to your question, one of the most significant things we are doing is centralising responsibility for procurement. Late last year we appointed a chief procurement officer, and central to their role has been the response and the safeguarding of the organisation against elements such as this.

The CHAIR: What has been heard before the ICAC this week is that there are still current Transport for NSW officials—for example, I believe, in the WhatsApp group chat that has been canvassed at that hearing. Are you aware of who those officials are that are in that WhatsApp group?

JOSH MURRAY: All I can say on that matter is that we work very closely with the commission. On many times, the commission gives us that information and allows us to take our own management actions against people. Other times, they have asked us to hold back, including at the start of the Wyvern investigations. The people who Transport is aware of in relation to this inquiry—and I'll be careful with what I say—have all been investigated and are no longer working at Transport. However, I anticipate that it is likely that there will be some further names that emanate before we reach the end of these hearings. That is something we're working closely with the ICAC on.

The CHAIR: It certainly sounds like that. The seriousness of this, of course, is that it doesn't sound like it was just one random bad egg. The breadth of the people involved in this is incredibly concerning. The issue is, as well, that this could go on for many months. We know how long these hearings take. We know how long it takes for the ICAC to hand down any findings. What is Transport for NSW doing in the meantime to ensure that this isn't going on right now with other individuals in other areas?

JOSH MURRAY: As I alluded to before, we have a procurement transformation program which is organisation-wide.

The CHAIR: What does that mean exactly?

JOSH MURRAY: The key point of that is the centralisation of procurement authority. With an organisation as large as Transport, up until the process began last year, with the centralisation of that work—which does accord with the previous recommendations from ICAC—there were still these pockets of procurement activity that were able to occur across Transport and the former roads divisions. What we've focused on is bringing that all under central leadership and accountability, with the ability to be a lot more forensic in how those matters are carried out. Obviously, we have a range of other measures that sit underneath all of those areas. In regard to the ICAC's recommendations, 21 of 26 have been completed and the remaining five are in progress through that centralisation work.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Welcome, Minister. I will turn to the press release you issued yesterday around the recategorisation of roads. Your press release states, "The reform will be delivered within existing Transport for NSW funding." Can you detail exactly how much funding is going to be allocated to implement and maintain that new road categorisation strategy or system?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Thank you for that question. This is a really important piece of work for the State. It's one that we've had a lot of feedback from, with the previous Government promising to reclassify up to 15,000 kilometres of road, never delivering that report and leaving a lot of those councils in a situation where they can't respond to the growing needs of freight or growing populations post-COVID with migration et cetera. It has been a really difficult challenge for them. In terms of the funding on that, it will be undertaken in a way that is absorbed as business as usual. That was the whole point. If you look back at the history of recategorisation of roads—or, as it used to be called, reclassification—it was something that happened about every 10 years. It became a very politicised process where governments either gave roads back or—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Just on that, Minister, I have followed the history a bit, so we don't need to go into too much depth there. What oversight mechanisms or probity mechanisms are going to be put in place to ensure it doesn't become subject to political influence and that the decisions around recategorisation are based on evidence and data?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: That's the whole point of it. It has been around getting guidelines drafted in extensive consultation with councils across the State. Transport has been working very closely with councils. As I've gone around, I have listened to them and heard what their perceptions of the process were. It's looking at how do we properly categorise roads for functionality, for purpose and for all of that. If you look back to that previous commitment, councils could essentially just say that they didn't want to have that cost anymore and it was too

much for them and, therefore, the State government should take it over, whereas we've said that we've got to have a road system with integrity.

Part of that has been put out in guidelines. A portal has been set up that, hopefully, will be here very shortly, where road managers like councils can go onto the website and they can go through criteria that are all there and they can see in advance whether it is likely that the road that they've selected for recategorisation will meet the criteria and guidelines and then they have a conversation with Transport for NSW. We have said to councils very clearly and on the public record—both me and the department—that we know there will have to be some prioritisation process. That is one of the things we have been working through. We are looking at roads which are urgently required for recategorisation because, potentially, say, there's a lot more freight on there, for a road safety purpose or whatever the thing is.

There's a whole piece of work that we're doing in Transport to try and improve the management of roads. When I came into government, we had something like 14 databases that managed the road network in Transport. There is now one. We've got the AusRAP data, which is now online so that people can see what the safety ratings are. That collects an enormous amount of data. Then we have the recategorisation process. We're clearly articulating whether a council or a State government should be responsible for that road. These are all evidence and data driven rather than a political stand up beside a road before an election saying, "This might be reclassified if we get elected." This is entirely new. This process—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: What will the ultimate decision rely on? Will it come to the Minister via Josh Murray with a recommendation as to "These are the roads that we are putting forward to be recategorised", and it's the Minister that makes the final call? How will that final decision be made?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: My understanding is that, in the process, it will go through all of that—our conversation with the council and Transport—and then they will make the recommendation for whether it's going to be recategorised or whatever. Then that would come to me as the Minister to sign off—because I think a gazette also has to happen as part of that. But one of the things is, because it's a clear and transparent process, I think you'll find that councils will have a lever to be able to say, "This should be done." If we look back to what happened under the former process with the independent panel, arm's length of government—report goes to the Minister, councils have priority roads that they disagreed with the former Government's decisions on. They really didn't have any way to prosecute a case where the wrong decision had been made. Then, when they went to the final report, it was never released by the former Government. There was all this work done and no outcome.

What we're saying is this should be a business as usual approach. Council should put their information into the portal, get an assessment themselves so they know if it's worthwhile going through it, have the conversation with Transport, work through how that works and then a decision is recommended by Transport and then I sign off on it. If they go to the stage where they disagree with, say, for some reason, a Minister—if a future Minister decided to not go with the recommendation of the department for some reason, then the council would have some evidence base to argue that case, which they've never had before.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Currently there are some nebulous arrangements where councils are contracted to do the roadworks and maintenance on State roads. If a road is recategorised from a local council road to a State road, will those arrangements still exist where the councils are still contracted to do the work on that road? Or will that change that relationship, where that won't be allowed to happen?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: It depends really because, if the council has got a road maintenance contract with Transport for NSW, then it would just go into that. Councils have a variety of different arrangements based on their capacity to provide those services to the State Government on the State road network or how they manage their local and regional. Again, this is a decision that council can go into. You've identified one of the problems with the former commitment and promise that was never kept is that that was unclear. It was unclear who was going to pay for the roads to be upgraded. It was unclear who was going to get—if there was a transfer, whether the councils would have to get them up to a functional level. We saw some stages where councils thought they were going to get a reclassification under the former Government and stopped maintaining roads. Some of them did things which probably pre-empted them from not becoming a State road because they allowed development there. There were a lot of challenges in that work. This is to try and get that transparency, accountability and data-driven approach into it.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Can I shift to the regional road maintenance backlog. What is the current dollar value of the road maintenance backlog and how does that compare with the last three years?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'd have to take the exact numbers on notice, but I will say, in terms of what we've done in regional road repairs and maintenance—and Matt can come to that in a minute, but I just want to say some things on this. When we came to government, we put an extra \$390 million onto regional roads to get

them through that first period. That went out in the first budget. It more than doubled the amount that they had got. They'd only got \$250 million for regional councils under the former Government's funding. We did that work. Then we have really escalated on the disaster recovery funding because that is a key concern. We know that the former Government—even in our first term, as we were trying to grapple with what had been left to us, there was \$190 million on average being spent on recovery of roads from natural disasters over the last five years each year. In last year's budget, it is actually \$1.024 billion. So more than five times that amount was given to regional councils.

That was really part of a structural misunderstanding of the process of how councils have to do it. Back in the old days before all of this wet weather, a council had a natural disaster, they cashflowed it themselves—maybe \$2 million. They might have a \$50 million operating budget. They got the money back from the Feds and the State. That's how it worked. When you've now got a situation where some councils might have an operating budget of \$30 million and they've got a \$120 million or more debt, they can't go out to tender unless they've got certainty of funding. We work really hard with NEMA, RA and Transport to put in the tripartite agreements.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: You've taken on notice the figure. Can you also take on notice, if you can't tell us now, how much of the 2025-26 road budget is specifically allocated to addressing that backlog?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Matt can do that now.

MATT FULLER: Thank you, Mr Banasiak, for the question. I, too, will take the question, in terms of the accrued backlog liability, on notice. In the last 12 months we have been working incredibly hard, given the incredible challenge that has been brought about by the weather not just through natural disasters but obviously successive La Niñas—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I appreciate that, but I'm getting dirty looks.

The CHAIR: Yes, the bell has rung.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: We'll come back to it in the afternoon if need be.

The CHAIR: I will go to the Opposition once more. Ms Overall?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Minister, to come back to the Thornton road and rail bridge, given no business case or benefit-cost ratio, how was the extra \$35 million approved?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: It went through a budget process.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Was that overseen by you? Was it your ministerial discretion?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: No. It went to ERC.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: What is the total budget allocation for your Regional Roads Fund?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: The total commitment for the fund was \$334 million. I think there's still some money that hasn't been allocated in that, but that's what we've got at this point. That's the total value of the fund.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: This \$45 million, as according to the website—

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Out of that fund, yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Where has that money come from?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: It's in the budget process.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: But are you suggesting that it was part of the previously unallocated funds that that has been taken from?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: That's my understanding of that.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So that is from the \$97 million that was previously unallocated, just to be clear?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So, at \$45 million, \$50 million, this one project accounts for around one-sixth of your entire signature fund—in the Maitland electorate, of which you are the member.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: What's the proximity of the Thornton road and rail bridge that you have publicly stated previously will be a game changer to your principal place of residence?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Overall, I am happy to answer that question, but—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: You can just give broad brushstrokes there, Minister. Is it a few kilometres? Just around the corner? I'm not asking for the specifics of your home address.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: If I answer that question—I'm going to be honest. If I answer that question—and I am honest about this, but I'm also aware that I do have, as we all do as members of Parliament, the desire not to be too open about our personal residences. But if I give you too much detail about where I live, it really pinpoints it to a small number of houses.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Just within the general proximity then—I do understand where you're coming from with that, Minister. I truly do. But it is pinpointed in *The Sydney Morning Herald* as of this morning as well.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, I'm really grateful to Mr Layzell for that commentary. I wonder—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That's a big call.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I wonder how far Clarence Town Bridge is from his residence, but that was another bridge that was approved under that Government.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Back to the point of the question: Your present place of residence is within the general vicinity of this project. Have you at any point declared a conflict of interest?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I don't have a conflict of interest in this at all. I am a resident of Maitland, as everyone knows. I don't use that bridge to get to work. I don't use it to drop off kids to school. I don't use it to get to health or medical appointments. I very rarely use that access. The reality is there are 20,000 or 30,000 more other people who live in that area.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: None of them are the Minister that overseas this signature fund that has just allocated \$35 million from you and \$5 million from Transport for NSW. Really, Minister, it's about the pub test when you're talking about conflict of interest, perceived or potential or actual. So you haven't declared a conflict of interest in this situation?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Overall, this project was commenced in 2010 under the former Labor Government. It sat on the desk—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: No, Minister. That is ancient history.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: It may be to you, but to the 30,000 people in Thornton who can't get to school, who can't get to work, who can't get to their babysitting—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: You, as the Minister, have allocated an additional \$35 million to this project, which is within proximity to your principal place of residence. The Premier was standing right beside you when you made the announcement for this bridge. Did he know that you lived nearby?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Overall, of course he did. He knows where I live.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Why did he not compel you to declare a conflict of interest?

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Point of order—

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Overall, I make all declarations that are required of me, on perceived or—

The CHAIR: Was that you, Mr Lawrence?

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Yes, I took a point of order.

The CHAIR: Sorry, I wasn't sure whether it was you or Bob. You both sound exactly the same when you take points of order.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: That was such a ridiculous question as to be discourteous. Honestly, it's up there with, "When did you stop beating your wife?" It's just spurious.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: To the point of order: I withdraw that, Chair. We'll move on.

The CHAIR: It's withdrawn, but in terms of what the member was saying, it is just another reminder in terms of courtesy, politeness and respect: We can still ask questions but be respectful.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Minister, let's get this straight: A \$45 million project, paid for from your ministerial Regional Roads Fund, is currently being investigated by the Auditor-General. It's a project with no business case or benefit-cost ratio in your electorate—in fact, it's within cooee of your own home—and you've made no declaration of a conflict of interest, even though such proximity could be perceived to have its obvious advantages.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Overall, it has been a feature of every hearing that I have attended with The Nationals in this place at budget estimates that you or your colleagues have made unsubstantiated or factually incorrect allegations about me and backgrounded media about my financial arrangements—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Have you declared a conflict of interest or not, Minister?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: —and my previous career et cetera.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I am not making allegations. Have you declared a conflict or not?

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Point of order—

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I make all my declarations in accordance with the requirements.

The CHAIR: A point of order has been taken again, Minister. We will hear from Mr Lawrence.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: I think in circumstances where such a global proposition is put that incorporates all these different allegations, courtesy should be given to allow an answer to it.

The CHAIR: Yes, and I have ruled in that way previously. I think, particularly when Ministers are addressing allegations, we must hear their response. The Minister may continue, without taking liberty with my ruling by speaking for a long time, which can also happen. The Minister may continue and then Ms Overall may ask the next question after the Minister has addressed the allegations.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Do you want to ask the question again?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'll move straight to the crux of the matter. Have you declared a conflict of interest in relation to the Thornton road and rail bridge?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Overall, I make all of the required disclosures that are required of me in my role as a Minister. I take that very seriously, and I continue to do that.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Good. So did you declare this particular project?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Overall, there is no conflict of interest in this situation. That road is of no material benefit to me or my family. It is something that was already on the books in 2010. It is part of a greater Thornton network. It was the only State asset in that area that could be upgraded, and that's why the decision was made to support it through an election commitment.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So it would be fair to say that you have not, to this point, declared a conflict of interest?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I think I've answered that question.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: In the interest of the perception of the public—of potentially not passing the pub test—would you commit to declaring a conflict of interest?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I make all of the required disclosures, and I hold myself to very high standards of integrity.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'll take that as a no. Minister, you've also said that you welcome the Auditor-General's investigation of the Regional Roads Fund—that would include into the Thornton road and rail bridge?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can I just ask a quick question, if I may, Chair? Minister, how close would the bridge need to be to your house for you to declare a conflict of interest?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: If I used the bridge on a daily basis. If it helped me get to work or get the kids to school or any of my general life, I would. But it's not one that I use—very infrequently.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How often is very infrequently?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Once every one or two months.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: And you see no need whatsoever, even once or twice—

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Because I use lots of roads in my electorate. I use roads all across the State at much higher frequencies.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: There's no necessity, in your view, to declare any conflict—actual, real, perceived or otherwise?

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order: Chair, even allowing for wide latitude in questioning during budget estimates, we've sat through quite a series of questions on this one point. I would say it's now no longer relevant to the terms of reference of this inquiry.

The CHAIR: Yes, repetition.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: To the point of order—

The CHAIR: I won't uphold the point of order because it's up to members to be able to ask these questions, although the Minister has responded, to the best of her ability, to numerous questions. Perhaps asking members to move on would be pertinent.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Just one more. Given the style of answer, we have sought clarification. To be fair to the witness—*Browne v Dunn*—I have one more on that. You would self-identify, would you say, in deciding for yourself what perceived conflicts you need to declare? Is that correct?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I just want to say that the design for this project will be out to the community by the end of 2025. The business case will be completed by the end of February 2026. The funding was put into the budget to ensure that the project could continue to be done, and that will have that ability to provide the BCRs et cetera in that space. This is a project that the community has called for for two decades.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, you said that, but I'm interested in your conflict.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: It is two decades that this has been called for, and that is the basis on which it was funded. That was very clear. If you speak to anyone in Maitland who uses that, they need this project.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I don't debate that. What I'm asking you is about your conflict.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You're not answering that.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Let's move on. Minister, finally on this point about the Auditor-General investigating the Regional Roads Fund. What about a working group for Transport for NSW—will they be looking into the Thornton road and rail project specifically or the Regional Roads Fund more broadly?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Sorry?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: A working group from Transport for NSW—will they be looking into the situation?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: A working group?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Yes.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Which working group?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That's what I'm asking. Will there be a working group for Transport for NSW to look into this? Mr Murray?

JOSH MURRAY: Thank you for the question. Obviously we were contacted by the Audit Office, as we are in the matter of any of their reviews that they do into any grant administration programs. We will participate through that process.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Moving on. Minister, there has been yet another extremely timely new announcement just this morning in relation to \$20 million more to deliver the Tripoli Way extension in full. I understand this was rushed through the Expenditure Review Committee just last Thursday, not even five days ago.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Just in time for the by-election.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: My goodness me. Did you know there was a by-election?

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Where was that money taken from for that project?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: In terms of where the money is coming from, you will need to probably ask the Treasurer on that, in terms of the actual money, because that came through expenditure review.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Can you take that on notice, Minister?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It's a road project. Why can't we ask you about it?

The CHAIR: Order! We will continue with the questions.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Why was the council kept in the dark until late yesterday, given they are going to be involved in its delivery?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Transport has been having ongoing discussions, and I've discussed with the council on a number of occasions—and members of the community—about this project. This is a project—again, the former Government took it out of the Albion Park upgrade in 2017, which meant it was never going to happen. We had thousands of people going into this area to live and not having that extension of the funding there for them. It is a real bugbear and has been ongoing. The timing of it was that council is getting to the stage where they will be able to—the critical timing of this was that they were getting to the point where they needed to know about the money before they went forward.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: And it's just conveniently before a by-election. We're not going to find out that the local MP lives around the corner, are we, Minister? Anyway, let's move on. Let's talk about some more buses. Have you visited the site of construction for 126 new buses promised by NSW Labor?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: No, I haven't, actually. I haven't got there. I'm not in the lead on the procurement, and I just haven't had a chance to get there.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So you haven't actually visited the paddock at Nowra that I did get to visit when there was just me and skippy.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I've been there, too. Kangaroos.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: That's right. The photo was the wrong way around, wasn't it, because you didn't see the stuff at the back of it. I remember that one. No, I haven't been there.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: You are paying close attention. Your Labor Government promised that these buses would be built in regional New South Wales and not offshore. How many buses have been provided from China so far?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: It is for Minister Graham. I think you're probably better asking him to go through that, actually, because it's in his remit.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: It's transport, Minister.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Do you want one of the department reps to do it? That's fine.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So you can't answer a question on transport. You don't know how many buses have been provided from China so far.

The CHAIR: Order!

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I've got it, but I can't remember just off the top of my head right now.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That's okay. You can take it on notice. That's fine. You may also need to take on notice how many more are expected from China.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: You're looking that up or you're going to take it on notice?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I will look it up and then, if I come back with it, I will come back to you.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That'd be great. You might also come back with whether any buses will actually be built at Nowra and, if so, when?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Okay.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That's a yes?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Thanks, Minister. Thanks for being so courteous. Now I might ask a few questions in relation to some regional areas. The great member for Oxley, Michael Kemp, has been advocating for the Valla Beach Road intersection safety review and upgrade. Yet, while we wait, we keep having fatalities at this location. When are you going to take serious action to save lives in that particular area?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Overall, I actually reject the premise of that question. I take very seriously when there are deaths on our road network.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Can you let us know about actions?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Are you going to listen or are you just going to keep interrupting?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Are you going to answer the question?

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Actions, Minister.

The CHAIR: Ms Overall, at this point I am going to ask that members, when they ask questions of the Minister, do so in a respectful tone. That has not been the case for some of this questioning this morning. I do very much try to conduct this Portfolio Committee's budget estimate hearings with respect.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I apologise, Chair.

The CHAIR: I think you can get every question out, Ms Overall, in a more respectful tone.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I will.

The CHAIR: Minister, if you could also try to refrain from using the same tone back, and we can see how we go.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Thanks, Chair. This issue arose with some changes that were made, basically, around the change of government time. There were some concerns around road safety at that intersection, and the former Government was working on that, and then, I think, the implementation happened in around March or April 2023—very early in our term. It created some confusion for the community about how that road was working. Then we've had a fatality there and numerous crashes. I have been up with the member for Oxley to the site on at least one occasion. I've been another time, at least, on my own, and maybe twice. At other times we've sent the engineers from the Centre for Road Safety up there. We put in a speed zone reduction to try and assist. We've got an AI camera in there that's currently collecting data on what is happening at the site. We are trying to design a number of changes that will improve the speed compliance, looking at the visibility of the signage and speed enforcement. We've said that we will deliver a solution at Valla Beach. That's my priority in response to the concerns that have been raised by the member for Oxley and also the communities.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Can I just respectfully ask, Minister, when the solution may be?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We get the data from the camera this month. I think it is very close to coming online now. It's a complex situation because there is a blind hill, a T-junction, challenging topography, and these require considered solutions. We have been looking at temporary roundabouts, a new roundabout, a range of different options, but we are getting the engineers to do this because, particularly with the experience we had with what happened with the previous treatment of this intersection, we want to get it right this time.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Sooner rather than later?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Absolutely. I've given that commitment to the community. I've given that commitment to Mr Kemp. I'm very concerned about that.

The CHAIR: Minister, the roughly 950 jobs that will be cut from Transport, how many are going to be cut from regional transport—as in, from the regions?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Thanks for that question. It's a really big issue, obviously, because the Government wants to ensure that we maintain jobs in the regions. To that point, these decisions are never easy. It is difficult. It's a difficult process. I won't give you all the talking points on that, but under this Government we've had 300 more jobs in the regions than previously. We've said publicly that we're not going to be looking at—

The CHAIR: Is this in Transport, Minister?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes. Transport for NSW. We've said publicly that we're not going to be looking at frontline service delivery jobs, and a lot of those are in the regions. It's more around the back end,

processing, centralising functions such as procurement, project support, communications and technology. I can't rule out any, but I'm saying that our focus is on keeping as many jobs in regional New South Wales as we can.

The CHAIR: What's the criteria that's being applied, then, in relation to those job cuts, to ensure that, for example, regional services aren't impacted but also, as you say, to try to maintain jobs in the region? Are there criteria that has been developed?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I will get Josh to answer that, because he's leading that work.

JOSH MURRAY: The next phase of the savings program that Transport is working through and has been well detailed over recent weeks—it does begin with the design principles of those corporate and back office functions. They are within the finance, technical and commercial areas and also the people, culture and workplaces and communications elements of the organisation. That is the starting position of those areas. They are mostly the metropolitan-based support services that then span across the State.

The CHAIR: I think we can also come back to delve into that a little bit further in the afternoon if need be. Minister, are you ensuring that, as a result of these cuts, then, there won't be any impact on the maintenance of infrastructure such as bridges, rail lines, roads—none of that will be impacted?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Absolutely, that's a key concern. We want to have that work done efficiently, and we want to make sure that the service levels are uplifted and not compromised in any way.

The CHAIR: In this year's budget, how much was allocated for new regional transport projects, if anything?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We had the \$450 million worth of bus uplift, which is across the whole. We are obviously working through the planning—

The CHAIR: Of bus what, did you say?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Bus services. Increased bus services—\$452 million over four years. That was in there. Obviously, there is a focus on the road repairs. There's \$9.9 billion in regional transport and roads, but you're looking for the breakdown on the transport, aren't you?

The CHAIR: Yes. I'm trying to get a sense of the breakdown between new transport projects compared to road spending in the budget. I couldn't find anything in terms of new regional transport projects.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: The buses come under that, and obviously they'll be worked through with Planning on a prioritisation basis. Obviously, we want to get the rest of the 16 cities that were unfunded by the former Government underway, so that will come under that.

The CHAIR: In terms of those 16 cities—because I did have a question on that—are you saying that all of those 16 regional cities, as announced, will be serviced?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, that's what we're looking to do in that \$452 million over the four years.

The CHAIR: Just a quick question on that, which is quite specific. I did write to you on 9 July about the 16 Regional Cities Services Improvement Program. I've been contacted by constituents in Port Macquarie regarding the service plan, which apparently they haven't been able to access—I know that the former member for Port Macquarie has asked about this as well—and any associated studies undertaken. Is there a reason that the community can't see that work that's already been undertaken? They've been requesting it. I've asked you about it, and I don't think anything has happened since then.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Sorry if I haven't gotten back to you on the min corro, but I will come back to you on that issue of where that can get to. It is a concern that that wasn't funded, and that's something that we've been trying to get money for in the budget, and that's where we've got to with that.

The CHAIR: So Port Macquarie is going to get it?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, because it is one of those ones that was left out. Then we are also doing the regional rail fleet. That work continues. And then the XPT refurbishment—so that's the \$40 million.

The CHAIR: Yes, I'll get to that as well.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: You were asking about funding that's there.

The CHAIR: Yes, the refurbishment. A question about the \$10 million in last year's budget that was allocated towards the Illawarra Rail Resilience Plan. Was that \$10 million allocated internally, in terms of somebody developing that plan? Was it contracted out?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: That was internal. Yes, internally.

The CHAIR: Has a plan been presented?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: No, it hasn't been presented, but we're looking at all of the issues around the Illawarra in rail resilience. Across the whole network we've got serious issues with on-time running, and we know that. We've been working on that. There are three components of that: There's the track work, the timetabling and the rolling stock. The Illawarra Rail Resilience Plan is about looking particularly at rail—

The CHAIR: What does \$10 million get? I feel like that could just be standard work for people within Transport for NSW to have a look at that, but this is a specific \$10 million plan that was announced. Where does that \$10 million go, and what is produced?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: How about I get Trudi to talk you through it?

TRUDI MARES: We can bring back the actual spend to date, but we are looking at spending a minimal amount of that \$10 million initially, looking at the planning opportunities, as the Minister mentioned, for short-term reliability, infrastructure uplift and then long-term infrastructure. The larger portion of the funding would be spent on investigations, site works, understanding what the geography is and doing detailed technical investigations to inform an investment plan.

The CHAIR: So none of that has already taken place? This has been a big issue for some time. None of that has already been undertaken on that line?

TRUDI MARES: We've done the preliminary work, but we have not done the full investigations work yet.

The CHAIR: In the past, before the \$10 million announcement, there was no work?

TRUDI MARES: Not a significant amount. There had been previous work. I know Mr Collins had talked about different work we had done down south in previous sessions, but new planning had not been done until we received this funding.

The CHAIR: Minister, is there any move by your department or have you asked for the department to give you options in terms of the electrification of the train from Kiama to Bomaderry?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, that's one of the parts of that work that we're looking at.

The CHAIR: So that's a \$10 million plan. Is it a business case?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: It's really to look at what are the most effective ways. There's so many different proposals on the table to improve rail resilience in the Illawarra. Part of that planning, as Trudi has said, is to get on the table what are the things that are viable and what are some costs to just get that planning work done.

The CHAIR: How many people within the department are working on that?

TRUDI MARES: I'd have to take that on notice and come back to you.

The CHAIR: It would be good to get some more details on that. Minister, you were just starting to talk about the regional train fleet. Do we have a rough time—a year, even—when we expect the first new train to be on the tracks? Not being tested, but actually with passengers?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: As you know, it's one of these ones we inherited which has been slow. We are working through as fast as we can. We're on track with where we had been at, in previous timelines discussed.

The CHAIR: Okay, we'll come back to that one.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Minister, I might just switch to maritime for a bit. Going to the announcement I think you made on the fourteenth or fifteenth about the Boating Infrastructure for Communities Grants Program, can you explain why funding was allocated to projects that don't involve boating infrastructure—namely, an effluent station and a small watercraft strategy?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I can probably get Howard to talk to that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Did you sign off on these projects? Or was that the previous transport Minister that had responsibility?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: The department assessed them.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Mr Collins, can you explain to me—

HOWARD COLLINS: Are we talking about the BIDS program?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Yes, Boating Infrastructure for Communities Grants Program. There was \$735,000 given to Wentworth Shire Council to refurbish their effluent station. I'm just wondering what the benefit is to boaters other than stopping them from slipping on a Bondi cigar at the boat ramp?

HOWARD COLLINS: As you know, Mr Banasiak—and I know you've visited, with Mark Hutchings, the Rozelle HQ—we obviously have responsibility for environmental services. We have a team who deal with a number of issues, and also pollution control. I don't know the details of why that particular project was funded at that extent. I will find that out, certainly, for this afternoon. But there are also, as you know, a number of sites we inherited from Crown Lands with modest funding, if I can put it that way, and a modest number of staff. But obviously, we have been focusing the next round of this funding on public amenities, mainly in the area, which are obviously very useful to people, but also dredging, as well. I think \$28 million for public boating amenities.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: To be fair, Mr Collins, the problem with the Boating Now program was it probably should have been called the "Picnic Table Now" program, or the "Toilet Block Now" program, because that's what councils were applying for and spending the money on. There was more money spent on toilet blocks and picnic tables and barbecue settings than there was on boat ramp infrastructure. Now, it seems we're creeping down that path again.

HOWARD COLLINS: Well, 386 projects, I think almost all complete. The Boating Now program is in the past, but certainly I think the latest program, which was announced by the Minister—certainly the majority of that focus is on boating infrastructure, dredging and prioritising working with local communities on what is needed in the boating area.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: There's still a lot of vagaries in there, Mr Collins, about toilet blocks and amenities.

HOWARD COLLINS: Yes, but I think the majority of those are actually not about toilet blocks or amenities. The majority of them are a lot to do with dredging, maintenance of wharfs, betterments. We've had a lot of programs. Forty-six successful projects under that particular program have been announced; 22 boat ramps and associated infrastructure; 40, obviously, to enhance—I know you and I have talked about disability access, particularly for fishers; 42 for environmental benefits—some of those are going to deal with pollution amounts; and five projects focusing on future needs, including dredging.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: When we come back to it—or we can do it now, Mr Collins. What evidence was provided that this project supported boating access in terms of the effluent station refurbishment?

HOWARD COLLINS: The Boating Infrastructure for Communities program is not just about access. It's about supporting those communities and dealing with a wide range of boaters, from not only tinnies to paddleboards to all sorts of things, and those people who use our waterways.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: The problem with paddleboards and kayaks is they don't pay the bills in terms of the Waterways Fund. The Waterways Fund is largely made up of boating registration, such as motorboats et cetera, and their licence fees.

HOWARD COLLINS: And moorings and other stuff.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: We contribute close to \$60 million to that fund. I think boaters have a right to get a little bit antsy when they see it being put into a small watercraft strategy for Willoughby City Council. Why wasn't that put into bricks and mortar in terms of boating infrastructure rather than a council planning document?

HOWARD COLLINS: Let me take on notice the detail of that one, but I think overall boaters do appreciate the quality of the water. We've seen an amazing improvement in the quality of water. We've seen humpback whales in Sydney and all sorts of stuff, so I do think the majority of this fund is connected with improvements which come out of your and my licence fees when we use the water.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: With all due respect, no point having great quality water if you can't actually get on it because the boat ramp is not safe or structurally sound.

HOWARD COLLINS: Twenty-two of those upgrade projects are directly about boat ramps. The majority of the work we are carrying out certainly is to do with boating infrastructure.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: In terms of the two that I have just mentioned, are you able to provide the Committee the submissions that were made in terms of those applications and the scoring sheets in terms of

how they were assessed? I'm curious as to why they were assessed higher than actual boating infrastructure that actually can make serious improvements.

HOWARD COLLINS: I will certainly take on notice to understand and share with you as much as we can regarding the assessment criteria.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I'm happy for it to be de-identified. I don't need to know who did the scoring, but I would be interested to see how they were scored compared to other projects.

HOWARD COLLINS: A lot of it is engagement with the local community, the local boating community and also the people who use our waterways. I will find that detail and share as much as we can.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Minister, given Maritime doesn't have data on usage patterns, how were these projects assessed in terms of value for money?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: They were assessed by the department. I didn't have a role in any of the assessments of it. They have the criteria of the grants. I don't exercise any discretion.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Does it concern you that Maritime doesn't have usage data in terms of patronage on these facilities? Wouldn't that be a good tool to assess where limited funds should be invested strategically?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Mr Banasiak, NSW Maritime does an incredible job. The staff—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I am not saying that, but if they don't have data—

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: These projects are really important for communities right across the State to get on the water, and they are assessed on a range of criteria. They are assessed in accordance with that. Obviously, there may not be formal usage criteria, as you say, but there also has to be capacity of the agencies that are applying for the funding to be able to deliver the projects, and so that's a really important part of that as well. In some of these projects, they may be also contributing funds as well.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I appreciate that, but I go to Mr Howard Collins' evidence in a previous estimates where he admitted that we're probably 50 years behind where we need to be for maritime infrastructure. We have limited funds from the Waterways Fund. We know the state of the Waterways Fund at the moment. My concern is how do we spend this money wisely to get the best bang for our buck? If it is not based on usage data, are we just creating seasonal white elephants that sit there dormant for nine months of the year and are only used for three months?

HOWARD COLLINS: I think one of the challenges we've had is that if we did use it, just purely on usage, I think we'd fix every boat ramp in Sydney and nothing would be fixed in the regions. My team is pretty experienced in understanding the local needs. We have officers from Eden all the way to Tweed, and many of those facilities, whilst they're not used by many dozens of people, are often the most neglected and have been left without maintenance or even repair. We have criteria—and we'll share that with you—of how we've ended up with this current round. There's always the ability—and we see this as a continual process—where additional projects can be added to the program as funding becomes available.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Is part of the criteria that the designs and construction are done by marine engineers?

HOWARD COLLINS: I'll have to take that on notice. Most of those infrastructure projects are dealt with by the MIDO team, and they do employ the appropriate engineers for the structures. Again, if you have any particular project you're interested in where you think there is an issue, please let us know.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I just want to note too that 63 per cent of those projects are actually in regional New South Wales.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Which is great compared to the last Boating Now program where almost none and stuff—all were.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We are trying to do that, and, as I said, the delivery partners can contribute up to 50 per cent of the funding then. We're putting in the 33. Potentially, there could be up to another \$33 million that is actually there, so it is about leveraging that investment as well.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Minister, the Ulmarra Ferry—the member for Clarence has been working with the community trying to fight the terrible Labor decision to axe that ferry. At the time, you committed to assist the council with a \$5 million transition fund, and recently this offer has been rescinded. Why have you backflipped on that promise?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Overall, I totally reject the premise of your question. We have not rescinded that offer at all. In fact, I was speaking to the general manager of the council about this yesterday. So, no, that's absolutely incorrect.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So the \$5 million is still in place?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We are working with the council. It's interesting to note that I haven't had any correspondence from Mr Williamson about this. I know he had been reaching out to people about it, but not to me, which would have been the first place to go to get some clarity on this.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So the \$5 million is still in place or not?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, absolutely.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: It is?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We're still looking at that, and that's fine. Council wrote to me some time ago, and I think they've outlined a much higher figure than that. We will be working through with them on getting the finer details on that. I've undertaken to speak to the general manager and come back to her by the end of this month about that.

The CHAIR: Minister, will the people of regional New South Wales see one of the new regional trains on their tracks before the end of the year?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Other than testing, no.

The CHAIR: Before the end of 2026?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I can't give you that time frame. Again, this is a procurement piece that comes under Minister Graham as lead on it, but that's not my understanding. We're not going to give you a time at this point because we are still working through to get the project delivered. It's a very complex project to deliver and one that in 10 years the former Government failed to deliver one single train onto the network.

The CHAIR: Minister, there are a number of people in regional New South Wales that have been—considering that the Government is extending the life of the XPTs with the refurbishment, when the new regional train line eventually does come on board, has there been consideration given to extending the life of those XPTs in terms of sleeper services? The regional train lines don't have sleeper services from capital cities. Is that actively being canvassed?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We are really looking at this. It was a massive fail by the former Government not to invest in sleeper trains. We are looking at, as part of Future Fleet procurement, what we do to do that, and the XPTs are there as well. There are a number of different ranges of issues that we have to deal with to try and make that work, but it is very much on the table.

The CHAIR: Questions from Government members?

The Hon. BOB NANVA: We're holding fire for now, Chair.

The CHAIR: That means we are breaking for morning tea. We will be back at 11.15 a.m.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back. We'll go straight to questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you, Minister, for joining us today. What's the status of the M6 stage one project?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Thank you for that question. Obviously, it's been subject to a lot of media inquiries. We are working through that with Transport. I think it's probably better if they give you the technical—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I've got them in the afternoon, so I'll work that through with them. I'm interested, as we sit here today, in what the status of it is as you see it.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Transport and the contractors are working to get a solution.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In relation to your view, your perception and your drive of it, if you like—forgive the pun—I'd like to understand from you as the roads Minister what your understanding is of the current status of it.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I really don't want to say too much publicly on this one. It is one where we have had lawyers and engineers involved in it. I don't think adding a Minister into the mix—I'm well aware of where it's up to.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sure. I wouldn't ask you for a legal opinion. I'm just asking for your understanding, as you sit here today as roads Minister. What's the status of the M6?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: That we are working with the contractors to get a resolution as soon as possible for the community.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The pictures on 7NEWS exposed the shocking extent of the damage on that project. What's required to fix it?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Again, that's really a question for the engineers. That's why Transport has been meeting regularly with the engineers on the project to try and get that resolution there. We're very aware. It's being actively worked on. But, again, I'm not going to pre-empt or suggest engineering solutions without any qualifications.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I understand. I'm not asking for engineering solutions. I'm not asking for legal solutions. But what I am interested in is your view as Minister here today. When will it open?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Again, we are working through that with the contractor. That's really important, because we want to make sure we get the right solution and that there's not an additional cost to the taxpayer on this. It's a project that's had a long history, and we want to make sure that it's done properly and completed. That's the goal we're all working towards.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When will it be completed?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Well, that's the goal that we're all working towards. Obviously, there have been some very challenging geotechnical issues, and they will be addressed through the work that Transport is undertaking with the contractor.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Have you had advice that it won't be open until the late 2030s?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I would not comment on any of that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Why not?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Because I'm not going to pre-empt the deliberations and the positive work that is happening between Transport and the contractor.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm not asking you to do that. I'm asking what you know as the roads Minister sitting here today at estimates about a very large project that taxpayers are paying for, and obviously which the local community is very interested in. What's the latest advice?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We are working on the surface works—to get those completed as soon as possible and to the time. Other parts of that are subject to the engineering work that is being undertaken by Transport and the contractors.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When will it open?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I think I've answered that question.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Are you covering up what you know about this project?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: No, I'm not covering it up. I'm not covering up anything.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But you're not prepared to tell this Committee the status of it, or your understanding of the status, or what advice you've received?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'm suggesting that it would be better, if you want to get more technical advice, that you ask the department in the time in the afternoon, or you can ask them now if you like too. But the reality is—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm aware of what I can ask, thank you.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Sorry, I didn't mean to—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm not asking for technical advice; I'm not asking for legal advice. What I'm asking is, as you sit here today as roads Minister, what is your understanding of the status of the project and when will it open?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I've been very clear with the answers I've given you that I'm not prepared to give you a time frame for the opening of the project because there are significant geotechnical issues that are being worked through right now. I'm not in a position to give you a time frame.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What is an acceptable outcome to you as roads Minister?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: An acceptable outcome is that we have all parties working together to get the project completed. That is the goal of the project and the goal of the work that Transport is undertaking right now.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So you don't know when the project will open or are you just not prepared to say? Have you been told?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Ward, it's a very technical issue that they're trying to work through.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I understand that. I'm not querying that. It's not a trick question. Have you been told when it will open?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: How could that be, because they are working through with the contractors about what the solution is? They haven't got the solution they're going to implement, so how could they have a time frame?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Has the department told you when it will open?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Not to my understanding of a time, because they are working through getting the solution done.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So you don't know when it will open.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Ward, I think I've answered that question in multiple ways. You keep asking the same question.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Well, which is it? Either you do know and you're not prepared to say or you don't know and haven't been told. I'm just asking you to clarify. Do you know when it will open?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I have answered that question.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I've said to you that they are undergoing complex technical work with the contractors, and that will inform the timeline for when the completion is.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, either you do know and you won't tell us or you don't know. Which one of those is it?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: The answer is that the contractors are working with Transport on what the solution will be, and that will inform the timeline.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The contractors and Transport ultimately report to you, Minister. So what is your understanding of when it will open?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: As I have said repeatedly, the technical solution hasn't been determined, and that will determine the timeline.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What is your understanding of that as at now?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: That is the answer. The technical solution hasn't been determined. When it is determined, that will determine the timeline.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is it a cover-up?

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order: Chair, Ms Ward has asked the same question several times. It's now becoming repetitious. I would suggest that is discourteous to the witness under the procedural fairness resolution.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: To the point of order: With respect, Chair, I'm not seeking to be discourteous in any way, but I am entitled to put the questions that I choose from the Opposition.

The CHAIR: I have listened. The member has been asking the same question, but politely and respectfully. I note that the Minister is also entitled to answer the question as she sees fit. I'll allow the member to continue.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So, Minister, you don't know the timeline?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Ward, the answer is that we do not have the final technical solution to deliver. That will inform the time frame. Until we have that, we cannot give a time frame.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So you don't know the timeline? It's not a trick question. You don't know the timeline for the opening of the M6.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Ward, until we find a technical solution, we cannot give a timeline.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So when is the technical solution due?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Ward, Transport for NSW is working on that with the engineers, with the contractor. You can ask either now or—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'll do that this afternoon. You're saying to this Committee that the technical solution is being worked on. When is that due?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: They're meeting regularly.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When is it due?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: It will take the time that it takes to get it done. It's a very complex situation. Safety has to be our highest priority in relation to this. We need to make sure that it is the right solution, so it will take the time that it takes. Putting a deadline so that I can say something in estimates to you is not the most efficient or responsible way to be proceeding.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is the 2028 delivery timeline still possible?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Again, that's a technical question, which you'd need to work through with the department. Given where we're at, we have to let the engineers work on the solution, not set them arbitrary time frames. There are many projects that have blown out for years under different governments. I'm not being political about it, but I'm just saying that to try to take something which is so technical and so—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, 2028 was provided as the date by the Labor Government. Is that still achievable?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Everything is achievable at some point.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The 2028 date on the M6?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Everything is achievable on any project, depending on time and money. It's a function of the vote.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is a 2028 delivery of the M6 stage one still possible in your view?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I don't have a view on whether it's achievable on that particular project in the sense of I'm not an engineer. I don't have the technical expertise, qualifications or skills to make that—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm not asking you about that.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Well, you are.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm asking you in your capacity—

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: If there's a situation where we have had a geotechnical issue on a project—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But, Minister, I'm asking you in your capacity, as you sit here today.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Sorry, did you want me to finish?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm asking you as the roads Minister, as you sit here today in estimates. I'm not asking for geotechnical; I'm not asking for legal. I've made that quite clear. What I am asking is in your capacity as roads Minister, sitting in the big chair driving this project, can you tell me how it is achievable if you can't tell me when it will be open?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Ward, I am working with the department—and they are working very hard with the contractors—to try and deliver a solution very quickly. The problem that we have is it is a complex geotechnical situation. It does require a lot of work to get there. It is complex. You know this from your previous roles, and I respect that you would know this. It has to be worked through properly to ensure that we get a safe solution that is actually in line, financially, for the taxpayers of New South Wales. They're the two priorities we're doing. As I sit in this seat, I am driving that outcome as far as I can.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So driving that outcome, then—is this a car crash project under your leadership?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'm not going to dignify that with a response. I don't think that's a respectful way to ask a question.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm asking what your input is; I'm asking what your understanding of the timeline is; I'm asking what your understanding and expectation of the delivery date is; I'm seeking to understand what your position is on the technical reports—none of which seem to be getting any answer. I'm trying to understand if this is a car crash under your leadership.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Ward, that is actually an incorrect reflection of what's been our discussion here.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Help me out. Tell me what the expectation is.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I've been very clear with you that the M6 is a project that was initiated by the former Government. We have taken that on. It has had a very serious geotechnical issue that is taking some time to resolve to get the engineering solution. Transport is supporting the contractor to find that solution. They are meeting extremely regularly.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'll ask them this afternoon.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: In terms of setting an arbitrary time frame for that, I think it would be unrealistic at this stage to do that. That's why I am not setting or directing the department on a time frame. We want this to be done properly and safely.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, who can I ask, besides the roads Minister, when a roads project will open?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: There's a whole lot of departmental witnesses here, but obviously we're—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The roads Minister is here; I'm asking you.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: You're entitled to ask me, but I'm telling you on that particular project we don't have a time frame or a deadline at this point in time because we are working through it.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The Premier has previously ruled out spending more money on the project. Is that the Government's current position?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: That's the position, yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No more money will be spent on it?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: That's the position of the Premier and the Government, as outlined by the Premier.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Have you been provided with advice from the department that it could drag out past 2030?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: There is always a risk that it could be any time frame, but—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Have you had that advice?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I can't recall a time put in there of that number. Maybe I have; maybe I haven't. But the reality is, my priority is trying to get the work done and get those discussions and workshops with Transport—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Certainly, and I appreciate you trying to do that work. What I'm asking, though, is have you received advice from Transport for NSW about this project being pushed into the 2030s—yes or no?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: No. I don't think so.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You haven't received that advice?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: No, I don't think so.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Do you want to check that answer?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I can't remember exactly about time frames because, as I've said, my focus in every single one of those discussions is not the end point; it's actually getting started to get that work actually done.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Murray, are you able to refresh the Minister's memory?

JOSH MURRAY: As the Minister has said, we continue to work with the joint venture parties through this and independent engineering.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Have you provided advice on the 2030s?

JOSH MURRAY: We haven't provided yet an update back to Government as to the latest from those technical assessments. We anticipate doing that within coming weeks, once we've had further workshops.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So no-one knows the date?

JOSH MURRAY: The current date for the delivery, as you've already pointed out, is the end of 2028.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is that still achievable?

JOSH MURRAY: That date was given at the occurrence of the two sinkholes on West Botany Street. It hasn't been updated since because we are working through the technical assessments, including with independent technical experts.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Certainly, I understand the technicalities. Is that still achievable?

JOSH MURRAY: Until we have that independent technical analysis that is agreed by all parties, we haven't updated the timelines.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I hear that. I understand that. I get the technical aspect. I'm not asking you about that. I'm asking is that date still achievable in your view, as you sit here today as the Transport secretary?

JOSH MURRAY: That is part of the work that is ongoing with the experts that have been brought in with the contractor.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is 2028 still achievable?

JOSH MURRAY: It is a design and construct contract and therefore—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I know the contract. I'm just asking about the date. Is it achievable?

JOSH MURRAY: The work is ongoing to determine exactly what technical solution will be put in place, how it would be carried out and—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It's currently a hole in the ground, Mr Murray. Is it achievable to get this roads project finished by 2028? Does anyone here know?

JOSH MURRAY: Ms Ward, what I'm saying to you is the date is currently at the end of 2028 and a number of other technical issues have occurred since then. We are factoring that in to what it would take to finish this project.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, are you confident that this can be delivered by 2028?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Ward, you've heard the evidence from Mr Murray.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm asking you as the roads Minister, as you sit here today, do you see the M6 project being delivered by 2028?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Ward, I have repeatedly said to you that I'm not going to give you an arbitrary time frame and say when I think that project can be delivered. There is too much work that is being undertaken by the department and by the contractor to try and resolve the issue, and I don't want to put a time frame on it.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, it's not an arbitrary time frame, is it? It's taxpayer money that is being utilised on this project. Billions of dollars have been committed to this. It's 90 per cent—effectively—complete. It's been pushed out; it's been pushed to the side. I understand there are technical issues, but these are taxpayer dollars. As you and Transport secretary Mr Murray sit here today, no-one can tell us whether it's achievable, whether it's been pushed out or whether you've had advice. Can you ask answer any of those aspects?

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Point of order: I understand the member's desire for a political frame and a headline, but the reality is the Minister has answered this on probably five occasions now, as has the secretary of the department.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'll move on. Minister, I understand that you've spoken about tolls and the toll review in the Legislative Assembly previously. Do you recall that?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Briefly, yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Why can you talk about tolls in the Legislative Assembly but not at estimates?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Sorry?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Are you able to talk about tolls?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: It's because I represent Minister Graham in the Legislative Assembly, but here I'm being asked questions in relation to my portfolio, which is Roads and Regional Transport. Minister Graham has—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I know that, thank you. What's your understanding of the Government's future policy on the toll cap?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Really, Ms Ward, that question would be better targeted towards Minister Graham—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You're the roads Minister.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: But he has carriage of the tolling policy in the State of New South Wales.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I understand that, but as you sit here as the roads Minister, what's your understanding of the Government's policy on toll capping?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Ward, I would really refer you to the relevant Minister for this. I'm happy to answer questions on behalf of Minister Graham in the Legislative Assembly, as is part of the procedure.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But you're the roads Minister, correct?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: But my understanding is in budget estimates, my role here is to be answering questions in relation to my portfolio in relation to budget estimates.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm asking, in relation to you being the roads Minister, what your understanding is—

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I haven't finished the question. I'm asking what your understanding is, in your capacity as roads Minister, of the Government's future policy on the toll cap. It's coming to an end. What's your understanding of what you're moving to do?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Ward, I'll refer you to my previous answer. I'm not sure what your strategy has been here, and I'm very pleased to tell Minister Graham the things you're interested in in his portfolio. I'm sure he can watch this and find out what you want to ask him about.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Should I ask him about roads?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: No, because that is in my portfolio. The toll cap is a policy that Minister Graham has been in charge of since we came to government.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Do you speak to him about it?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We do. Of course we do.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Do you have a say? Do you say, "Where are we up to? I'm the roads Minister. I need to know what we're doing with the tolls"? You do have that conversation?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We do talk about it, but it's budget estimates. I think it's appropriate that we actually ask questions about—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What roads does the Government intend to keep in public ownership? You're the roads Minister; what roads are staying in public hands?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We're not privatising them, is my understanding.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You're the roads Minister. Your position is that once the toll roads end their concession, they'll be returning to public hands. That's right, isn't it?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Sorry, say that again.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The toll concessions, once they end, your Government's position is that they will return to public ownership?

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I have 20 seconds left.

The CHAIR: I know, but a point of order has been taken. I ignored the last one.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: My point of order goes to relevance. The Minister has already answered the question with respect to tolling, toll caps and toll concessions. Ms Ward is again asking another set of questions around toll concessions.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'll keep it to roads.

The CHAIR: I won't uphold the point of order.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, there won't be any further privatisation of toll roads. Is that correct?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: That is correct. We have set up an entity to look at this. But that is really, as I say, under Minister Graham's remit. It would be much better to ask him.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No more privatisation of toll roads. That is what you said.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, correct.

The CHAIR: Minister, have you been following—I assume you have—the coverage in relation to the current ICAC investigation that I've already asked about?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes.

The CHAIR: Have you been involved in discussions around how to ensure that this whole practice within Transport for NSW is cleaned up, firstly? I asked Mr Murray this. What has your involvement been?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Obviously, I have been briefed about it. Mr Murray has been working hard to do those reforms that need to happen in our procurement process in Transport for NSW, and the Government supports that. There is no place for corruption in our public sector. We don't want that to be the case. Anything we can do, whether it's looking at policies and procedures, cooperating with investigators or making decisions around employment of staff who have had allegations or whatever—obviously, that is handled by Mr Murray, but I am kept abreast of the broad, high-level aspects of that.

The CHAIR: Are you confident that people within Transport for NSW who are making complaints—whistleblowers—are being treated with respect and believed and that everything is being done correctly and appropriately?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I take those allegations really seriously that whistleblowers make. I support them. I have sought assurances when topics have been raised in the media and when we have been briefed on it from Mr Murray that those are being taken seriously, and he has assured me that that's the case. If people have issues, they can always address that with me. I am always open to that. But I haven't had anyone, to my knowledge, come forward to me to say that they have concerns about the way they have been treated as a whistleblower from Transport for NSW.

The CHAIR: What about the story from 7 August in *The Sydney Morning Herald* that says, in relation to the whistleblower, she had expected the names on the emails to later prompt the agency's fraud and investigation unit to contact her but that did not happen?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: That's a media raising of that story.

The CHAIR: I believe it would have been raised within the ICAC hearing.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Sorry, yes. I want to be very careful about what I say in relation to ICAC hearings. Just to be really clear, if people have a concern and they feel that they are not being heard, they are always open to write to me as the Minister and I will take it seriously. I have also spoken with Mr Murray around this issue. From the conversations we have had, I have felt and believed and understood that there is a care and concern for the welfare and safety of whistleblowers. That is something that, as a government, we are committed to—transparency and ensuring that people who report allegations of corruption are able to do so freely and safely.

The CHAIR: Are there any concerns held in relation to the agency's fraud and investigation unit itself?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: These are, in many cases, historic allegations of a culture that arose over many years. Transport is trying to address those issues. Obviously, they will continue to do that. I think Mr Murray outlined previously a number of strategies that the department is using to do that. There is always room for improvement when it comes to prevention and detection of fraud and bad practices in any agency. I am confident that the department is making the changes that are required. I have been briefed not just by Mr Murray but by other members of the executive leadership around things that they are undertaking in a procurement space, particularly, to try and address this.

The CHAIR: What's that unit called, Mr Murray? Is it the fraud and investigation unit?

JOSH MURRAY: The fraud and corruption prevention unit.

The CHAIR: Is it usual for the unit to potentially not contact somebody who makes a complaint?

JOSH MURRAY: Again, I'm just noting what we have said already about these matters being live. However, I would like to advise the Committee that the Speak Up reports that were made were done on an anonymous basis. I understand that the evidence of the whistleblower, who was right to be pursuing these elements, was that they believed that they had delivered enough information there that would enable the identities and the further detailed requirements to be picked up. That's something that we are looking at in Transport very closely as to that distance, if you like, between an anonymous report and having enough information through the Speak Up hotline to then be able to take it further.

As it was in this case, by the time those details had become apparent, the ICAC Wyvern processes were already underway. In fact, we had become aware of it through the ICAC rather than through the hotline reporting that had been done. In response to your earlier question about the concerns around the Speak Up hotline and whether the person was treated with enough urgency and respect, I can advise the Committee that we are re-tendering that service and we will move to a new contract in the short term in regard to improving what we have there. In our fraud and corruption ranks, we have added additional resources to make sure that we can be acting on these elements as quickly as possible.

The CHAIR: That's very useful. Minister, what does the timeline look like for the 10-year plan for regional rail? There seem to be a lot of processes or plans of development and consultation around regional transport and regional rail, but nothing announced for the community to be able to expect, other than new trains at some point maybe years down the track.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Sorry, which one are you—

The CHAIR: The 10-year plan.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Like the RNEWUP?

The CHAIR: Yes, there is a 10-year plan for the regional rail network. Does developing a 10-year plan mean that regional communities can expect more regional passenger rail? Is that what that looks like?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Partly it's that. It's also some freight work. Under the former Government there was a Fixing Country Rail program, which delivered some really good outcomes. But some of those outcomes were also, how can I say, probably gold plating sections of the network that then became stranded assets—for example, getting a TAL up to 25 tonnes when it probably only needed to be 23 tonnes to do the work that it was required to do and we could have actually got more done. It was a challenging environment in there. We are working on that.

But we need to make sure that we have a whole-of-network approach. Part of the issue with Fixing Country Rail also was that, I think, originally, in the first iteration of the program, it was like, "What can we do", and then it was like, "We are not getting the sort of projects we want." Then it went more to opportunistic grants where potentially the proponent of the grant might want something to help their business, like GrainCorp or something like that. It wasn't actually looking at the network as a whole and saying, "Where can we get better efficiency to get more freight on rail and get more passengers"—

The CHAIR: That's a lot of freight. Is it the intention to look at where passenger rail may also benefit either new services or more services?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Part of that comes under a couple of different things. That RNEWUP is really around the track infrastructure and planning and that part. Predominantly there is a freight piece there—is probably the main focus, I would say, of that, because that's the thing that will drive the growth. We're also doing the Strategic Regional Integrated Transport Plans in each of the regions, which then speak to these regional rail opportunities for uplift of passenger services as well. Then, obviously, TrainLink is always looking at how they can work on their—we have an issue with, again, the regional rail fleet procurement and having to look at how do

we roll out more seats when that new train will not have additional extra capacity. That's where we have to look at future fleet as well. There are a lot of constraints on getting passenger uplift because of, really, a lack of planning for growth in that. When we look at regional trains, that's the only sector that has actually been—other than the metro—past pre-COVID levels. It is a priority for us. We want to do it, but it is a very complicated part.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: The secretariat is going to hand you a photo of a boat ramp. It goes to my point about maritime engineering. This is Conjola Park boat ramp. It received funding out of Boating Now round three, plus the Bushfire Local Economic Recovery fund, to the tune of \$775,349. If I'm disabled and elderly, how do I utilise that boat ramp in the current state that it is in?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: That's a great question, Mr Banasiak. Have you seen it, Howard?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: This ramp is two years old, constructed in 2023.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: So it would have been a decision of the former Government to build it.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: That's right, but the fact remains that taxpayer money has been spent on a ramp that is completely unusable because of poor design.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'm sorry, I can't speak to decisions of the former Government on grants.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I know you can't, but the question is: How can boating users now have any faith that the process has changed? Because the people that assessed this application are the same people that you rely on for advice now. Mr Collins?

HOWARD COLLINS: I will have a look at this one. Obviously there are many dozen boat ramps which are built. Some of them are built through our MIDO team, our infrastructure development team. Others are built by councils where we provide the funding. I will have a look at this one. I'll see what I can do in terms of understanding its current state as well. Just remind me, which ramp is this?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: This is Conjola Park boat ramp on Havilland Street. Boating Now round three—it was funded through. If it's ramps that are constructed by council, what oversight does the MIDO team have in terms of engineering to make sure it's done to the—

HOWARD COLLINS: Pretty good.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Well, are you sure about that?

HOWARD COLLINS: We've got one photograph here of one example. Yes, there may be other reasons. I'll find out why the design—if that is the design—failed or what actually has happened with this ramp.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: It seems that the ramp slope is inadequate. The floating pontoon is sitting at an unsuitable height based on the water levels.

HOWARD COLLINS: Yes, the water level seems extremely high.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: It's not usable. What independent marine engineering or boating safety advice was obtained before this was constructed—or firstly designed and then constructed?

HOWARD COLLINS: Let me take this one away. I see from the photograph actually there's no real marine growth on the area. I don't know whether that is a particularly high water level which is in that area. But let me find out. I'll find out what the current status is. And, yes, occasionally perhaps people get the design wrong or perhaps it's not adequate, but the majority of the times we work with qualified engineers and people who hold the necessary requirements of marine design of infrastructure. Let me find out about this one and I'll get back to you this afternoon.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: But you'd agree, when someone gets a design wrong on something like that, it's a significant cost to the taxpayer?

HOWARD COLLINS: I agree with you. It's unfortunate that this one looks like—on this photograph—something is fundamentally wrong with the design. But let me find out a little bit more about this particular area and what actually has happened. Certainly if there are others that you're concerned about, feel free to let us know.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Mr Banasiak, the point that we talked about before the break around changes that you had identified with more regional grants and looking at the criteria, I think that's something that we need to look at as well. That is something across all of our grant programs in Transport that we've been trying to improve. If we look at the active transport grants, for example—a different program, I understand, but since we've come to government we've put in money for development grants as well as delivery. It helps those projects get started, so potentially there might be more funding for the development of a project which might be more fit for

purpose. We've quarantined funding for regions so that they do get their fair share. We've maxed out the number of council projects that can be undertaken so that not just councils that are great at writing grant applications get the majority—lion's share of the money. We have been trying to improve the accountability and processes. I really value your feedback. I really want to say that quite genuinely to you. We're always happy, as you know, to meet with Mr Hutchings from Maritime and also with myself on this matter. I know you have been taking those opportunities. I'm really grateful for that. Thank you for your feedback.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I'll switch to another maritime issue. On 10 May in *The Daily Telegraph*—this is regarding the Kamay ferry wharves—you labelled the project "one of the worst examples of mismanagement". You said:

What the former Government has delivered is a glorified fishing platform ... that's money that is not going to other crucial projects across the state.

That is fairly strong language. What are you doing outside of saying fairly strong words in *The Daily Telegraph*? Is there going to be some form of public review in terms of this management to understand how it occurred or what things can be put in place so it doesn't happen again?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Certainly that has been part of what we are trying to work at. The first estimated cost of that was \$18 million under the former Government and it blew out to—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: To \$75 million.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes. Even to cancel it would have been horrendous.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Now we've got maintenance costs on top of that that is coming out of the Waterways Fund.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Obviously we're trying to look at how we can mitigate that, how we can—and in the future, particularly around grant processes. That is something we really are trying to do under our Government to ensure that we do have greater transparency, better criteria. I went through some of the list of the issues that we've had with former grant projects. I was quite distressed when I was meeting with regional councils about some of their projects and saying to them, "Why are you doing this project and not this one that's on your strategic plan?" I was told by them, for example, that they were told not to put in projects for some of that stimulus funding that was in their strategic plans—to put in new projects that no-one had ever heard of before because it was all meant to be new. It is very disturbing, the way that the former Government was doing their grant programs. We are trying to improve that as a government.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Is there anything specifically that will stop a project progressing this far in terms of costs before it is pulled up and re-evaluated for feasibility and value for money for taxpayers?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Whenever there is an unintended cost increase, that is assessed by Transport for NSW. They do look at the reasons for the cost increase and then the determination is made, whether that is recommended to increase the funding or descope the project or a whole lot of different challenges like that. There is a process in place that Transport has for doing that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Can I go to taxis for a minute. You were quoted in a press release earlier this month regarding the wheelchair-accessible taxi availability. Obviously from a regional perspective, wheelchair-accessible taxis are even fewer on the ground out in the regions than they are anywhere else. What economic assessment was done in terms of the viability of regional taxi plate owners' ability to service loans? Part of this stimulus is around loans for taxi drivers to purchase or retrofit vehicles for wheelchair access. How is a taxi driver going to service a loan out in the regions when they're barely making any money each shift?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We've been working on this with yourselves, actually, since we were in opposition, because of the problems we inherited in terms of taxis. We both advocated for a better viable taxi, and I remember having conversations—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: It was exacerbated by the deregulation, which you supported.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We also went to the Treasurer of the Government at the time and got more money for taxi owners in that. We were trying to assist. We made commitments that we would try to address wheelchair-accessible taxis. We held a series of round tables. Three of those were held in regional New South Wales, as well as one in Sydney. That came up with the lift fee, which was the \$15 increase.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Has any assessment been done, though, on whether they are able to service those loans that are on offer, based on how much money they're making out in the regions picking up passengers?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: It was a recommendation of the report that that was done. That would have been assessed, I'm sure, at that point. In addition to that, there's also the operator grants of \$2,500 as well. It might be something to ask the officials later.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, when will the Milton Ulladulla bypass start construction?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Obviously that's a project that's part of the Princes Highway upgrade.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes. When will it start construction?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: The funding for that is \$940 million. There is funding from the State. The concept design and environmental assessments are currently underway. We are looking at that. We are doing investigations.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When will it start construction?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We don't have a time frame for that because we have to go through the planning and the EIS for it. As you might be aware, it's one of those projects where there was a lot of consultation undertaken under the former Government. We had members of committees resigning and very unhappy with the former Government's failure to consult, so it has been a long time trying to pull it out of the fire.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Compared to other projects, the latest media release for the Fifteenth Avenue upgrade says that construction will start in 2027. How can you tell the community when one project in roads can start and not this one?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: The former Government had 12 years to build this bypass. It's a bit rich to be coming and complaining because we're two years in and we can't give you a time frame on it.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm just asking for the opening date.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We're working through the—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, you're able to state in a media release a date for construction starting on one project. I'm just asking why you can do that in your media release from your Government for Fifteenth Avenue, but your Government can't tell us today when construction will start on the Milton Ulladulla bypass.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Are you finished now? Can I answer the question?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's a question, yes.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: As I was saying, the former Government had 12 years to build the—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, I'm interested in this project.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Point of order—

The CHAIR: I think I know what the point of order is going to be. The Minister literally said two words and then you cut in, Ms Ward. Please wait a little bit more time for the Minister to answer. Back to you, Minister.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: To the point of order: Chair, it does seem that every question is prefaced with "the former Government". I do have limited time. I'm asking about current projects.

The CHAIR: I won't uphold the point of order, Ms Ward. Back to you, Minister.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Current projects.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Through you, Chair: The former Government did have 12 years to build this. We've been carrying out investigations. We've had some environmental considerations with the local greater glider population. That's informing the concept design and the EIS. We have to be respectful of that process. We've also had—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: All right.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Sorry, do you not want me to finish?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm interested in the date. Will the bypass start construction before 2029?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Ward, there's no construction timeline that has been finalised, because it's dependent on the completion of planning and environmental assessment work. We're doing everything we can to expedite that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm sure Fifteenth Avenue is also subject to that same planning work. Why is it that you can say Fifteenth Avenue will start in 2027 but you can't tell the community when construction on a major road project, the Milton Ulladulla bypass—using taxpayer money—will start?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Ward, we do our projects as we can do them. There are some that are easier to anticipate. When you're talking about Milton Ulladulla, you're talking about quite a sensitive environmental area. There has been a lot of contentious community consultation and there have been failures from the former Government that we've had to work our way through. It is more challenging.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: On that environmental assessment then, what's the target date or period that Transport for NSW intends to complete the concept design and that environmental impact assessment?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Sorry, can you say that again?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What's the target date for the period that Transport intends to complete the concept design and the environmental assessment?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We awarded that work in December 2024, for concept design and environmental assessment, to Aurecon. They are working concurrently. We are trying to expedite that out. They're well underway. It's critical work, but I don't think I have a time frame that I can give you on when that will be finalised.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When will the Nowra bypass start construction?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Again, I'm happy to—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sorry? When will the Nowra bypass start construction?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Sorry.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Hello?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Can I come back to that one? Sorry, I'm just trying to get that up because I've got two.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can someone send a text to the Minister? When will the Nowra bypass start construction? What's the next step for the project?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I think we're losing the respectful way there. It's not funded for construction, which you'd be aware of.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: All right. While you're taking the time to find that, you don't know when the M6 will open, you don't know when the Milton Ulladulla bypass will start construction and you don't know when the Nowra bypass will start construction either.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Is there a question in that?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes. You don't know when any of those projects will open. We've asked you about three major projects. You don't know when the M6 will open, you don't know when the Milton Ulladulla bypass will start construction and you don't know when the Nowra bypass will start construction.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Point of order—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Do you know any roads projects, Minister?

The CHAIR: A point of order has been taken.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Start date, construction date, opening date—any timeline?

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: It's just a series of statements we seem to be continuing, rather than a question. This is a forum for questions.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'll phrase it as a question.

The CHAIR: I won't uphold your point of order. There was a very clear question, in fact, from Ms Ward. We'll go back to the Minister.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, I'm asking about what you know about major roads projects in New South Wales as you sit here today as the roads Minister. What do you know?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Are you ready? Two of those projects are in planning. One of them has very technical and commercial issues that are being worked through. There's a vast number of projects that are under

construction in this State. To have all of them that we could be telling you exactly the time frames for would be unrealistic.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You're the roads Minister.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I think a reasonable person would rather that the roads Minister is working on these roads, not looking at an arbitrary date.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, with respect, it's not an arbitrary date. These are major roads projects worth billions of dollars. I would have thought, on behalf of taxpayers, that it was rightful, correct and respectful for them to ask you what your expectation is about start dates, completion dates and timelines. Are you saying that's unreasonable?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Sorry?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Are you saying that's unreasonable?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Ward, what I'm saying is that two of those projects that you mentioned are under planning, so they're not at construction stage yet. The other one is in a very technical situation with work being done to bring it to a conclusion. Of the hundreds or probably thousands of projects that I am looking after in this State, there are two that, under your Government, were commenced and you had 12 years to do them. If you are so concerned about them, why didn't you do them then?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It's a little bit like the bypasses that are being announced just before the Kiama by-election. It's interesting that they were announced. You've had three budgets to announce those and then, all of a sudden, they're miraculously appearing. That's curious, isn't it? Or was it due to your advocacy and planning for those Kiama projects?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Ward, I said to you previously that with Tripoli Way, that was a commitment that we took to the election. At the last minute—again, in 2017 the project split off from Albion Park Rail. It then got no funding from your Government until 2023, in the dying days of your Government, to keep Gareth Ward in the seat as an Independent. And you're giving him that money—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you, Minister. Can I ask you about your current budget?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I haven't finished my answer. Can I finish my answer?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm happy to move on.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: You asked me about the timing of that announcement. I think it's very germane because—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm happy to move on, Minister. I'd really appreciate the opportunity. I have one minute left.

The CHAIR: Order! I think we'll just move to the next question at this point.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Point of order—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, what is your position on the closure of the Glebe Island port?

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: A pretty relevant allegation was put. The Minister is trying to answer. Rather than just being told to move on, perhaps it could be considered—

The CHAIR: Sorry, Mr Lawrence. Could you please start your point of order again.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: A sort of allegation was made about politicisation, and the Minister was trying to answer and was being spoken over. I would suggest that, rather than just being told to move on, it should rather be considered whether she should be able to answer that question, because it was an allegation.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: To the point of order: I believe that the Minister was far beyond, respectfully, what I had asked, and I was trying to be respectful and move on to the next subject matter. I have one minute left.

The CHAIR: I just wanted to check with the Minister, if you've got a very brief response, and then we will move to the next question if you didn't get—

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes. To reiterate, we funded commitment in the 2023 election for that project. We have been working with council and with the local community. It's become clear that they needed to have more work done on this project to get it up and running, to see the full scope of the project delivered. They're

at a point in the project—it's my understanding that it is an opportune time for the project that is being run by council, for them to have funding certainty, and that was what was driving the decision to announce there.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you, Minister. What's your position on the closure of the Glebe Island port?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Obviously, there's a metro station, which is under Minister Graham's remit, there, but there is a review currently being conducted. That will inform the future of the Glebe Island port.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What's your position on it, Minister?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: My position is that there's a review underway. There's a complex set of considerations there, and there are no decisions that have been finalised at this stage.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Have you met with the Working Port Coalition?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: No, I haven't, because the ports isn't in my portfolio. It's not part of that remit there, but—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Would you be prepared to meet with them?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: If they have requested. I don't believe they have requested that meeting, but the reality is that this is not—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No problem. Have you sought advice from Transport—

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: You didn't want me to finish that? Okay.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Have you sought advice from Transport for NSW regarding the impact to the road network should the port close?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I've been briefed on aspects of the project in relation to my portfolio of Roads.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What was that advice?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We're undertaking consultation with stakeholders on this. That should be front and centre, and the Government will have more to say when that review is complete. I won't be commenting—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is that advice in relation to the impact on the road network?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Ward, there have been discussions around it, not at length. As I said, it's not within majority of my remit. But, obviously, we're alive to it, and Transport is working through that and providing that advice to government, to the areas that are making decisions.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Murray, has Transport for NSW provided any modelling, to Treasury or other government bodies, on the impacts of the decision to the road network?

JOSH MURRAY: As the Minister has said, that work is ongoing. It is not led by Transport. But we feed into the government working parties through the Cabinet Office and Treasury.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Specifically in relation to impact on the road network, has Transport for NSW provided advice to the Minister or to the Treasury?

JOSH MURRAY: Transport provides, through the cross-government working group, information reliant on the base precinct and the ports work that is ongoing and is being talked about and is the responsibility of the Treasurer.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Has roads modelling been undertaking?

JOSH MURRAY: As I say, Transport is involved in that working group. So all work gets channelled through that review process.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes. Has that work including road modelling?

JOSH MURRAY: I wouldn't want to speculate on what's been included, because it's not a piece of work that is controlled by Transport. I'm sure you'd be able to redirect your questions to those undertaking the review.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So I should ask Minister Graham or the Treasurer about roads?

JOSH MURRAY: It is the Treasurer, who is leading the report on the broader considerations. We're feeding into that, which we do on a regular basis.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You don't know if it includes road modelling, or you won't say?

JOSH MURRAY: It's not our place to talk wider about the government considerations that will go into that report. We are providing all manner of detail through the transport network, the road network, in relation to that piece of work.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That detail that you're providing—does that include roads modelling for the impact of closure of a port?

JOSH MURRAY: As I've said, there are traffic and transport issues that have been part of that review. Transport has been part of this work for a long period of time and continues to provide a lot of information through that process. I'm not going to talk to which individual pieces of information are there, because it's part of a holistic, whole-of-government approach as to the best step forward. That will be considered by government. It's not Transport's decision.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is the modelling secret?

JOSH MURRAY: Work that is being done is part of a Cabinet process and will be—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is roads modelling secret—around Glebe Island port?

JOSH MURRAY: I'm not suggesting that. I'm saying that we have provided a huge range of information and will continue to do so.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But you won't tell.

JOSH MURRAY: It's not my report, Ms Ward.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Minister, the great member for Upper Hunter, Dave Layzell, has been very concerned about the impact, on the local community, of freight movements for renewable projects. Will there be limits to the number of movements per day to reduce the impacts on communities like Merriwa?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'm very pleased that you asked the question about this. Before the election, there was a roads forum that was held, actually, in Upper Hunter, and residents of Merriwa were there. They expressed their concerns around the movement of oversize, over-mass vehicles as part of the renewable energy zone. That was one of the reasons why, as part of our Regional Roads Fund, we actually made a commitment of \$12 million to invest in putting an overtaking or a passing lane in there, because they didn't have one around their town. They made that case. There had been some work that had been undertaken by the previous Government—and I give credit for that—to upgrade the Golden Highway. But it hadn't included Merriwa in that piece of work, and so I've met with them. We, as we've come to government, actually set up a—Transport heads and chairs a transport and logistics group on renewable energies movement, zones and the movement, and that's a whole-of-government piece that is actually coordinated through Transport's working with the Port of Newcastle, with Roads and then also right across the State, with the other renewable—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So that will look at the number of movements and the potential impact of all of that?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes. It is looking at the number of movements, and it is also looking at the timing of those movements out of the port. It is looking at the whole gamut of the impacts on there, and it is work that I'm incredibly proud that we're doing in Transport, to make sure that we're minimising the impact on communities and ensuring they have liveability of those concerns. It was not our choice to start the renewables in the Central-West Orana. That was a decision of the former Government. Unfortunately, they didn't put in quite enough work on that logistics piece. But we're picking that up and really running with it.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'm sure the communities of Merriwa will be happy to hear that. The amazing member for Myall Lakes, Tanya Thompson, has been advocating for an upgrade of the Failford Road–Lakes Way intersection for safety reasons, which has been supported by Transport for NSW to date. Is there a commitment to proceed with this project?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'm not making announcements at budget estimates. I can say the member for Myall Lakes is a very passionate member for her community, and we continue to engage with her on issues like that. I'm happy to give that response to her or to take it on notice here.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: If you could take it on notice—it's fantastic, because the wonderful member for Myall Lakes has put that question forward this morning, so it would be great to hear. The member for Coffs Harbour, the local council and the local business community have all been seeking a commitment for funding to upgrade the old Pacific Highway through Coffs Harbour, once the bypass has opened up. What's the position of the Government, in regard to funding for the handover of the road?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I think that's something that is still, from my understanding, under negotiation and something we'll be discussing with council at the appropriate time. It's not something I intend to ventilate through estimates or make determinations on.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So you're suggesting that it is under negotiation, then. You are talking with council or you're going to be?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We've had conversations with council. I have met with them a number of times on a variety of things, in light of the bypass et cetera. Obviously, the re-categorisation process will provide some business as usual arrangements and ways that we can actually work with them on that.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: The member for Northern Tablelands, Brendan Moylan, has been advocating for repair of the New England Highway after floods. You have talked about the significant regional road maintenance, and we all recognise the impact of ongoing weather. There have been thousands of potholes filled, obviously, but that's a short-term solution. Is there a long-term investment plan for this major piece of infrastructure?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We've been doing a lot of investment on the New England Highway, notably Singleton bypass. Muswellbrook bypass is starting. We completed work on the Belford interchange. There is constantly work going on, and we will continue to do that. I have to say that I am very pleased with the advocacy of the member for Northern Tablelands.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: He's a very hard worker.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: He has been. But we had really, as I said, worked into it. I think we had done 5,000 potholes filled and 50,000 square metres of heavy patching on the highway at that time.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Are you concerned about the potential impact on the road network of millions of tonnes of waste being trucked out to regional areas like Parkes and Tarago?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I, as roads Minister, don't have a judgement about what is being carried on the roads, as such. Is it people, is it cattle, is it grain, is it food, or is it waste or oversize or overmass items—it's not for me to make the judgement about what gets carried.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: But the impact on the roads would be something that concerns you.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: But the impact is 100 per cent my concern. That's why we are investing in our Strategic Regional Integrated Transport Plans to better understand what is being carried on the network while we're investing in upgrades on roads as we do them. While we're always meeting with councils—I meet with councils right across the State, and that is something that we look at.

The CHAIR: The Kangaroo Valley Hampden Bridge—what is planned for that?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Thanks for that question. This is a project that is really difficult for the local community, and I understand that. I was down there a couple of weeks ago, meeting with some of the locals about it, and the mayor and the locals members from Federal and State level. This is a bridge that is, I think it's a hundred—1898.

The CHAIR: Yes, and it's down to a 23.5-tonne load limit.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, and I understand that. The strengthening work that was undertaken in about 2010 was good work that was done in consultation with the community. There was a report, apparently, in 2020 which said that there were some concerns around weight. Transport wasn't funded by the former Government to do anything about it at that time. We have been trying to nurse it along, but when we got the advice that it needed to have the weight reduced, we had to act, which we did. We are working on a rapid assessment and some maintenance work right now—that's been going on this month—to really try and lean in and to get that weight limit up as high as possible.

We've also had conversations with a lot of the people who are carrying those heavy loads that the weight limit is not the gross vehicle mass of the vehicle, it's actually what the actual tonnage is. There may be vehicles that are rated to 23 tonne, but they don't weigh 23 tonne when they go over the bridge. That is a clarification that I think was important for the community there. I think by the end of next month we're hoping to have some more information about temporary and more permanent solutions to that, which will be informed by the work we're doing on the maintenance right now.

The CHAIR: In this current budget, then, did the Government allocate anything towards the reparation, restoration and new bridge, whatever that looks like? Was there money allocated to that for this very important, very significant Kangaroo Valley bridge?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: There has been some funding, obviously, for emergency works to get done, and then we are looking at getting the business cases for temporary and permanent works.

The CHAIR: That sounds like there's still a fair few farmers, for example, other people and businesses in Kangaroo Valley that will still have to—they're very concerned, of course, in terms of how much extra they have to pay in terms of loads. It doesn't sound like there is a solution—just a bandaid solution, really, but not anything significant for the locals who are concerned about this.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I wouldn't characterise it that way, Chair, because the work that we're doing now is extra maintenance. It's really trying to lean in—

The CHAIR: How many more tonnes are you trying to—what's your goal, in terms of fixing the bridge? The maintenance, whatever you're doing—is that going to get us back to, say, the 42½ that was first put in place in 2003? Or is it going to be more than that?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: The 42½ is the temporary goal, if you like, to try and restore the access that has been there, and we are obviously working through that and making sure that we get it done. Safety has got to be the biggest priority. I totally understand it's not just the impact on those truck drivers and businesses, it's also on the surrounding road networks and the detours as well. I'm really alive to that issue. In terms of the absolute numbers of people impacted, very small, but the impact for those individuals is very large, so I do have an enormous amount of empathy for them. We are really doing whatever we can to try and get that access restored. When we get to a temporary or a permanent solution, we will be looking at what goals would be appropriate for the network at that point in time.

The CHAIR: Minister, yesterday you issued a media release in relation to koala safety fences. It was good timing for today. I appreciate the briefing that I got from your team and Ms Webb in relation to what is being done in the wildlife safety space. But I wanted to just ask a specific question in relation to Appin Road, which is on the media release. It states:

Construction is set to begin next year for a planned koala underpass with concrete rectangular tunnel ... and logs around Appin Road at Ousedale Creek in Sydney's west, one of three underpasses to be built...

That's the first underpass, to begin next year. When can we expect to see all of those three underpasses completed along Appin Road if the first is only going to begin next year?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'll get Trudi to give you that answer. I do thank you for your interest in this. It's a really important issue.

TRUDI MARES: One of the underpasses has commenced. It's around 60 per cent complete, the Noorumba Reserve underpass. As you said, Ousedale is next year, with construction commencing in '26. I don't have a current date for the Beuleh Reserve, the second, developer-delivered one. They're just in some discussions on that at the moment.

The CHAIR: And the Noorumba Reserve underpass—when is that looking like that will be complete?

TRUDI MARES: It's 60 per cent through, but let me come back this afternoon with an estimated date, noting we aren't delivering that one.

The CHAIR: Minister, is there a reason speed limits on that section of Appin Road have not been considered—let's just say introduced, because we know that that would assist, a reduction in speed limits along that part of the road, where we know is essentially a koala corridor. Koalas are crossing quite a bit, and the rate of deaths is increasing because traffic is increasing. We know south-west Sydney has a huge amount of growth. Why won't the Government just commit to reducing the speed limit to ensure drivers can more easily see koalas in the first place and respond and stop in time?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Thanks for that question. The speed limits are set in accordance with the New South Wales speed zoning limits. I actually had a good conversation with your colleague the member for Ballina around this earlier in the year to try and drill down to that, and how we can make them more responsive to this particular issue. I know it is a challenging area, particularly with those areas of high growth in regional New South Wales, so that is something we are trying to work through. In terms of the specifics—

The CHAIR: Back to the policy side of it in terms of working through those issues, it's a ministerial decision, if you like. It's a policy decision. Other States do it in areas where there are wildlife corridors, areas where there's a lot of wildlife; sections of the road will be reduced in terms of speed limit. Why won't the Government consider doing this for Appin Road?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'm happy to further explore that. The reality is the speed zoning standard was to try and get some standardisation, so in one sense it's better to get the standards so that it actually works

across the network rather than having situations where we can't upgrade a road because, if we upgrade it, people will start wanting it to be a 60-kilometre road or an 80-kilometre per hour road, and that's the speed they want to do. There's science and engineering around speed zone limits, and that is the challenge. If you've got a road that looks like it should be 80 and it's not—it's been downgraded to 60 because of a factor like koala safety—then that is something where we'd need to look at the signposting. We'd need to look at all the things that drive that behaviour. One of the things we're trialling, for example, is AI-BMS.

The CHAIR: Yes, I heard all that, which was great. But, Minister, do you accept that there is a whole-of-government strategy in terms of saving the koala? They're a threatened species. In fact, they are endangered. It was a healthy population, but Sydney's koalas are being struck at an enormous rate, which is increasing each year. You as Minister for Roads can do something here and reduce the speed limit in this part. It's a highway, really, for koalas. Why can't you just decrease the speed limit on Appin Road to save the koalas? It's a policy decision.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: That's what I'm saying. Our speed limits in New South Wales are determined according to the speed zone standard, and that is to try and get standardisation of processes. But I'm very happy to take that on board and to interrogate that with the policy team around what measures we could be able to do. I know we have had discussions, as I said, with Ms Smith about the whole issue around those zones previously. So I will circle back to those and come back to you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I will be in touch with your office.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Just picking up on the Chair's questioning around the bridge down at Kangaroo Valley—more broadly, freight operators have come to me with concerns about bridge weight limits and last-mile access issues and detours being obviously a drag on productivity. How many key freight bottlenecks have been resolved in the past 12 months and how many remain unresolved?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: To get a number like that, I'd have to take that on notice, I'm sorry. But it is a priority for the Government. If I look at things like when we had the situation at Tarro Bridge when we first came to government, we expedited delivery of that asset back to the freight industry for use as soon as possible. That's something that's a really high priority for the Government.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Do you actually have a priority list for bridge strengthening and last-mile freight connections that you're working to?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'd have to take that—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Happy for you to take that on notice if you don't have it to hand.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Sure. Sticking with heavy vehicle issues, how many heavy vehicle rest stops in New South Wales actually meet the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator standards?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Off the top of my head, I wouldn't be able to give you that, I'm sorry.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Are you happy to take it on notice?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: What rest stop upgrades or new builds are funded in this 2025-2026 budget, and are they going to be built to heavy vehicle regulation standards and also Austroads guidelines?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'll take that on notice as well; I'll give you that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Sticking with Austroads guidelines, does the Government have a policy position on mandating Austroads guidelines for all new road infrastructure upgrades? I'm noting that it's just a guideline at the moment, but I am aware there's some movements legally around liability—I guess is the best way to describe it—challenging liability when a road isn't built to Austroads guidelines.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Obviously heavy vehicle rest areas are a big priority. We're seeing, in road deaths on the network, that fatigue is a big and growing factor within deaths on our roads, so it is definitely a priority for the Government. We have been doing a lot of work to rejuvenate the existing rest areas that we have in New South Wales and also to get more in place. There's obviously the Western Sydney one but also ones on the network. I think there's about 12 or something we're looking at on the network that we're trying to get. We are trying to do that work and, as someone who formerly operated a heavy vehicle business, I understand how important it is. That is something that we are trying to progress.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Sure, but in terms of Austroads guidelines, and mandating them for all new infrastructure builds? It's more of a policy question, Minister, not necessarily a department. Are there moves to look at mandating Austroads guidelines on new road infrastructure?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'm not sure that is the case. I know we are doing a lot of work on rest areas at the moment. The other thing I guess to be cognisant of is we're doing a lot of work, particularly on the Golden Highway, to try and look after that area as well, because that is one that I know has been pointed out quite a lot. So there's also the upgrades that we have to do, in order. That's the only answer I can give you. I can take on notice more detail.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Eurobodalla bypass. It's currently unfunded but it's projected to be \$2 billion worth. We've got a hospital opening there, and it seems that the hospital will open before the bypass will. Why do we have a misalignment in planning between Health and Transport, given that we're looking at 30 kilometres worth of bottlenecks to get to this hospital without this bypass?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Again, this is one that was announced under the former Government. There was no funding ever allocated for it. We're obviously trying to complete projects that we've got. We've found with the sequencing that we're doing, particularly in the regional space, we're able to bring projects forward at times because we've slowed them down for a period to get everyone back on track. So that is, I guess, the way it is. We're focused on a realistic delivery of a pipeline of projects for the South Coast. We have to look at market capacity, disruption—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Where does the Eurobodalla bypass sit within that list of realistic possibilities?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: At the moment it's unfunded, but we're obviously trying to catch up and get work done. We're working on Jervis Bay. We're working on Milton Ulladulla—a whole range.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Sticking with the former Government's proposals, the Dubbo bridge has a massive cost blowout. Who's responsible for miscalculating the geotech works on that project, which is the main cause of the blowouts? They misunderstood how far they'd have to drill the pilings down by 20 or 30 metres.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I think you're probably best to ask the department about that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Anyone from the department can give me an answer now or we can go this afternoon.

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: I'll get some information this afternoon.

JOSH MURRAY: We'll come back to you.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Minister, just going to your announcement—I think it was on 13 August—about the rail crossing at Quirindi. What's the Government's plan beyond the trial? I think it was 850 of these passive crossings across the State. Is there a plan to roll this out beyond the trial?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: The broad brush on this is that project—I think it was \$1.2 million to install it—has got massive benefits if it is found to be effective. It's solar and it's wireless, so it doesn't require trenching. It is put in through a metal—sort of dug in or driven into the ground, rather than concreted in, so there's a lot of time and environmental savings in using that technology. Traditionally a similar level crossing using signals et cetera would cost \$2 million to \$6 million. So if we can get this to work—so the trial gets completed and it shows that it's effective in reducing crashes and near-hits—then we can roll out more of these with the money that we get to do level crossing improvements. That's what the goal is.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: What's the time frame for the trial? Twelve months?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I think it's March 2026, from memory. It's next year we're doing it, and there's a camera in there at the moment, not for enforcement but really to just look at what the behaviours are. When we were there the other day at the announcement, they were testing it—there wasn't a train there—and it did actually stop a car which probably was not going to stop otherwise. But we have to do the proper testing, because then you get type approval so then the national safety regulators can agree that it can be used on the network. That's what that's about.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Just quickly on the announcement around the state-of-the-art Maritime "thunderbird"—I appreciate Mark Hutchings gave me a bit of a preview that it was coming, and I have been to the facility where it is built—in terms of ongoing costs, has there been funding set aside for it? My concern is that Fisheries has this great state-of-the-art vehicle and it's up on blocks at the moment because they can't afford the fuel. Is there ongoing funding for it actually to be operational once it's built?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes. There will be obviously.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: In my discussions with Maritime, they aren't the principal agency responsible for rescues but often they get there. Is there a view to change the policy around them actually being designated as a rescue agency, given that this vehicle will be set up for not only flood response but also rescues more broadly?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: They do that work now. If they're on the waterways—I was speaking to one of them the other day when we were out on Sydney Harbour and he was—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Yes, but I know there's this tension between them and Marine Rescue: that Marine Rescue says, "No, we're the rescue agency", but often the boating safety officers get there at the same time or, if not, beforehand.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: All hands on deck when we're in an emergency. If there are those sorts of issues, I'm happy to progress those with the Minister. I think we're both of the view that we want to save lives on the water. We lose far too many people. It's always a good plug for a life jacket.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'll just go back to the Glebe Island port. Mr Murray, I'm going to ask you this point blank, noting your oath to tell the truth to this Committee today. Have Transport for NSW employees, paid by the taxpayer, completed traffic modelling in regard to the closure of the Glebe Island port?

JOSH MURRAY: Ms Ward, I'd be happy to take that on notice in terms of the terminology around traffic modelling. Again, we've been part of the working group with Placemaking NSW, the Treasury and the Cabinet Office to provide government advice on this proposal, and that is still being worked through at the moment.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you, Mr Murray. You're the Secretary of Transport for NSW. Surely you would know whether traffic modelling has been provided if the Government is giving consideration, as it has said it is, to closing Glebe Island port.

JOSH MURRAY: Ms Ward, as I say, I'm happy to take that on notice, given it is a whole-of-government approach that is being taken to The Bays precinct and it has not been announced in terms of what the future direction will be.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, industry stakeholders comment that approximately 226,000 additional truck movements per year will be included if industries are moved to Port Kembla or Newcastle, leading to increased congestion, pollution and higher safety risks for drivers. Do you contest that figure?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Ward, I don't contest the figure because I'm not across the exact number that would be there. What I would say is that it is a complex set of considerations. Extensive consultation with stakeholders has taken place. The Government will have more to say when the review is complete. We are making sure that any decisions on the future of the site will be underpinned by detailed and robust analysis of the issues that you've raised this morning.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I have one minute, so I might move onto one more.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: The process is not finished, and you're asking as if it is.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, what roads does the Government intend to keep in public ownership?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: The roads that we have in public ownership.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Okay, so what of those roads are staying in public hands?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: All of them is my understanding. We're not privatising.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The Government's position is that once toll roads end their concession, they'll be returning to public hands. That's correct, isn't it?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Sorry. In terms of the tolls, that is something that really you should address with Minister Graham.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It's not a trick; it's just the roads. You've said you're not privatising. The Government's position is that once those toll road concessions end, they'll be returning to public hands. That's right, isn't it?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Ward, I appreciate the question here, but I just would say that the toll reform that the Government is undertaking is complex work and that—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm asking about the roads, not the toll reform. I'm just asking about the roads. Are they staying in public hands, Minister.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: The Western Harbour Tunnel? Is that what you're talking about? Which roads are you worried about?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm asking you: Will roads remain in public hands and will they return to public hands?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: No, your first question was "Will they remain in public hands?", and they will remain in public hands.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Okay, and will they be returning to public hands? That's correct, isn't it? That's your position?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Ward, I'm not sure what you're trying to get at here.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm asking if the roads will return to public hands. It's not a trick. It's not complex.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Ward, we have said that we are trying to keep Western Harbour Tunnel in public hands.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: And the other roads?

The CHAIR: Thank you. I'm sorry to do this. Minister, there have been complaints from residents in Annandale in relation to the traffic noise being experienced after the opening of the Rozelle interchange. The existing acoustic barriers aren't up to the job. There have been some questions asked in the lower House about this issue by the member for Balmain, Kobi Shetty. It doesn't appear as though anything is being done by the Government. They've relied upon an independent report to suggest that the noise isn't as bad as the residents are saying it is. Are you going to take any responsibility for the noise that the Rozelle interchange is causing for these residents?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: In terms of the Rozelle interchange and in terms of all our projects, if people have concerns around noise, we do try to address that with them and go through it. We do independent reports et cetera—so that it has that independence from government—around noise assessments. That is the reason that that work's there. In terms of if there are particular residents, I'm happy to meet with them. I'm happy to have a discussion with them about where they're up to. I know there are concerns, and I have seen them raised with me.

The CHAIR: So you will meet with the residents of Annandale to hear about their concerns?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes.

The CHAIR: Again, they're very unhappy with what they think is a report that doesn't do justice to what their—

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'd like to hear their view directly on that. I'm happy to have that conversation with them.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Another project that went nowhere under the last Government is Goonoo Goonoo Road up Tamworth way. It was first promised in 2019 and then re-announced at the 2023 election by the local member up there. It has now been partially revived. Can you confirm an exact start and completion date for the northern section and give some indication of a timeline for the southern section, given the community has waited two elections for this?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: This has been a challenging one. We have now got, I think, \$58.4 million to do that work. One of the challenges with it, I think, is that, as you say, there'd been a lot of re-announcements of the work. Basically we've been looking at how we can get the best bang for buck to get this work underway. I was up there with the mayor and the local member just a week or so ago, because we've got the consultation report out there and we want people to look at the new alignment. It's publicly available, so they can tell us what they think about it. Basically, what we're looking at is upgrading the Calala Lane intersection. That's replacing the existing roundabout with traffic signals and providing a dedicate right-turn lane. I can read through all of this, but it's publicly available if you want it.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I will save you the time. Does that \$58.4 million headline figure factor in the inflation and supply chain pressures and the change in scope since 2019?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Additional funding was put into it, so yes.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: If the community are providing feedback, how is that going to potentially change the design? And what would that do to the cost?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Hopefully we've got it right. Really at this point we're looking at just getting them to see what has come out and if there have been changes made as a result of that consultation.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: No clear timeline yet?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: There is, but I just can't remember off the top of my head.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: If you want to take it on notice.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, I will.

The CHAIR: Questions from Government members.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Minister, there's been some reporting today on the regional road funding, including a project in your electorate. Are you able to provide the Committee with some further context on this project and how the Government is supporting growing regional communities across the State?

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Good question.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Excellent question.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Did you write it?

The CHAIR: Order!

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I really would like to do that. It's not a laughing matter, actually. It's a really serious one for our community.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: I'm glad someone takes it seriously.

The CHAIR: Order! Let the Minister give the answer.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I should say—I meant to say it when I got back in but we got into other questions—that the Auditor-General originally had the State project in scope for that report but they are now just focusing on the counsel report, so just to clarify that. Also, I would like to say that if we're going to talk about roads that are used frequently that have a material impact on my life, the M1, the Warringah Freeway and the Sydney Harbour Bridge would be roads that I would have to declare a conflict of interest on because I'm on them far more often than I'm on the other one that was there.

Anyway, that said, we always welcome any better administration of grants, oversight of grants, accountability and transparency. That's why we welcome the Auditor-General looking at this grant program. It's not to look at the selection of projects. That was not the scope. It was to look at the administration of the grants, and that's an appropriate thing to do. These are election commitments, and people make them every time. I think the difference we saw under the former Government was things like the bushfire recovery grants, the Refresh and Renew grants, the Stronger Communities Fund, the schools renewable fund, and the Regional Cultural Fund where we saw sometimes in excess of 90 per cent of funding going to Government seats. So 96 per cent, 75 per cent—all of these are numbers.

As a member of a regional community—Thornton, to be really clear, was the fastest growing suburb within the Hunter and the fastest growing within the Maitland electorate for a period of some 10 or so years. Houses were pumped into that area. What happened was in 2010 the former Labor Government was constructing a duplication process. I remember at the time the former Liberal member Robyn Parker when she was a candidate said, "No, we will duplicate it." I can remember John Robertson, who was the Opposition leader, said, "This won't happen. They won't duplicate this," and they didn't. So it sat on the shelf as a project for 12 long years.

To make things worse, in 2012 the Liberal-Nationals Government at that time then took the cap on development north of that bridge off, which meant that council had no levers to reject development applications. The growth of Thornton and Chisholm, a whole brand-new suburb to the north of that area—I live to the south—and all of that which accesses there has been a massive growth area for 20 years now, planned and developed. Houses have gone in there. Council had no capacity to do it. There have been plans on foot for up to \$150 million. It's probably \$250 million worth of works now to try and upgrade that whole corridor. We're talking from where it finishes at the M1.

To put it in perspective for people, it finishes at the M1, crosses under the New England Highway, shortly joins the Pacific Highway and then goes on the back road to Raymond Terrace. That crossing goes over a rail line.

It's really difficult for the community to get through there. It is probably the number one topic of frustration for all the residents in that area. There is a massive industrial estate there. It has a number of schools. It goes into the member for Wallsend's electorate. It goes into Newcastle. All of these things get impacted by that road network. So we're trying to look at all that work.

Some of the work that needs to be done there Transport already had in progress. They were already looking at other treatments of this area. They've been working with council. It is work that very much needed to be undertaken. If I look at projects in the Regional Roads Fund more generally, which the Coalition seem to hate so much because communities are getting funding, you have the Tuross Head intersection. The progress association there had been complaining for literally years, since before 2015, about it and the Government refused to do any funding. They actually had to go to Ann Sudmalis when she was the Federal member for that area. They couldn't get anything from Andrew Constance on that.

It's actually a very similar situation to Giinagay Way and Valla Beach, which was raised by the Opposition earlier. There was a \$1.4 million safety upgrade but not the extra \$1.5 that was required to try and improve that. I've talked about the Golden Highway. The Ellerton road intersection—the former member for Monaro, who is here in the room today, bragged that it needed to be done but announced it with no funding before the election and now wants to critique the fact that we're getting the money done. The Bulli bypass investigation has an important role in the Illawarra's regional transport.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Point of order—

The CHAIR: Minister, I hate to interrupt but there is a point of order.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I reluctantly do so also, but a member of this Committee has been referred to. I ask that the Minister, in accordance with procedural fairness and courtesy between witnesses and members—this is a serious process and she has an obligation to ask questions. She shouldn't be criticised for asking questions of the Minister. I ask that the Minister be respectful of Legislative Council members who are doing their job, whether or not she was a former member in the other place.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: To the point of order: It's a little bit rich to suggest that bragging is some sort of insult in circumstances where the honourable member has spent a large part of the morning bragging about how good her colleagues are, including prefacing all her questions with "amazing" and "fantastic".

The CHAIR: I've heard enough.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Madam Chair, I withdraw the bragging. If it's so offensive, I'm sorry.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. That's great. I was going to say it could be or it couldn't be.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: To continue, the Speers Point roundabout is another one they hate. That had \$5 million allocated in the 2022 budget. It was not enough to do the project. We made sure it gets done. The Gosford bypass—a massive, major corridor from the M1 on the Central Coast, a massively growing community. There are 30,000 vehicles travel along that corridor. It would not have been funded without us. The M1 Princes Motorway at Dapto—again, planning is underway for additional entry and exit ramps. That is really required for that growing community. It's expected to grow by around 100,000 people by 2041.

There is the Alphadale crossroads up in Lismore. Bruxner Highway has high traffic volumes—20,000 a day—further limiting access. Again, Giinagay Way and Valla Beach, where warning signs have been put in—Transport has come to the conclusion that they need traffic lights. The Nerriga Road upgrade is part of Queanbeyan-Palerang council's advocacy in the Federal election. These are documents that were there. Cuttagee Bridge was funded by those opposite under the Fixing Country Bridges Program and then the funding was removed because it didn't meet the criteria of the program because it wasn't a timber bridge; it was a composite bridge. It was also probably too difficult for them to do.

There is a noise assessment at Ellerton Drive. That builds on significant funding there. There is the Cowbed Bridge upgrade. The bridge was constructed in 1950. The remediation of deck supports was undertaken in 2013. It didn't meet the 12-tonne load limit. Again, we are trying to get ahead of these things. There was the Monaro Street upgrade—we've put, I think, \$2 million into this. The project was funded with \$10 million under the New South Wales Government's drought stimulus. It had a loan or a co-contribution, but apparently that wasn't a worthy one under those opposite. Melville Ford Bridge—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Point of order: I believe these estimates hearings are in relation to the current budget. I ask that the Minister be confined to her answers to this Committee's questions in relation to the

current budget cycle and her responsibility. While she may want to discuss previous projects, they were not under her remit and I'm not sure what she is getting at.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: To the point of order: I understand this is excruciating for the member, but the reality is the Minister—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: She likes to talk about other governments.

The CHAIR: Order! We will hear from the Government member.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: The Minister is directly answering my question by contrasting the record of this Government compared with the previous one. I think that it's entirely in order.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: She can do that in her media spin. She has plenty of press releases to do that through.

The CHAIR: I will not uphold the Hon. Natalie Ward's point of order. This is Government time. The member is right, possibly, on the use of an adjective earlier. The Minister can continue because it's her time.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I have one more. I just ask if she could table the document to which she's referring.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: No, it's an internal document.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You're sharing it with the Committee, so table it.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: It's an aide-mémoire for me.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Table the document.

The CHAIR: Ms Ward, she does not need to table it. You know how it works.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: She's happy to share it.

The CHAIR: Minister, you can continue. You have four minutes and 47 seconds.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I will try not to take all of it. The Melville Ford Bridge is another project. This is why I get really excited: It's 6.7 metres higher than the existing bridge. It used to go under multiple times, every single year. It's going to go from a single-lane little timber clippy-cloppy bridge to a two-lane concrete bridge. Again, this is one that the former State Government and the local government had all invested in. At Currawang Road is the completion of the \$10.4 million upgrade. That was in the Liberal member for Goulburn's electorate. Tarago Road is important. Reschs Creek Bridge—part of the advocacy document here, and Upper Hunter roads projects, again, on flood resilience.

It's something that all of us in this climate change environment, where we've got flooding happening so regularly—we have to prioritise things for communities in regional areas who are supporting industries like farming, mining, investment in renewals—all those things. That's what this program is around, and resilience from floods and building back better. That's where a lot of these projects will go. There is a big frustration. The East Nowra Sub Arterial Road—improving traffic congestion between east Nowra and Nowra CBD. There's the Briars Sharrow Bridge.

The Port Stephens upgrade—they had a lot of flooding. They're out in the media at the moment calling for us to take over quite a number of their roads because they can't afford it. They're having to look at selling off road reserves to fund their roads. They'd been left in such a poor condition by those opposite. They came with an advocacy plan to try and do that. Kyogle—I think the Coalition did about 80 bridges or something. We just wanted to do the last 30 or so. We're trying to get those works done. There is \$27 million of funding for Kyogle Council flood immunity—again, part of the \$4 million from this commitment to make up that \$27 million. It had been through a number of different grant programs.

These weren't just plucked out of a hat. These were projects that had merit. They were projects that were strategically important to the communities that they served. I really want to put on the record—and I will stop there; I won't go through every single one. Sorry, one last one—the Wallendbeen bridge was one that was really damaged. It needed the abutments done. It didn't have it. That was such a difficult process of complex frustration for that community. The good member for Cootamundra has got that funding, which is great.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How much?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: It's \$15.2 million, so that's fantastic. Can I just say that when those commitments were made, we had 11 made in seats that were then held by the Labor Party, three were in Liberal

Party seats, 15 were in Nationals seats—and one of those has been made since the election, I have to say, so 14 at the time—and one was an Independent.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So you do divide projects by electorate.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: For the Opposition to characterise this as only favouring Labor seats is absolutely ridiculous. I don't accept the premise that it was around marginal seats, because some of those seats had quite high margins. The sad thing for the member for Monaro is she went backwards. But you can't just blame the fund, is my word. Anyway, it's really great to have a chat. Can we please not talk about this anymore, because I'm really sick of having the same conversation with you all the time about a project which regional communities really needed. They were crying out to us. When investment under the former Government moved, it moved because there was a by-election. The former member for Monaro had billions of dollars invested by those opposite in that electorate. Upper Hunter—billions of dollars in the by-election. The community is sick of that. That's what the grants programs were really all about.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: But I still won, didn't I, Minister?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I do acknowledge the interjection that she still won. Yes, she did win in the by-election.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: "She" is the cat's mother.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: The former member for Monaro won in an election where there were billions of dollars poured into her electorate. I think at the next election, in 2023, we saw from the community that they wanted these things done on the basis of strategic need and integrated transport plans.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. I hate to wind you up. There are no more questions, I take it?

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: No. Thank you for the very comprehensive answers, Minister.

The CHAIR: Thanks so much for appearing, Minister. We will break for lunch and come back with the officials at two o'clock.

(The Minister withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back from lunch. We'll kick off the afternoon session, beginning with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Thank you all for being here and for a memorable moment last time at my first estimates. Mr Hayes, we'll always have Puddledock Road.

ANTHONY HAYES: Yes, indeed.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: It's not one that we're going to forget again. Mr Murray, I will go to you, please. With the Regional Roads Fund, have those 30 projects—it was previously 28, but now it's 30—been prioritised in any way?

JOSH MURRAY: I might actually direct you back to Mr Hayes in relation to this and the detail of those projects.

ANTHONY HAYES: Thank you for the question. Out of the 30 projects, there are 20 projects with council and then there are 10 projects that will be delivered by Transport. In terms of the council projects, we sign a funding deed with each of the councils which stipulates our expectations on how the money will be spent, on timelines and on managing risk et cetera. And then, obviously, for the transport delivered, we follow our internal governance in terms of the appropriate governance for delivery based on the size of the project and the expenditure et cetera.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'm not aware, so I'm asking out of genuine interest and knowledge here, in terms of the internal governance for delivery, you don't necessarily look at the critical need for the projects or what the communities might be calling for. You're essentially advised by the Minister and by the Government as to which they want to see done. How does that work?

ANTHONY HAYES: In this instance, these were election commitments. As a result, we're advised via the Cabinet process.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That this will happen.

ANTHONY HAYES: They are very specific. There are specific amounts of money for specific projects.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So that was the election commitment as such—the figure was made as the election commitment and Transport is then advised, "There's \$15 million for the Thornton road and rail bridge. You need to progress this."

ANTHONY HAYES: Yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Thank you for providing that clarity for me. Mr Murray, back to you. Is it standard that such projects would be progressed without completed business cases or benefit-cost ratios?

JOSH MURRAY: Again—and I think Mr Hayes has provided some information on this in the last estimates hearing—a number of those were grants through to councils through that process. The way that that had been set up was that the election commitment had been given as to how much would be dedicated to getting those projects through to the next stage or with the council processes. Otherwise, there are a number of projects, as Mr Hayes has said, that Transport is leading in terms of their development and delivery. They are subject to our usual processes and gateway sign-offs around funding.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Sorry, just to keep my train of thought, would your normal processes in every other instance require completed business cases to be progressed?

JOSH MURRAY: On some of them, as we've discussed, there are business cases or further feasibility work ongoing into the delivery of the project.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: But they weren't at the time that Transport for NSW was advised of these projects?

JOSH MURRAY: Not in the same manner that a project that begins from inception would be subject to that same business case, because they were election commitments. They were provided through the Parliamentary Budget Office. Then, as Mr Hayes has referred to, by the Cabinet Office—in the early stages of the new Government—they are endorsed and then published to the agencies.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Lead me through this again, if you will. It comes back to an earlier question asked by the Chair. Transport for NSW is advised of what the amount is and what the election commitment will be and then, when it comes to a project like the Thornton road and rail bridge, it is incumbent on Transport for NSW, who is looking after that particular project as one of the 10, to go back to the Government to say, "Fifteen million dollars isn't enough. We're going to need more money."

JOSH MURRAY: That's correct.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: On what basis does Transport for NSW then decide on what that figure—so in this instance it's \$35 million additional to the \$15 million originally. If there isn't a business case or a benefit-cost ratio to look at, how has that figure been reached?

JOSH MURRAY: Again, I'll pass to Mr Hayes around individual projects like the one you're referring to, which was a longstanding known project in the Hunter. They were election commitments. Therefore, they were beginning under that process and we would start to firm them up. If there were elements where the price or the costing that had been given was different to what would be deliverable under that scope then, of course, we would come back to government with either options to look at that in a different way or further direction.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Did you want to add anything to that?

ANTHONY HAYES: Only that, in this instance, the initial \$15 million was clearly for planning and early work. That allowed us to do that work to have a better definition of the size of the project. Our engineering experts and our planning experts defined it as a tier 3 project, which then, again, outlines where we feel it will land in terms of price and in terms of the complexity of the project et cetera. The business case process helps to flesh out the detail of that as you go through, but obviously there are a number of steps in that business case process. We are expecting to have the business case finalised by February. But along the line there are obviously a number of steps to get to that point. Each step allows us to get a better feel for what the project is likely to ultimately cost.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'm not saying this in a disrespectful way, but you are coming from a position of having a level of expertise and knowledge around a project of a similar nature et cetera, but in the absence of a business case until February next year, you are kind of spitballing when you are saying, "This is what we think will cover that project in order to deliver it to completion."

ANTHONY HAYES: It is not a finalised cost at this stage.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: In other words, more could be required. Mr Murray, I will come back to you. This is just one example of the projects that Transport for NSW is looking after. If we are looking at the 10 of those, without that business case, in likelihood more money will be needed—maybe not for all of them but potentially for some. Where would such funding come from? If you go back to the Government and the Government says, "We've got no more to do it", where does that leave the projects?

JOSH MURRAY: In this case, they are election commitments. Again, there would be government decision-making that would go behind that. But I think that comes to the very essence of your question, which is that governments do make both funding commitments and project commitments well in advance of business cases or further feasibility works being completed, particularly in relation to election commitments. That is an accepted process—that the organisations and the agencies would begin work on implementing those knowing that they will need to come back to government with more finite detail as the development continues. But through the Regional Roads Fund, money has been made available to begin all of those projects.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Bringing it back to the Regional Roads Fund and the \$334 million in total, if this latest \$35 million—or \$30 million, it seems, because you blokes are stumping up \$5 million. That was from the unallocated funds, so I'm presuming there must be around \$40-odd million left in the unallocated funds at this point. Is it more than that? Sixty-odd?

JOSH MURRAY: As projects are brought to market and delivered either with council or the ones we're delivering ourselves, as you say, some prices may go over what was originally allocated in terms of what might be deliverable for that scope. Others may come under and that will be looked at in terms of the overall delivery. Our first priority would be to manage within the cost envelope that has been provided and, if changes have to be made to scope or to the approach, then we would take that discussion to the Government while we're looking at all those numbers as they come in.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That's a lovely, positive thought, Mr Murray, that some of those projects will come in under that cost when we know costs are escalating. But, in other words, what I'm saying is that the \$334 million that currently is what the Regional Roads Fund consists of—that could very well be exhausted in entirety.

JOSH MURRAY: It will be our task to manage those projects through. We believe that—certainly, with the style of work that we are looking at, they are priority local projects that have all been known about for a period of time. Reducing any shocks on the way through in terms of managing those within the budget envelope will be the key task.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Can you explain how the Thornton road and rail bridge was specifically selected to receive this additional \$35 million funding? If you've got 10 projects, let's just say that there has to be a percentage of them that will probably require additional funding. Why was Thornton road and rail bridge selected?

JOSH MURRAY: Mr Hayes, I'll ask you to talk to the history of that project.

ANTHONY HAYES: It's obviously a key challenging area and has been for quite some time. Having said that, I think when the State Government allocates \$15 million for planning, it is not unusual then that there would be an expectation that there would be additional funding provided for delivery of the projects. Once we understood there was \$15 million allocated to get the project started, there was certainly an expectation from us that it would be funded through to delivery when we had a better idea of the price.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: But that could also be the situation with the other existing nine projects that will need funding as well. Why was this one specifically singled out at this point? Is it the one that is the most advanced? Is it the most progressed? Is there a priority system around that? I'm just trying to work out why this one project of the 10.

ANTHONY HAYES: A number of the projects—so tranche one. And then in the most recent budget there was tranche two. A number of the Transport-delivered projects received additional funding to get them to the next stage or to get them through to delivery.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: What sort of figures for those other projects—not necessarily breaking down all of them.

ANTHONY HAYES: If you bear with me a moment—Speers Point roundabout, for example.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Which was how much?

ANTHONY HAYES: Initially through Consolidated Fund, there was \$5 million and then tranche one was \$6 million and then in tranche two there's been an additional \$5 million provided, which brings the total to \$16 million, \$11 million of which is coming from the Regional Roads Fund.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: And the other four?

ANTHONY HAYES: Golden Highway improvements—the initial tranche was \$12 million. And, following additional review, that's received an additional \$11.7 million.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Just back to the Speers Point roundabout, you said that there was \$11 million from the Regional Roads Fund. The additional \$5 million—did you say \$16 million?

ANTHONY HAYES: Yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Where does the additional \$5 million—

ANTHONY HAYES: The additional \$5 million—that had already been provided. That was the initial allocation, the initial \$5 million.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So none of the other projects, though, are in the vicinity of an additional \$35 million?

ANTHONY HAYES: No, but based on the size of the project—Yass Road, for example. The initial tranche was \$19 million and the second tranche was \$14.7 million, bringing the total to \$33 million.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So that is an additional \$14.7 million on top of the \$19 million?

ANTHONY HAYES: Yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That is one heck of a roundabout. And, yes, I do know it very well—as was explained by the Minister. Mr Murray, can you tell me the process of how Transport for NSW is to fund that extra \$5 million of the \$50 million that the Government has publicly stated will be provided? The documentation says \$45 million. The Minister said this morning that Transport for NSW is providing the additional \$5 million. How does that work?

JOSH MURRAY: We'll work through our project delivery budgets to ensure that we can have the right funding for that available at the time that the project needs it.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Is that an allocation that you already have in place?

JOSH MURRAY: It's part of the capital budget process that we have on hand.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: This one might come back to you, Mr Hayes. Were these other projects, whether it's Speers Point roundabout or Yass Road roundabout—were they being identified as priorities as such? Or are you just looking at the whole 10 that Transport for NSW is dealing with and whether or not extra money—is there any prioritisation?

ANTHONY HAYES: We would consider them priorities because they were Government election commitments and the Government is obviously very focused on them.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: It's just the election commitment that makes the prioritisation of it? Was it a recommendation of Transport for NSW for that project to receive that figure? Did you recommend it to the Minister or did the Minister come and say, "Where are we at with this project and what's happening? Do we need more money"?

ANTHONY HAYES: Once we started work, given the election commitments to start with—and most of them were for planning to get started. Then we've come up with those numbers and recommended them to the Government.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Mr Murray, I'm looking at the additional funds that are being provided by Transport for NSW rather than what's coming out of the Regional Roads Fund. Will funding for other projects—say, other regional roads, for example—potentially be sidelined as a result? If you're looking at how that additional \$5 million will be funded through your capital expenditure, as you mentioned, will other projects, particularly in the regions, have to be put aside in order to furnish this figure?

JOSH MURRAY: No. We will be focusing on spending our capital profile. As you may be aware, Transport over a number of years—one of the key challenges is always ensuring that correct spending of the capital budget elements like the delivery of major projects, and whether delays, industrial relations issues, any of these things, can slow down the delivery of major projects in the field. Transport is working very closely across government to make sure that the capital budget is landed in its entirety. By moving into some of those areas

where we are able to assist with projects that are moving faster than others, then we can make sure that that taxpayers' money is appropriately used at the time, and then obviously use the Transport capital budget to offset any risks in delivery.

ANTHONY HAYES: If I may add to that, because Mr Murray probably is not aware of this, the \$5 million additional that we were asking for was actually opex. As a result, we will need to find that funding—the capex. Again, it is not an unusual part of the process for us to be asked to look for internal funding sources to manage our projects and to manage our budgets.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Will that potentially be required for any of the other projects as well? Does your budget then become overly stretched as a result, because you're going to have to find additional funds for anything else?

ANTHONY HAYES: At this stage, no. In fact, to your earlier question, there may be one or two where, by the time we finish the detailed design, we can save a little bit of money, which could go back into the—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Fingers crossed.

ANTHONY HAYES: Fingers crossed, yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Again, coming back to the wonderful Tanya Thompson, member for Myall Lakes—she's asking again about the Failford Road and Lakes Way intersection and the works on the deep lift asphalt around this intersection. Has funding gone ahead? Has money already been put into completing that work? But the whole junction actually needs an upgrade. Can we get some detail on the project, please?

JOSH MURRAY: We'd have to take that one on notice. If we can come back with it quickly, we'll certainly provide that in the hearing today.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: The decision about the deep lift asphalt intersection rather than a complete upgrade to the junction—if we can have some clarification, that would be fantastic. And—very quickly—the member for Dubbo has raised serious concerns about the administration of the oversized and over-mass permit system, in particular the concerns that the changes to the system have created a bottleneck at the ARTC for getting approvals. How is the system going to be streamlined?

TRUDI MARES: I can speak to that. We're aware of the issue and we're working closely with the ARTC. We have sent communications out to the freight industry just this week, explaining that the ARTC are looking at how they can fast-track or set in place the adequate processes to deal with that. We have given them some resources to support them in the meantime and asked that they communicate out to industry as soon as they've set up their new process.

The CHAIR: I've got some questions again on the new regional train fleet. On the website there's an update from 14 August. Under "Regional Rail", the update states:

A timeline for the delivery of the balance of the trains will be confirmed once the manufacturing testing and assurance phase has been completed.

Am I directing that question to you, Mr Fuller? Who's taking that one?

JOSH MURRAY: Raquel can take these questions.

The CHAIR: The question is, with that timeline, is that for all of the trains? The update uses the words:

... for the delivery of the balance of the trains ... once the manufacturing testing and assurance phase ...

For that phase, which trains has that been carried out on? Just a couple?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: The overall program has many different moving parts. In the current phase of testing, we have five trains currently in country and we have one more on its way. It's currently on a boat, and that's due to arrive before the end of the year. There are various other trains in manufacture in Spain. The progressive rollout of these is not subject to the final train coming before we enter into service the first, so we have to coordinate with the service planner on how these trains, once they're fully commissioned, can enter into service. That is done with the operator.

The CHAIR: The question is about just trying to get some kind of clarity in terms of that start date for the public, in terms of when they can expect the first train to have passed all the tests and be in service. At this point we don't have a timeline yet because it has blown out so much. It says that a timeline will be confirmed once this manufacturing testing and assurance phase has been completed. Do we at least have a timeline for when the timeline is coming out?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: Our immediate focus is on the first train. It's an important question, and it is a focus for us on the first train and entry into service. There isn't a specified number of hours or mandated hours for the testing, but it is quite a complex process. We have to ensure that the trains are safe, and we need the certification by the regulator. The process and the timing are determined by the complexity and the risk profile of the train. This is a new train—it's the first of its type in this country—so we are going through the testing. We have to test each of the systems, and the timeline will be subject to the outcomes of each of those test phases.

The CHAIR: Is there a rough indication? Some of the research that I've done as I've had a look at the various train magazines and literature seems to suggest that—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Trainspotter.

The CHAIR: Honestly, it's good night-time reading. It seems to suggest that train testing takes two years, on average, for example. Is that the kind of timeline that you're working on? This first train started being tested on Sydney's electrified rail network in February 2025. What timeline are you looking at? Are you thinking six months, one year, 18 months, two years? The industry average seems to be two years to test trains. Is that right?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: I really want to answer your question, it's just that I'm unable to commit to that timeline right now. We found that we have to go through the testing. It's currently running, and there are different phases of testing. When the train arrives in-country, it doesn't come fully fitted. It goes up to Dubbo and it gets fitted out with all the ancillary pieces. Then we do some testing within the depot and the yards to make sure we test all the braking systems before it goes out on the live line. Once it gets to dynamic testing, we then start testing how it interacts with the network: the signalling system and the communications. Because of the bi-mode function on this train, we're having to test that on both the electrified and diesel modes. It's quite a complex process, so it can be six to nine months or it can be 18 to 24 months. This is going through some rigorous testing. What follows each of those processes is an assurance to make sure that this is safe, and it needs to be certified by the rail regulator. If I was to give you a date, I would be putting undue pressure on the regulator and our teams to meet a date, so I'm just not able to give you a public date at this time.

The CHAIR: Where is it up to in terms of the final cost of the new regional train fleet? Have we got the final cost yet, or is that uncertain as well, because the testing is also a cost?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: No, we do have a target program, and the cost remains within the allocated budget of \$2.29 billion.

The CHAIR: So it remains within the cost. On the issue with momentum, has that all been sorted and settled—the consortium?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: The commercial matters are still under discussion. I'd like to say that they're nearing conclusion, but I can't really comment too much on that at this point.

The CHAIR: How many staff does Transport for NSW have over in Spain? Or is it somewhere else?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: I don't have the exact details on that. I'll come back to you on that. That's for the testing in-factory?

The CHAIR: Yes.

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: I'll confirm that for you.

The CHAIR: I'll move to some questions about the strategic regional integrated transport plans. So the surveys were undertaken. Was that undertaken all at once, in terms of the regions, or is that undertaken on a stepped or staged process throughout the regions?

ANTHONY HAYES: I'm happy to answer that one. In total, there will be nine SRITPs. Each one is being managed individually. There are three tranches for them. There's the Hunter, and the South East and Tablelands to start with. The Central Coast, Illawarra-Shoalhaven, and Central West and Orana is tranche two, and then tranche three is the North Coast, Far West, Riverina-Murray, and New England and North West. On community engagement, the engagement process happens individually for each one, with each individual community.

The CHAIR: There were surveys undertaken. Are these surveys online surveys as well as more face-to-face engagement workshops?

ANTHONY HAYES: Yes.

The CHAIR: What's the intent? You can see, when you go into any survey of this kind, the vast majority of people, the overwhelming majority of respondents are going to say that they want—which is what's happened here. Just to be clear, I'm looking at the Hunter and the South East and Tablelands surveys. It would be the same everywhere. Almost half of the people respond with "access to transport for all" as a big desire or objective, and "a safe transport network". What happens with those responses? Everybody will want more transport. Can they expect to actually get more transport as a result of this project?

ANTHONY HAYES: It's not necessarily about more transport. I think the starting point is—

The CHAIR: I think that's what they're saying, though, largely.

ANTHONY HAYES: We've had 250 briefings and I think we've had 62,000 views of our "Have your say" pages, so a lot of people are quite excited to be involved in the process.

The CHAIR: Because people do want more transport in the regions, as I'm sure you're hearing.

ANTHONY HAYES: Absolutely. I think the starting point for it, though, is to accept that the people of Tamworth will have very different transport goals to the people of Byron Bay. What we're trying to do is be respectful of the process. Each part of New South Wales will have different priorities and will have different focus points. In some instances, a community might be really keen on having a bypass that gets all the trucks out of their main street. In others, it might be about more public transport. Everywhere is different. So the purpose of all the engagement is to understand what's most important to that community, and community, in that instance—in the past, Transport would come up with a plan.

What we want to do now is have one plan that has engaged council, the chamber of commerce, the Country Women's Association and property development—everybody—so that we all come up with one plan that that regional community believes is the key plan. Then the next stage of the process is to go through and prioritise all of the different ideas that have been come up with in that plan so that we can start to work on how could that work, what would it cost, what would the timelines be, so that we can be more prepared and we can present to Government, "Here's what that community wants, and it's not just what Transport thinks; it's what the whole community thinks."

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Through you, Mr Murray, I might go to Mr Fuller regarding my initial couple of questions, around the road maintenance backlog. Are you able to report any of those figures I asked for?

MATT FULLER: Sure. I don't have the accrued maintenance backlog, but what I do have is the fact that, this year, we've got about \$1.2 billion allocated to regional maintenance across New South Wales.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: That's regional maintenance?

MATT FULLER: That's just dedicated to regional maintenance, absolutely, everything outside of the Greater Sydney network. What that does—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: How does that compare to the Greater Sydney network?

MATT FULLER: In the next 12 months, we have just under half a billion for that network, and the 1.255 that we have this year is also an increase on what we had previously, of over \$100 million on the last year. In addition to that, we also have almost \$800 million for the continued recovery from natural disasters. That's a significant addition in terms of assisting the overall network. That's across both State and local road network. You mentioned before there's been some great progress on potholes. We've had nearly 200,000 across the State in the last 12 months delivered. Our turnaround times on repairing and restoring the network are becoming less and less all the time, which is really good to see, despite the fact that the teams have endured a really incredible challenge in this last couple of years, not just through the well-publicised natural disasters and the impacts that not only has on the network but the other considerations.

You mentioned the New England Highway earlier. The New England Highway, twice this year since the beginning of the year, has had to be the key, critical supply chain route, whether it was through Ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred or the Mid North Coast floods. When the M1 was cut off, when we had flooding in the north-west of the State, impacting the Newell, we've had to divert all heavy vehicle traffic down that New England corridor and also had to use the Gwydir and up through Jackadgery, up to Glen Innes and across to access the New England, which has put an enormous strain on those networks and, I have to say, has been incredibly well responded to by not just our teams but also our council partners who participate in those road maintenance council contracts. The deployment that we've had in this last 12 months, I think, has been of the likes we've never seen before, and it's really contributing to at least stabilising that network backlog and assisting us in terms of response times and just making sure that delivery occurs. The Minister mentioned—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Do you have specific, set targets in terms of reducing that backlog, whether it's internal targets, in terms of what you aim to achieve, in terms of—

MATT FULLER: We absolutely have pavement health index targets and bridge health index targets and things. They are outlined in our asset and services plans. We do have that accrued—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Specifically around maintenance backlogs, do you have a target to reduce the backlog?

MATT FULLER: In terms of the actual percentage of the accrued maintenance backlog, that's not something we've got a detailed reduction on at the moment. We've been really prioritising our recovery from the natural disasters and really prioritising the response and the increase in delivery. As the Minister mentioned, over \$1 billion has been invested in natural disaster recovery in the last 12 months. That's more than a five-time increase on what we were seeing in previous years. Between our own teams and council partners, getting that delivery happening to make sure of that recovery and rehabilitation of the network has been what we've been really focused on.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Are we focusing on rebuilding the network to a better standard and a more resilient standard than what it was before the disaster might have hit and damaged the road? The feedback I'm getting from constituents is that your council partners will get the money and send the local spray-patcher around, which is 80 per cent water, 20 per cent bitumen, and then the next disaster happens, and all that bitumen and work has just been washed away. Are we focusing on rebuilding these roads to withstand some of these natural events that we're having?

MATT FULLER: Absolutely. There's a number of elements to respond to your question. There's what we're doing in terms of detailed planning work at the moment, to continue to build planning for what we need on the network, particularly as it relates to further resilience in the network and, to your point, how we would reduce that accrued maintenance backlog. Through the natural disaster recovery funding, there has been considerable uplift and betterment applied to a number of projects. It's a bit of a furphy that you don't get betterment when you restore and recover the network under some of the disaster relief funding arrangements. We've seen some really great examples. I think of some of the ones in the Northern Rivers, particularly as it relates to things like slope failures. We've had un-engineered slopes—basically, cuttings through hills—that have failed, and now those corridors have really substantial engineered slopes. They might have concrete piles and capping. They might have soil nailing and rock bolting—but considerably more resilience built into some of those recovery projects.

We think about resilience consistently in how we develop our program. What we are really focused on in this next four years is having an integrated program that combines all of the funding streams, because each of those is not, I guess, mutually exclusive. As an example—some of the benefits we get from the road safety program also give us very substantive resilience outcomes. Even simple things like widening shoulders, widening centrelines—they protect a road significantly for the moisture impact and also some of that degradation that happens on the edge lines of roads from some of the heavy vehicles. So we are consistently thinking about resilience.

There's lots of examples. A really good one is the upgrades that's happened to the M1. During the Mid North Coast floods, we had the M1 section there out and around Taree, across the islands and the bridges there. We removed over 4,000 tonnes of debris. The highway was closed from—I'm trying to remember the time—on the Tuesday through to Saturday at six o'clock. We reopened that highway after, basically, getting access during the day on the Friday, still with water over the road. We were able to clear the road, have it restored, open that lane and have that in good trafficable condition because it's been built in a very resilient way, to service that National Land Transport Network. So we are consistently thinking about how we use our current investments, our future investments and also just our standard routine maintenance program to further resilience across the network.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Mr Carlon, you've been sitting there, waiting patiently for a question. In terms of regional-specific road safety campaign expenditure, what was it in 2024-25? And is that looking to be increased in 2025-26?

BERNARD CARLON: I don't have the exact split with me right now. I can get that for you. But, certainly, the estimate, when we did the review associated with the audit of regional road safety, was around the—between 60 to 70 per cent of the investment was actually happening on regional roads but not just regional roads: in regional education programs, the regional programs associated with our vehicle safety programs—for example, the Cudal facility, out at Orange. So there's a significant proportion of the investment, right across the road safety program, that actually is allocated in regional—I can get the figures for you for this estimate, for this financial year, in terms of the regional distribution of the fund.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Thank you. That would be great. Through you, Mr Murray, I might go back to Mr Collins, around the boating infrastructure community grants. I've just got a few questions about some of the other projects. Mr Collins, Ritchie Villages, Diamond Waters boat ramp—a grant was given to them for \$258,412. The ramp is located in a caravan park, and there is no access to the public. So my question to you is why are we funding ramps that are for a commercial enterprise rather than for the community?

HOWARD COLLINS: Thanks very much for the question. I will have a look at that. Just say again, Ritchie?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Ritchie Villages, Diamond Waters boat ramp. It's located within a caravan park, and the advice I've received is that the ramp is not available to the public.

HOWARD COLLINS: I will double-check that. I think you said last time, "Why are we building toilet blocks?" I actually validated that question you had, and it's a boat pump-out station, which I think you were referring to.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Is this the Wentworth council?

HOWARD COLLINS: Yes. I can't think of anything which is more useful.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Yes, it was described on the website as an effluent station refurbishment.

HOWARD COLLINS: Yes, it is for—as you know, larger boats have the ability to remove the effluent from the vessel. That's what that one is for. But I will have a look at that, and certainly I will provide you with today's photograph of this ramp, as well.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Oh, someone has gone around?

HOWARD COLLINS: It looks very different from this one. When was this taken?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: It would have only been recently. It was sent to me.

HOWARD COLLINS: It has been flooded four times, but today it all looks good.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you all for coming back this afternoon. Through you, perhaps, Mr Murray—you might direct me to who's in charge. Fifteenth Avenue?

TRUDI MARES: I can take that with Ms Rubalcaba, depending on the question.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm happy to deal with you both. Thank you so much for sitting there patiently. Referring to the last media release concerning the delivery strategy for Fifteenth Avenue, why was the four-lane carriageway with two traffic lanes in either direction selected over three lanes each way?

TRUDI MARES: When we were looking at the original scope, we had a range of options available. As Mr Murray mentioned earlier, we look at scoping within envelope, and within the billion-dollar allocation that we were given we had a few options presented. The dual carriageway either way with turning bays was selected along with some corridor preservation for a future transit lane.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But why was the two-lane specifically selected over the three lanes? To give the turning bay?

TRUDI MARES: It was a scope and budget decision. Within the envelope, to be able to deliver to that, we looked at future needs, but then what we would be able to implement now.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So, effectively, was that cheaper than doing the three lanes? I'll put it this way: Has the three-lane option been costed?

TRUDI MARES: We have done early concept designs on both and done comparisons and, yes, it is definitely within envelope to do the design that we've got. If we did three lanes either way, then it would be more expensive.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It would be more expensive? So that would not be within that envelope of the \$1 billion?

TRUDI MARES: No.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But that has been costed, obviously, to work out whether it's—

TRUDI MARES: Yes, we always have multiple options available.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: As the media release states, the works for stage one will be completed in three sections. So stage one is made up of the three sections. That's correct, isn't it?

TRUDI MARES: There's two pieces of work happening. I will talk to the safety works, then I might hand to Ms Rubalcaba. But we have got some safety works happening this year and next year, and they were within the original \$50 million envelope commitment along with the planning work that we did. So we have got an additional lane on Cowpasture Road, speed limit and pedestrian works and an extension of right-turn bay. So they're all in delivery this year and next. The staging and delivery strategy is still being determined, but I'll let Ms Rubalcaba speak to that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The media release—I'm not trying to trick you. The media release said it was in three stages. That's not controversial, is it?

TRUDI MARES: I don't think so. I'll hand over.

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: No, I don't believe so. As Ms Mares said, we have commenced and almost completed the safety improvement works, so that would be stage one. Stage two would be the remainder of the main works, and I think the future stage of three would be the potential future third lane in either direction.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's not what is in the media release, though. The media release states the works for stage one will be completed in three sections. So is that incorrect?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: That would be talking about the main works. Apologies, if you could just give me one second, I'm playing a little bit of catch-up. We are still going through the planning stages. We have engaged our designers, so we're doing the concept design and also looking at property acquisitions. I'll have to come back to you about the staging.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Could you come back today?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: Yes, absolutely.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Given it was in your media release and it's not controversial, it's not something you need to—it's not a trick, but your media release states it and then—

JOSH MURRAY: Ms Ward, I might be able to assist, bearing in mind I haven't seen the exact media release.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Point of order—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It's in the Government's media release.

The CHAIR: There is a point of order from Mr Buttigieg.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: If the member wishes to refer to a media release, it would prudent to please table the media release.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It's the Government's media release. I don't need to table your own Government's media release, seriously.

The CHAIR: That's usually the case. We refer to media releases and Government statements all the time in budget estimates.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: There's 30,000 staff out there that can find their own media release.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Is it that difficult to table a media release for the benefit of the secretary?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: To the point of order: I don't think there's any requirement, anywhere, and there's no precedent for tabling this. This is a government document. You're wasting my time.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Thanks for your consideration.

The CHAIR: Mr Murray, did you want to continue?

JOSH MURRAY: We'll find the media release and come back. We're happy to; I just don't have it in front of me right now. I want to make sure I'm addressing the right part.

The CHAIR: It's helpful if it's able to be tabled. If not, that's fine; that's the member's prerogative.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm sure you can find it on your own website somewhere, or the honourable member might look it up while he's sitting there waiting.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Good to see you're interested in the answer.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Now that my time's been interrupted—

The CHAIR: Let's keep going.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: —on your own Government media release while you've got 30,000 staff to look it up—perhaps somebody could. So the \$1 billion is the main works. Is that correct?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: That's correct.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So within that, are all three stages of the stage one—sorry, all three sections. You've got stage one; that's got three sections to it. Are all three of those sections of stage one fully funded?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: If I can come back to you just to confirm the staging—I don't want to mislead you. Within the funding envelope, we have progressed a concept design, and that's what we're finalising in the detail, but if I could come back—let me clarify the staging, just so I don't misspeak.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But the media release states, and the public has been assured, that there's a stage one—it's not a trick question in any way; your media release says it. There's a stage one. It has three sections. Of those three sections, Mr Murray, can anyone confirm that those three sections of stage one, which you've announced within the \$1 billion envelope, are fully funded?

JOSH MURRAY: The stages are referred to in the media release. The first is the duplication between Second Avenue and Cowpasture Road. The second section is between Second Avenue and Fourth Avenue, and the third section is the duplication between Fourth Avenue and Devonshire Road.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: While future stages will include the full connection through the Bradfield City Centre. I have it. I'm asking if it's fully funded.

JOSH MURRAY: Yes, the budget has been announced for that project at \$1 billion, beginning, as Ms Mares said, with \$50 million worth of safety upgrades to those intersections.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sure. So "Stage one will be completed in three sections, the first involving duplication between Second Avenue and Cowpasture Road"—that's funded?

JOSH MURRAY: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Fully funded?

TRUDI MARES: We have not finalised the design. It is still in planning. We have got the \$1 billion envelope, and the scope of the stages that you've outlined that we just want to verify and we've taken on notice to check, but we have not finalised and presented a design to the community yet.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So you've done an announcement. You've said stage one will be completed in three sections. Is each section fully funded?

TRUDI MARES: I can't answer that, because we haven't finished the planning work.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So the \$1 billion doesn't cover all three sections?

TRUDI MARES: No, I didn't say that. I said we haven't finished the planning work, so we cannot talk to the final design yet. That work is being undertaken right now. Definitely, the intent is the stages that we will verify and we know what our envelope is financially.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The media release states that construction will start in 2027. Is that for section one or for those interim safety upgrades?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: Safety upgrades have commenced already. Stage one is scheduled, or forecast at this point, to commence in 2027.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So the media release is referring to section one?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: Correct.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Not the safety upgrades?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: No.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can anyone confirm whether the three sections of stage one can be delivered for the \$1 billion?

TRUDI MARES: We'll finalise planning and go to the community with the final design when it's completed, so not today.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So no-one can confirm the \$1 billion?

TRUDI MARES: We haven't finalised planning and design.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Okay, so that's a no?

TRUDI MARES: We haven't finalised planning and design.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I can only assume that's not a yes. I'm not trying to—

TRUDI MARES: No, no, but first of all we're checking the stages, but we have not finished design and gone out to the community with that yet.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Alright, so when will section one start construction and when is that forecast to be complete?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: The forecasted start date is 2027 at this point. The completion date will be subject to staging, planning and procurement. We'll incorporate any of our contractors' staging plans and program as part of that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sorry, I can't hear that. Can you say that again?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: The start date is forecast for 2027.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, and completion forecast?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: The completion date I can't confirm at this point.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Do you have a forecast?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: Bear with me one second.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How long do you think it will take?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: Construction forecast at the moment is 2030.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So 2030, okay. Section two—when will that start construction?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: That's the overall for all the stages at this time but, as Ms Mares said, we are currently in the planning phases. We have a budget envelope and we need to complete planning, so the overall forecast at the moment is construction start date 2027 and construction completion 2030. It's not differentiated by stage at this point.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So stage one of three sections will start in 2027 and complete in 2030?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: Correct.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Section two will start when?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: The overall construction is not broken down by stages at this time. We need to complete the planning. So these dates that I've provided are not explicit to one, two or three stages. We've got some planning, delivery and procurement engagement to do before we lock down those firm dates.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So there's no forecasting for completion of each of those sections?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: No.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Okay, sorry. It's quite confusing.

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: Sorry, apologies.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm just trying to get to the—I'm not trying to—but let's just take it back a step then. So there are the three sections of stage one?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Section one is due to start construction—when did you say?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: In 2027.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Alright. So stage one is 2027 to 2030. Is that correct?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: Correct.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Or is it section one of stage one is 2027 to 2030?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: We've got an overall program to do for each of the stages. I can't give you explicit start and completion dates for each of those phases at the moment. We are focused on section one. Those are the indicative dates we have at this time until we go to market, engage the market, go through a procurement process, finalise the planning, and engage and consult with the community.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Alright, so the \$1 billion promise, will that cover all three sections of stage one?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: I think we're still in planning phases and, until we've completed that, I can't confirm that for you.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Okay, sorry, there's one stage one and three sections of stage one, according to the media release—that's correct?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: That's what the media release says, yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Okay, and that's what you're planning for?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: Correct.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But we don't have a completion time and we're not sure if it fits within that envelope at this stage?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: We have forecast dates at this time.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Okay, what are those?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: Those are the dates I've given you. That's for the overall. Where we can break this down into sections, we will.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Okay.

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: Where we can consolidate those to get the best efficiencies, we will.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Okay.

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: I'm sure you'll appreciate the planning phase and the market engagement and procurement phases yield some innovations in staging and completion, and we'll incorporate those. So these are indicative dates at this time.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Okay, and what is the forecast date for the Milton Ulladulla bypass?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: I may hand that one to Trudi.

TRUDI MARES: Mr Hayes will just check that one. I know we have delivery funding. I don't know if we have a timeline.

ANTHONY HAYES: No, I'm afraid we don't have a delivery commencement date or a delivery completion date at this time.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So no commencement and no completion on that?

ANTHONY HAYES: No.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Okay. Alright, at the previous State election the Labor Party, the now Government, promised to spend \$180 million to duplicate Heathcote Road. Where is that up to?

TRUDI MARES: Do you want to talk to delivery? And then we're in planning, so I might start on that, and we can hand over for the delivery answer.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I just want to know where it's up to.

TRUDI MARES: Yes, one moment. I have a special Heathcote tab.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The duplication part, not the other projects. Your promise to duplicate.

TRUDI MARES: Okay, yes. So that is the \$180 million?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes.

TRUDI MARES: So that's the duplication and overtaking lane between New Illawarra Road and Princes Highway. It's in development. We anticipate construction will start next year.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So 2026. First half or second half?

TRUDI MARES: Second half.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Okay, and is that preliminary works or is that construction on the duplication?

TRUDI MARES: No, full construction.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Full construction?

TRUDI MARES: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The budget says that—oh, sorry, and how much has been spent to date of that \$180 million?

TRUDI MARES: That's the full budget for the full works.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, but how much of that has been spent to date?

TRUDI MARES: Spent to date? I'd have to take that on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Okay, alright. And, sorry, you said that was between two parts. Can you just clarify where that's between?

TRUDI MARES: Yes, upgrade between New Illawarra Road and the Princes Highway.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Okay, thank you. So you'll take on notice how much has been spent so far?

TRUDI MARES: Yes, I'll come back to you this afternoon if I can.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you. I appreciate it. That section will cost the \$180 million, is that right?

TRUDI MARES: That's correct.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Okay, thank you. And the budget says—sorry, when will the environmental impact statement for that project start—the EIS?

TRUDI MARES: Yes, I can get that for you as well. Do you want me to come back or do you want me to find it?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, just when it will start. If you like you can come back to it.

TRUDI MARES: Yes, I'll find it.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Okay. While you're doing that, I don't now if you're dealing with this or somebody else has the joy—Hampden Bridge. I know we've touched on that, in the Kangaroo Valley. Is that you?

ANTHONY HAYES: Mr Fuller will take that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So obviously that bridge was closed to heavy vehicles. We've touched on that through the Chair. Whats the status of Hampden Bridge now?

MATT FULLER: Sure, thank you. Firstly, I want to acknowledge the challenge for the Kangaroo Valley community because it's not just the Hampden Bridge and the load restriction. We've also had in the last couple of years considerable impacts through the slope failures that have happened on Cambewarra Mountain.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I understand and we've heard from them, thank you, Mr Fuller. I've got three minutes left, so I'm with you, but we acknowledge that. If we can move on to just what's the status of it.

MATT FULLER: Absolutely. What we are doing at the moment is a maintenance program on the Hampden Bridge. As you pointed out, we've got a load restriction due to safety reasons and the recommendations from engineers. We have started the maintenance work, so we have teams currently addressing what's referred to as the top chord, which is the timber rail that you would see on the bridge deck, which is the top-level timber across the bridge.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: They're doing work on that or assessing it?

MATT FULLER: They have started work on that, yes, so we're replacing sections of the timber top chord.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes.

MATT FULLER: We are juggling that work and the closures that are required with the other works because we want to maintain, obviously, overall access into the valley. It's an intricate process between the slope works that we have on Macquarie Pass. We've got some urgent works to do up on Macquarie Pass in the next couple of months, so we are juggling the work on Hampden Bridge in and around that. We will start a much more comprehensive program of the bottom chord on the bridge, which is the bottom timber rail. To access that, we have to erect a substantial amount of scaffold onto the bridge. At the moment, we're doing detailed engineering assessments about the dead load of that scaffold and how the bridge can be phased because that load restriction not just applies to vehicles but anything we obviously place on the bridge to undertake that maintenance, so we're just working through that at the moment to get a detailed program. As we progress that we will be staging the works on the bottom chord. The bottom chord requires the potential relocation of some of the utilities to get access to the structural timbers, so it is a very detailed piece of work on an 1898 bridge.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, I understand. Thank you.

MATT FULLER: We have sourced and have available all of the timbers we require, because we also have to make sure we get the right seasoned timbers et cetera that are able to meet the—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you. In the one minute I have left—thanks for that, Mr Fuller, that's really helpful—I might just ask when will the community be made aware of those next steps?

MATT FULLER: We're engaging with the community all the time. We've had regular—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How?

MATT FULLER: There have been sessions that we've convened with Mr Hayes' team down in the community drop-ins and things. We have a hotline number that is available for people to call in and get information about the work that's happening and, from what I understand, also other stakeholder engagement processes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How will they be told about the next phase?

MATT FULLER: They will be told as we get that program more finite. At the moment, we're trying to develop that program. As I said, we're really doing that investigative work on the scaffold and how that staging occurs and how we plan that in and around the other works in the valley.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When will heavy vehicles be allowed again on the bridge?

MATT FULLER: Our ultimate aim is to restore the load restriction through all of this maintenance work. We need to develop that plan. We need to do that work. We need to make sure there are no hidden surprises when we pull out those structural timbers and replace them.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The 42½-plus tonnes.

MATT FULLER: Then we do a final engineering assessment at the end of the work and then monitoring, with the aim of restoring that load limit. We are also working on the options for temporary bridging in the event that that load restriction isn't able to be achieved.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What's your rough guesstimate around when that might be?

MATT FULLER: It's going to take some months. There's no question.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: A year?

MATT FULLER: It's going to take us, I would say, at least another number of weeks to develop the program around, as I said, the scaffold and the replacement of the timbers.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Do you think the entire project will probably be completed, say, in a year? I know you have assessments to do; I've heard that. But is it a this year finalisation or is it a year-long project realistically?

MATT FULLER: All I can say at this point is it's going to take a number of months. I suspect that the bottom chord timbers will require, at minimum, two stages, possibly three. Each of those stages I would anticipate would take a few months by the time you erect scaffold, do the work, take the scaffold down again and relocate it, and we are trying to plan that in and around the other works in the valley. I would say it is a number of months. I wouldn't want to commit to a time frame. I understand that it's very challenging for the community, and certainly

want to acknowledge that. We will work closely with them to continue to provide as much information as we can as soon as that becomes more available.

The CHAIR: Going to the inquiry into the impacts on the Rozelle interchange and the Government's response, which was tabled in October last year. Recommendation 14 of that inquiry was that the New South Wales Government ensure there's ongoing and genuine community engagement and consultation between Transport for NSW, local councils and community members to address issues and ongoing concerns. The Government's response states:

In consultation with councils, Transport will also prepare a 12-month and five-year post-opening Road Network Performance Review Plan for WestConnex Stage 3 (M4 and M8 extensions and Rozelle Interchange). The first of these reviews has now commenced.

Is there an update on the first of those reviews, which had commenced by the time this report was submitted?

TRUDI MARES: There was a lot of things there. Let me just catch up on that.

The CHAIR: There was a preamble to my question.

TRUDI MARES: Yes, that's okay.

The CHAIR: And the question is around the 12-month post-opening Road Network Performance Review Plan for WestConnex stage three. Apparently that has commenced. I just wanted an update.

TRUDI MARES: We have done the access review with City of Canada Bay, and we have some treatments in place that we're trialling at the moment with the left-hand bans. They're due for completion in September. We have some cameras there as well. We're doing the traffic studies. They will form part of that network review. We are also working on a local traffic study with the councils as well, and we'll see if there is any State road interface with that that we need to consider in the overall network integration review. All of the data has been collected. There are different engagements going on at the moment, but we have not completed the review yet.

The CHAIR: Is it the intention for those reviews to be released publicly?

TRUDI MARES: Yes. We always release those.

The CHAIR: For recommendation 4 of the same inquiry, the Government's response refers to a couple of different amounts of money that had been given to Inner West Council to do a couple of things. One is—and this was raised during the inquiry—the \$20 million that was given to Inner West Council to deliver the master plan for the Rozelle Parklands in consultation with the community. Is there an update on that?

TRUDI MARES: I don't know that I have that at hand. Can I take that on notice and I'll come back to you this afternoon if I can?

The CHAIR: Yes. Specifically I'm keen to know whether the department is keeping track of how much has been spent to date because it would be good to get an update for that, as well as if there were any further conditions that Inner West Council needs to meet in return for that amount of funding.

TRUDI MARES: I'll come back to you on that.

The CHAIR: Secondly, there was \$360,000 provided to Inner West Council as part of the 2023-24—this could be something maybe for the transport Minister. The Get NSW Active program is under Minister Graham, isn't it?

TRUDI MARES: Correct.

The CHAIR: I'll come back to that one in a future hearing. Western Distributor improvements—I'm sure you're aware of the community concern around the impact of the changes there in terms of the right-hand turning off the Anzac Bridge onto Banks Street and the significant impact that that is potentially going to have in terms of the Pyrmont community but also in relation to the Pyrmont Peninsula Place Strategy. The Pyrmont Peninsula Place Strategy is indeed a strategy of the Government under planning.

TRUDI MARES: Yes.

The CHAIR: Firstly, what engagement takes place between the planning side of it, with all of their wonderful goals under that strategy, and this change for the Western Distributor, which actually looks like it's going to mar or negate some of the benefits of the Pyrmont Peninsula Place Strategy.

TRUDI MARES: They're the same team that are working together with that community and looking at the network integration impacts and what work we should be doing. We have not got a decision on WDN integration works and what will or won't proceed as part of that. It is being tied up in the broader review of all of

the network impacts from the north side and the south side. We work regularly with that Pyrmont community. They are given regular updates. We went through the city recently and gave them an update on where we were up to with implementing some of those projects, but they're definitely in the same discussion. We'll make sure, as soon as we've got a decision on any integration works and how they might interface with the Pyrmont plan, to update the community and stakeholders there.

The CHAIR: As part of that and part of any potential change to understand the impacts of it, has traffic modelling been undertaken?

TRUDI MARES: Yes.

The CHAIR: Is that public? Does the community have access to that?

TRUDI MARES: I don't know that the traffic modelling in the form it's in is very digestible for the public, but we certainly share the outputs of that and the analysis and insights from it when we're in discussions with them.

The CHAIR: Have they asked for the modelling?

TRUDI MARES: I'd have to take that on notice. I'm not sure if they've asked that specific question.

The CHAIR: Within a lot of community groups these days, particularly those that are interested in traffic impacts and what planning decisions will mean for their local community, I think you'll find that there are usually a few people that can understand traffic modelling actually.

TRUDI MARES: And we sit down and brief with anyone that asks. We don't release the data, that's all, but very happy to brief.

The CHAIR: When is construction expected to commence on that?

TRUDI MARES: The integration works?

The CHAIR: Yes.

TRUDI MARES: We haven't made a decision on what will commence and what won't.

The CHAIR: When is that decision expected to be made then? Where are we up to in the process?

TRUDI MARES: We are finalising the review of the network integration on the north side and presenting that back to Government this year.

The CHAIR: When you're saying the integration, you mean specifically the issue that the community is concerned about in terms of the removal of the ability for the eastbound cars to—right, so that decision actually hasn't been made?

TRUDI MARES: No, we haven't confirmed that yet.

The CHAIR: But you're in the final stages of it?

TRUDI MARES: Yes.

The CHAIR: When you're saying you're part of the same team, this is within Transport for NSW. The Pyrmont Peninsula Place Strategy people, where do they fit within the department?

TRUDI MARES: They sit in my team. I've got the planning function as well as the integration function for Sydney. We have place-based teams that look at the long-term plans as well as any place strategies, like the Pyrmont one, plus they do the network integration work. So that is all looked at collectively for a place.

The CHAIR: To the issue of the Western Harbour Tunnel and Warringah Freeway Upgrade project, I've asked a couple of questions over multiple budget estimates about the community—Camberay Voices, people in that community group particularly—being disillusioned by the way in which complaints have been handled in relation to that project. I understand that a review was contracted out into the monitoring of complaints oversight. Ms Mares, you're nodding and about to answer.

TRUDI MARES: I feel like you're staying with me, potentially?

The CHAIR: Yes. It was outsourced, firstly. Is that correct?

TRUDI MARES: That's correct. It was independent.

The CHAIR: Who did that?

TRUDI MARES: Let me find the name. I can give you a status update, but I don't know if I have the name.

The CHAIR: The consultants, the company, whoever was undertaken to look at that issue and investigate it, did they have complete separation from the project?

TRUDI MARES: Yes. It was completely independent. I haven't got this note in front of me, but it was an environmental representative. I understand that any complaints went through ministerial offices and were addressed outside of the department as well. So that was entirely independent of the department.

The CHAIR: I'll come back to that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Mr Collins, I might stick with you on the same topic of the grants program. Another example I have concerns about are wharf upgrades to Bundeena, Currawong, Lintern Street and Saratoga Veterans, totalling about \$3.59 million. They're all connected to the commuter ferry service from Palm Beach. I'm wondering how that aligns with the intent of a community-based grant program. Should that not come from some other pot in Transport in terms of infrastructure?

HOWARD COLLINS: I know some of them. I know Bundeena pretty well because I've used it quite a lot. Whilst the ferry calls there every half-hour or every hour, other people use the wharf. Fishers use the wharf. Vessels can drop and pick up people from those locations. In the overall maritime infrastructure, there are occasions when obviously these grants are used not just for recreational boating wharves but sometimes where the facilities are either shared by both or are part of Maritime's overall responsibility for some of those wharves.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: That covers my concerns about Mackerel Beach as well, which I had similar concerns about. Shoalhaven council was given \$350,000 to essentially create another plan to tell us how they're going to implement the coastal management plan, which should detail the infrastructure upgrades to maritime facilities in their council area. How is that the most appropriate use of the funds, given that 44 other councils have to have a legislated requirement to create a coastal management plan and now you're giving \$350,000 to Shoalhaven council to create a plan about how they're going to implement another plan? Just build the bloody thing!

HOWARD COLLINS: Obviously, that area—you mentioned Lake Conjola earlier—is a very complicated area. It has a lot of issues regarding the previous blocking of the access to Lake Conjola and many other wharves and locations.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: But with all due respect, that's what the coastal management plan is supposed to address. Forty-four other councils do that within their coastal management plan. What precedent are we setting where we give another council \$250,000 to create a plan about a plan?

HOWARD COLLINS: Let me take a look at that and come back to you if I can today, Mr Banasiak, regarding why that unique position is as you suggest and whether there are any other locations where we've provided that funding. But obviously it is a very complex area, and a lot of maritime structures and their own ramps are managed by this council.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Can I go to the Crowdy Head harbour project? Is that still with you, Mr Collins?

HOWARD COLLINS: I believe so.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: The original allocation for that project was \$2 million, and I think back in 2023 we were advised that \$500,000 had already been spent. How much has been spent to date and on what specifically?

HOWARD COLLINS: I will give you an up-to-date position on that as of recent times rather than me putting my finger in the air of past information that we have here. Again, I will come back to you on Crowdy Bay.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Okay. I'll keep asking questions about more specifically and you can come back with that.

HOWARD COLLINS: Please do.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: The project scope has been revised now to include demolition and replacement of jetty one; installation of heavy-duty pontoons with water and electricity at each berth; 18 berths, including one short-term; demolition of jetty two; and dredging of the harbour. Who approved this project scope change and when was that approved?

HOWARD COLLINS: Obviously, like many projects, once you start getting into the detail, you discover a number of unknowns. I understand that once they carried out more thorough surveys, they discovered that there was a need to do more extensive works. That often happens, particularly with below-water infrastructure. It's very difficult to assess.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: That's significant project scope creep, though.

HOWARD COLLINS: Yes. I suppose, like you suggested, to get stuff done we could've done the minimum viable thing and then come back 10 years later. But I think the view with this project was get in there once, do it properly, and hopefully then we won't be back for some time to come. Again, I can get some more information regarding the project, but I understand the reason for that scope creep was discovering unknown engineering issues.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: You can perhaps take this on notice or you can tell me now: What consultation was undertaken before that scope was changed?

HOWARD COLLINS: I know that in general terms for many of these projects extensive consultation takes place with local community groups—boaters, fishing groups—but I'll give you the details of what consultation took place regarding Crowdy Bay.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I note that there was a "Have your say" consultation in 2022 with 47 responses and not one response raised the need for 18 berths with water and power. They did raise the need for a fishing platform to replace jetty two. There were also concerns about floating pontoons in surge conditions and calls for dredging in front of the boat ramps. I'm wondering what data you have to justify the change to 18 berths with water and power.

HOWARD COLLINS: We'll have a look at that. I don't think we wake up in the morning and just decide to do these things. We will give you a bit more explanation. I don't have the details here, but I'm sure the team would have the reasons why we changed those 18 locations for water and power and what was the need for the change.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Obviously the team is listening. If you can take on notice what the anticipated revenue is from that berth hire and whether you've got any modelling that supports your estimates.

HOWARD COLLINS: Yes.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Also whether consideration was given to the fact that the Crowdy Head co-op is closing and whether that might impact the financial sustainability or the modelling on those berths.

HOWARD COLLINS: Thank you for that. I'll definitely take on board your points. If I can come back today, I will. If not, we'll certainly take it on notice.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Going to the GHD report from 2022 into this project, with regard to dredging, the report showed evidence of sensitive marine grasses. Have there been any changes to what environmental approvals are required for future dredging at that location?

HOWARD COLLINS: I don't know specifically about that location. But, as you know, we have recently taken on the responsibility for spending \$16 million in many locations along the New South Wales coast. One of those things is to ensure that the environmental impacts are minimised by the method of dredging—using suction dredging rather than excavation. Also, as you know, we've been keen to—where marine grass or sensitive flora and fauna have been impacted, it's a case of putting back more, from seahorse hotels to extra grass being added. I know that the teams have had a very successful outcome for a number of sites. I can again look at this particular site and see what the environmental assessments were for dredging and the impacts on the flora and fauna.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Am I right in saying that Crowdy Head isn't earmarked to be part of that \$16 million dredging program?

HOWARD COLLINS: I don't think it is. I think that's part of the package of work. But obviously we're working through the prioritisation of those dredging programs. As you know, we are aiming to have a dredging vessel, which Maritime will look after rather than relying on single-source contractors or people who take years to get into operation in certain sites.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: You mentioned earlier today—and obviously I've been aware of it because I've been talking to you and Mr Hutchings about this—that assets were transferred from Crown Lands and the modest staffing you were given. Can you quantify some of that for the record? How much dollars worth of assets were transferred from Crown Lands to Maritime? How much staffing were you given?

HOWARD COLLINS: I believe the number of staff was 14, of which nine were to do with the Tweed Heads dredging sand transfer facility. I've been there and seen the staff who operate who now work for Maritime. There were several hundred million dollars. Again, I think we got a calculation of Crown land. As you know, Mr Banasiak, this was done in the middle of COVID or certainly at a rapid-fire pace by a previous transport Minister, where I think Mark Hutchings caught the ball and had limited or, let's say, modest resource to do that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Are you able to provide us a list of the assets on notice?

HOWARD COLLINS: We have an understanding of what they are. Our Maritime team are going through ownership because we're discovering pieces of land—which Crown Lands have told us were there for us—and we've discovered they're owned by someone else or there are some boundary issues. So we're going through that in detail. I'll see if I can get you the up-to-date information of the value of that land. But also, we are working very hard to ensure we can deal with this matter.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Mr Collins, this may be one for you. Matty's Flat public reserve has had \$2.3 million invested into new wharves. The information to hand suggests that this area has been subjected to a native title claim. Is there an update of this project and how all this is proceeding?

HOWARD COLLINS: I've seen certainly the name on the list of projects. I haven't got any detail about native title claim. Again, Ms Overall, I'll get some information on that if I can. I've certainly seen Matty's Flat as being part of the investment in waterways for Maritime.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So you're not aware, at this point, of a native title claim?

HOWARD COLLINS: Personally, I'm not. That doesn't mean the Maritime team hasn't got details regarding a claim. I can quickly find that out, to make sure you understand what the latest position is.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That would be great. Mr Fuller, this may be for you. You have touched on some of this; you talked a little bit about bridges. The member for Cootamundra has been vocal in her electorate about the bridge infrastructure, specifically the William Bradford Bridge, Irrigation Way Bridge and the mid-level bridge crossing at Cowra. I'm interested to know about the future plans for regional bridge infrastructure at those specific locations.

MATT FULLER: I'd have to take on notice those specific bridges. I don't know off the top of my head exactly what's planned for those in terms of routine regular maintenance. As we've needed to do with Hampden and other bridges around the State, we have a forward program of bridges that we have in terms of our known maintenance program, known risks. Then we, from time to time, have some other instances occur where bridges are impacted, either through weather events, by heavy vehicle strikes or some of the other things. I don't have information to hand on those three.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: If you'd take those three on notice, that would be great.

MATT FULLER: I know we've been working with the member for Cootamundra very closely on Wallendbeen. The good news on that is that will be open to traffic in the next couple of months. We have made some really good progress on the adjoining road approaches. We've needed to complete that work. That's been progressing very well.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I appreciate you taking that on notice. Following on from Mr Banasiak's earlier question, what works have happened to date and what works will occur this year to the Goonoo Goonoo Road upgrade?

ANTHONY HAYES: That would be one for me. I get the good names.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: A bit like our Puddledock Road again, yes.

ANTHONY HAYES: No work will be happening this year. We have been working very closely with council in terms of the development.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Sorry, Mr Hayes, so nothing further this year?

ANTHONY HAYES: No. That's correct. There is \$4 million of State funding for us to complete the final business case. It has taken some time because there were two intersections in question along Goonoo Goonoo. Council's initial focus was on one and then it recently changed. We have had to pivot. We are not expecting to commence delivery of that project and early works until 2027, and then the project proper in 2028.

The CHAIR: I have a question for you, Ms Webb. Thank you for your briefing the other day on what the Government is doing in terms of protecting wildlife from vehicle strikes and the various technologies that are being trialled. I wanted to raise an issue that a constituent has raised in terms of wombat deaths in Wollondilly,

particularly. There are various places around the State that seem to be highways for wombats as well. This group is Wollondilly Wombat Watch. They recorded 18 wombat deaths from vehicle strikes in just 10 days. Is the Government looking at places in Wollondilly, firstly, for testing the technology in terms of alerting motorists to the presence of wildlife?

SALLY WEBB: Yes, Ms Faehrmann. The team has a list of potential places to undertake the trials that are on track. We've got the two trials. One is around the smart signage and one is around the pale paint. We will be looking for trial sites, and good opportunities to trial those. There are a number of points that need to be demonstrated through the trials. They will need to assess whether that site is feasible. But I am aware that that is on the list of potential sites.

The CHAIR: Is it the Government's policy to remove signage that has been designed by local communities to alert drivers to wombats? In the face of there not being any signs or any warnings, the community has taken it upon themselves to warn drivers that wombats cross. But that signage has been removed. Is that New South Wales Government policy?

SALLY WEBB: I might defer to one of my colleagues here on signage. If not, we will take that on notice.

The CHAIR: I've seen the photos. They are just photos of wombats. Compared to politicians, they're not offensive.

SALLY WEBB: I'm aware that our signage does need to meet standards. It is important to have consistent signage and signage that means the same thing across the State and that motorists understand. I expect it's due to compliance with that, but we can take that question on notice.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Mr Collins, sticking with dredging, in terms of the \$16 million, obviously that is a finite amount of money. Does Maritime have a priority list in terms of dredging projects or areas that it's going to consider and is working down the list?

HOWARD COLLINS: This has been a very hot topic for resolving a number of long historic issues. I believe Maritime have put together the large list of projects.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: And it's probably a moving feast with all the major storms we've had.

HOWARD COLLINS: I know Matt Fuller and I have been working on what is important for maybe other funding to deal with breakwalls and the consequence of silting. But I certainly believe that, for boating and access to a number of locations, there is a long list. We are working through that and will be consulting with the community before that is finalised. Yes, there is a finite amount of money. I'm certainly hoping that \$16 million is the start of a further series of funding opportunities for us, because we know that the dredging task is far greater than that value of money.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Has that \$16 million been fully allocated now or assigned?

HOWARD COLLINS: I'll check with the team, but I believe we have yet to finalise and have those individual locations fixed in that \$16 million. We are doing some work on costings. We understand, obviously, as you say, there are some safety issues and there are some concerns for the local neighbourhood, and also consultation with a number of groups. Each of them believe that their project is the most important. As you go from Eden to Tweed and back again, you find that they are all very important. I know Mark and the team are doing that. With his new organisation structure, there will be specific people working on the dredging program.

The CHAIR: We will now break for afternoon tea. We will be back at 3.45 p.m.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back. We'll get straight into questions from the Opposition. Ms Natalie Ward?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Victoria Road—who is dealing with that?

HOWARD COLLINS: Is it operations? Is it—what's the question?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Has Transport for NSW changed traffic light sequencing around Marlborough Street in Drummoyne?

HOWARD COLLINS: We have been working on a number of trials to look at traffic light phasing to smooth as much as possible the traffic. I can take on notice whether we have done any changing into that specific junction. But we, obviously, are optimising that area and—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: If you could take on notice any changes to that traffic light sequencing, that would be helpful.

HOWARD COLLINS: We do, obviously, move traffic light sequencing every single day. In fact, they all have what they call "personalities" by time of day and location. But I'll check whether we've made any dramatic changes to the phasing of those lights.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Perhaps dramatic and/or other less dramatic changes would be fabulous too for those—

HOWARD COLLINS: Sometimes we tweak them every day.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you. That would be helpful. Has Transport for NSW received reports and complaints from residents about traffic congestion in and around Marlborough Street?

HOWARD COLLINS: Obviously, as we work through that very busy area, what we are doing—and I know Trudi and I have been working together on some of the opportunities, left turn bans, looking at other areas. I can't say I've received any complaints, but it might be worth us investigating whether we've had any complaints. There is a lot of congestion in that area. Of course, there's still the legacy of the changes with the Rozelle interchange.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: If you're able to let me know today—or Ms Mares—any complaints or reports you've received, that would be helpful. There was a trial implemented for a no left turn into Lyons Road from Victoria Road at Drummoyne in the morning peak. This trial was installed in March 2025. What's the outcome of that trial?

TRUDI MARES: It's a six-month trial so that won't be finalised until September. Then we will review the data and report back.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How does Transport assess the effectiveness of the trial?

TRUDI MARES: We've got some cameras in there. They're capturing compliance as well as traffic count. Then we'll look at traffic studies to see what the congestion is like—also working with the council on any rat-running and any information they're receiving.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When you get that data, how do you make that assessment? Is there someone specifically that does that or a group that's tasked with it?

TRUDI MARES: Yes, we have a network integration team that will do the analysis on that. We'll work back with the councils as part of that local access study as well.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When will a decision be made about whether that no left turn in the morning peak will stay?

TRUDI MARES: I haven't got a timeline. I think we will have to see what the data looks like and then make an assessment on whether we need to run the trial for a bit longer or we can make a call on whether it should be permanent straight after that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What would incline you to run the trial further?

TRUDI MARES: Only if we feel we haven't got enough data or the council gives us feedback or the community, but at this point it will finish in September and I don't have a timeline for making a decision just yet.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Equally, if you did have that feedback from the community that they were not happy with that trial, could you potentially complete it at that point?

TRUDI MARES: Yes, that's correct.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: At last year's Rozelle Interchange inquiry, Transport committed to a traffic study around Drummoyne. My understanding is the traffic study identified that rat-running in local streets that you mentioned, Ms Mares. How is Transport addressing that rat-running in the local streets in Drummoyne?

TRUDI MARES: We are still working with the council on undertaking further studies on their local roads and any opportunities they may have to make changes in there, whether that be adjustments to their own one-way running or turning areas, or calming measures—things like that—to change behaviour and use of those local streets. We're still working through that with them.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When do you think you might have worked through that and might start addressing some of those?

TRUDI MARES: Let me just see if I have a time frame. I don't have a final date for that. I'd have to take that on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is Transport holding—it's not a vexed question, but is the traffic being held in Drummoyne? Why has Transport seemingly taken the view not to share that burden with, say, Balmain or Rozelle? It seems to be a Drummoyne issue—that burden of traffic congestion

TRUDI MARES: Mr Collins might like to answer that.

HOWARD COLLINS: I've got some pretty clever people who've done this for years and one of the things you have to do is deal—if you allow traffic to flow, you end up with a very congested point at the beginning of it. If you phase the lights to hold traffic back, it does allow a greater flow of vehicles per hour. We've been working through this area. We've been doing the traffic study, looking at the impacts. It does vary significantly. Pre-COVID, that would be Monday to Friday, but what we see is Mondays and Fridays are very different. The team continually monitor that and we're working with Trudi's team in terms of the final suggested solution. But we do, on many junctions in Sydney, phase the lights to allow for a smoother flow through the area, as we do with passengers on stations in station control, and as we do with other vehicles. As you know, metered on-ramps are part of that, holding back the traffic to allow for better flows.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Would it be a possibility to take a view—or is there one option to share that traffic congestion burden?

HOWARD COLLINS: We haven't finished that study. When we've finished the study and understood what is the best solution—but at the moment it is normal practice in many roads around the world to hold traffic back to allow for smoother flow.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When will the traffic study be finished?

HOWARD COLLINS: I think the six-month trial isn't until later in the year.

TRUDI MARES: September. I'd say by the end of the year.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can I move to Mortlake Ferry. Mr Fuller, how are the upgrade works progressing at the Mortlake punt?

MATT FULLER: I'd have to take on notice exactly where they're at at the moment. I don't have that information at hand.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I note that local members weren't notified of that work first. Has the department kept them updated and informed?

MATT FULLER: I'd have to check on that—certainly happy to. I'm not sure what's happened there, but I'll take that on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can we try to get an answer today, because obviously there are a lot of community members in touch with them. They didn't know the works were happening. They weren't informed. It would be helpful if we could get an understanding of what the intention is.

MATT FULLER: I'm very happy for the team to organise a catch-up with the local members and to inform them about where we're at so that they can get that—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sure, but separately if we can have an answer about whether there is an intended program or if that's something that they need to put into place through you and with you, that would be helpful.

MATT FULLER: No problem. I'm happy to work out where we're at and meet with local members too.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When will the Mortlake car ferry be operational again?

MATT FULLER: I'd have to take that on notice. I don't have a date.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is that something we're able to get an answer on from the team while we work on some other things today?

MATT FULLER: We'll do our best, but we'll see how we go.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Because, obviously, a lot of people rely on that car ferry and are interested in when they might be able to re-commence that form of transport.

HOWARD COLLINS: You can watch the work daily on the live traffic cameras, so you can see—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, I'm a little bit busy in estimates—as much as that sounds fabulous and exciting to do, thank you. Can you provide an update on the work to upgrade the DFO roundabout in Drummoyne? Anyone?

TRUDI MARES: Ms Rubalcaba?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: I'll have a check. I'll come back to you.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I am just wondering why the community is waiting so long for that work. It does seem to have been quite extracted. It has been almost four years since the first announcement of that. I would just like to get a timeline.

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: Can I take that on notice? I'll come back to you as soon as I can.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's very helpful. In relation to the M5 westbound upgrade at Moorebank, is anyone volunteering for that piece of fun?

JOSH MURRAY: Raquel.

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: Apologies, what was the question?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: With the M5 westbound upgrade at Moorebank, will there be sound barriers installed along that M5 bridge over the Georges River?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: I believe that the design is still progressing, so until that's complete, I can't give you that answer.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When will that be complete?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: The contract has only just been awarded. I will have to find the exact date for when the design will be complete, but we will go out to the community for consultation as part of the planning conditions. That will be incorporated if there's any requirement for that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Could you take on notice when you anticipate that process might be completed?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: Yes, absolutely.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Could you take on notice whether it's the intention to install those sound barriers on the M5 at that bridge over the Georges River? If not, what other noise mitigation measures might be considered or included in that design brief? Obviously you've put a design brief together. Is that a part of it, or are there other options?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: It's part of the technical studies that go through what is required—the monitoring that's done before, after and post, and what can be incorporated within the design. It will be progressive—design requirements, planning conditions—and then we'll consult with the community on those.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What's the timeline for the completion of the M5 westbound upgrade?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: Let me just double-check on my sheet. There's a lot of data for me.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: While you're doing that, we might also find out when construction will start.

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: I'm happy to come back in two minutes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, if you could.

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: Sorry, there's just a lot of data for me to filter through here.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Just the timeline for the completion of that—just for clarity—M5 westbound upgrade. When will construction start on that, and is the final design complete on that one? Alford's Point Road—am I pronouncing that right? What prompted the proposed speed limit change on Alford's Point Road? Anyone?

JOSH MURRAY: We'll take that on notice, Ms Ward.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How many submissions did Transport for NSW receive regarding the changed speed limit on Alford's Point Road?

JOSH MURRAY: Again, I think we'll take that on notice and make sure we get the latest on how that came about.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Murray, that would be very helpful. If you could perhaps also take on notice how many of those submissions were in favour of the changed speed limit and how many were against the proposed speed limit change. Mr Murray?

JOSH MURRAY: Yes, thank you.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sorry, we just need something for the *Hansard* to confirm that. How does Transport for NSW enforce the tonnage limits, and what has been done to enforce the tonnage limit on Nuwarra Road, Moorebank? That would be helpful.

JOSH MURRAY: I'll take that on notice as well.

MATT FULLER: Ms Ward, I've just checked some of the public information on Mortlake Ferry. It does say that our works will be concluded within four months. We started that at the beginning of July, and on our website there is a bit of a comprehensive—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sorry, which one was that, just for *Hansard*?

MATT FULLER: The Mortlake Ferry. It's scheduled for four months. We commenced that in July. On our website, it does have some detailed updates as we progress through each month, as to the works that are being undertaken and what the community can expect as part of those works.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When will it be finished?

MATT FULLER: But, certainly, we will be happy to meet with local members and provide them with a more comprehensive update.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You'll undertake to do that?

MATT FULLER: Yes, no problem.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I appreciate that, Mr Fuller. Mr Murray, the Government claims to have reduced the TSSE, or Transport senior service executive positions, by 200 roles. Is that correct?

JOSH MURRAY: That's correct. More than 200.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: More than?

JOSH MURRAY: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is Transport aware of what roles have been reduced?

JOSH MURRAY: Yes, those are roles that have left the organisation.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sorry?

JOSH MURRAY: Those roles have left the organisation.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Have left?

JOSH MURRAY: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Those roles have left? Over 200 roles?

JOSH MURRAY: Correct.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Do you have a list of those positions? Just the titles. I don't need the names, obviously, but the titles.

JOSH MURRAY: I don't have that available with me. I'd be happy to take it on notice. They have been part of the first stage restructure of the leadership of the organisation, completed over the last financial year.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You're happy to take that on notice?

JOSH MURRAY: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The position titles are all we need. If you could take on notice all the 200-plus roles that have left, that would be helpful, just to be clear on what we're after.

JOSH MURRAY: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What services or offerings does Transport intend to reduce as a result of those staff cuts?

JOSH MURRAY: Again, Transport has been very up-front about the changes to those roles. Obviously the Government has a commitment to reduce senior executive roles by 15 per cent across the sector. Transport has now delivered a more than 17 per cent reduction on its executive workforce. But as I said in the previous question, that has been done in light of redesigning from 10 divisions down to seven and recasting our leadership teams and reappointing into roles that are set with the current priorities in mind. That does mean that some areas, such as the former set-up of the organisation into geographic modes, has changed to a statewide model. When you ask about which areas will be changed, much of that has to do with reforming the responsibilities and the spans of control of those executives, and making sure that that's fit to the organisation structure going forward.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What is the salary savings target that is needed for Transport for NSW in relation to the reduction of the TSSE and award employees?

JOSH MURRAY: Transport has made significant savings over the last two financial years, which have been in line with the budget aims that have been set, both externally through the Government programs and the commitment such as the senior executive reduction, but also through Transport's own financial sustainability plan, which is a 10-year plan.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But just specifically in relation to what the salary savings target is.

JOSH MURRAY: In regard to people savings targets overall, which includes consultants, labour hire and many of those other expensive pursuits through the organisation, as well as the changes that we've announced to the workforce profiles, that is a general savings target of around \$600 million.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Was Transport given that target, or did Transport decide on the salary savings target?

JOSH MURRAY: Transport has a number of commitments to make, such as the reduction in labour hire and the reduction in senior executives. Those elements have been baked into that plan. Other elements of it are part of our own strategic plan, moving forward, to reshape the organisation and its budget.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Which part did Transport decide?

JOSH MURRAY: The overall plan has been set by the team and the structure. We've been working through the operating model piece of work, which is now moving into that final phase that has been announced over recent weeks. All of those elements contribute savings.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In relation to award employees, you intend to cut 950 award employees. Mr Murray, are road designers and road safety experts award employees?

JOSH MURRAY: It's not 950 award employees. We have said that, within the Transport senior manager ranks and the award ranks, we anticipate the next round of savings could impact up to 950 roles. That's not people; that's roles in the organisation. We're going through that design work at the moment.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Of those, are road designers and road safety experts award employees?

JOSH MURRAY: The design of the next phases of reform, which will answer the question as to what roles might be impacted, is being done now. However, this is not targeting frontline or delivery roles within the organisation. It is focused on support and corporate roles.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sure, but that's not the question I'm asking. I'll ask it again: Are road designers and road safety experts considered award employees?

JOSH MURRAY: It would depend at what level of the organisation they are.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm just asking if those roles are award employees.

JOSH MURRAY: And it's not possible to answer the question in that manner. There would be award employees who would work in those roles. There would also be senior managers and senior executives.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: All right. I'm asking if those roles are—any of them—award employees. And I think we've got to, some are.

JOSH MURRAY: It's possible that there will be award employees who work in those areas, yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Are timetable design roles award employees?

JOSH MURRAY: And again, the same. It depends on the seniority of the person's role that we're talking about in this regard.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Are people that carry out that task, timetable design roles—are they award employees if they are carrying out that task?

JOSH MURRAY: The award employees relates to the categorisation of the person's role within the organisation, not the team that they're in or the task that they're doing.

The CHAIR: It wouldn't be a Regional Transport budget estimates if I didn't ask about roll-on bikes. Somebody's prepared a response to this, I am sure. Apparently there's a second phase of the ability to put bikes onto trains every day of the week, I'm hearing, but still to Dubbo.

JOSH MURRAY: I think you'll be pleased to know that Mr Macey has joined us today specifically for this question.

The CHAIR: I'm so glad I asked.

ROBERT MACEY: I have been looking forward to this question. A new trial has commenced. It commenced on 4 August, and it's an expansion on the original trial. So we're still using the same engineering design that was incorporated as part of the first trial. But what we've included as part of this trial is it is seven days a week. There are alternate stops, as well, on the way through. So it's not just Sydney to Dubbo; it's Sydney, Orange, Bathurst and Dubbo as well. They're probably the larger changes that have arisen this time around. We're certainly working with the bike users' associations across Sydney and the regional areas to enhance this trial, and obviously this trial will provide us with further clarity on further rollouts.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Macey. It sounds great, but it's not that much still. It's just another two stops and every day of the week. Just in terms of the restrictions, the bike spaces have to be pre-booked?

ROBERT MACEY: Correct.

The CHAIR: Why is that?

ROBERT MACEY: They're generally pre-booked so we know at a point in time. People can't just come on and bring a bike. If there are already bikes in those two spaces, then it makes it very difficult as the journey continues if someone jumps on board, for example, at Orange and there are already two spaces that are being filled.

The CHAIR: Just to be clear, the two spaces aren't per carriage, are they? They're per train?

ROBERT MACEY: Per train.

The CHAIR: Or are they per carriage?

ROBERT MACEY: They're per train.

The CHAIR: Is the department taking on board the feedback about the limitations in relation to that, the limitations in relation to just two bikes on a train?

ROBERT MACEY: The feedback has been very positive this time with regards to the trials, given the expansion that has arisen.

The CHAIR: But that means additional stops and additional days.

ROBERT MACEY: Correct.

The CHAIR: I have heard from bicycle user groups about—people tend to, when they do cycling, if they do cycling on the weekends or in the regions or even, indeed, in many parts of Sydney, cycle in groups. Is there a reason why the two bicycles being able to be rolled on per train is in place? What's that limitation about?

ROBERT MACEY: The limitation is the technology. It is 40-year-old rolling stock. It is technology that was put in place 40 years ago. So there would be significant cost to upgrade each of those trains to accommodate more than two bikes in a safe manner.

The CHAIR: What you've done is, basically, one carriage has been adapted, if you like, and the seats taken out or whatever it is for those bikes to be locked in place without being boxed up. Is that correct?

ROBERT MACEY: That's right.

The CHAIR: What's the next phase of this?

ROBERT MACEY: We will continue this trial for the next three months and assess the patronage, the comments and the feedback. We are considering, potentially, at a point in time, also to do a phase three, which

will be a coach trial. But at this point in time we've gone out to tender, so we don't really want to incorporate that trial as part of the coach network at this moment in time.

The CHAIR: What have you gone out to tender for?

ROBERT MACEY: For the regional coach network.

The CHAIR: Buses?

ROBERT MACEY: Correct. Coaches.

The CHAIR: Coaches for the bikes to be rolled on?

ROBERT MACEY: Not only do we run the TrainLink network, which is the heavy rail, but we also run the coach network between those major large towns. So we've gone out to tender in that regard.

The CHAIR: The tender is for what? Just to be clear.

ROBERT MACEY: For the new coach network.

The CHAIR: Has it got anything to do with the bikes?

ROBERT MACEY: To incorporate it as part of the phase three of the bike trial, is where I'm trying to get to.

The CHAIR: I'm still not clear. So the phase three of the bike trial—is this so that those bikes are rolled onto the buses? I'm just unclear of the connection.

ROBERT MACEY: Correct. It's to assess the phase three assessment of rolling bikes onto the buses as well, because, at this point in time, it's a very restricted network.

The CHAIR: Is it envisioned that every train, in terms of that regional train network, will be, if the trial is successful—I think it would be—that every train will have the ability to carry the two bikes?

ROBERT MACEY: At this point in time, the XPTs and the Xplorer network is, obviously, due for decommissioning at a point in time. We'll have the new regional fleet that'll be coming on board. Retrofitting the existing rolling stock is probably going to be cost prohibitive, but it's really gaining an understanding at this moment in time of how that network will operate.

The CHAIR: I do think it sounds a bit restrictive, in that the whole purpose of roll-on bikes is to be a little bit spontaneous, for a start, and not having to pre-book. Pre-book tends to be—I think that's when you do box your bike up and sort all that out. If there are only two bikes allowed, it does tend to be a bit self-defeating, I feel. To go to the bother of doing all of that for each train to just allow two bikes does seem like it's set up to fail. With respect, Mr Macey, I just can't see that the department seems to be wanting this one to work right across every regional train.

ROBERT MACEY: We're certainly putting all efforts in this trial, in this second phase of the trial, and working with the industry as well.

The CHAIR: Which user groups are you working with?

ROBERT MACEY: Central-west bike users' group and Bicycle NSW as well.

The CHAIR: My other question was with the fencing along Appin Road. Is this for you again, Ms Webb, depending on the question?

SALLY WEBB: It would be me or possibly Trudi.

The CHAIR: The fencing there was 75 per cent, I understand, completed, despite the Government's commitments for completion by mid 2025, I've got here in front of me. This is Appin Road fencing. Can I get an update whether that's all finished?

TRUDI MARES: Yes, you may. There are two sections, two projects. There's the developer-led project on the Appin Road upgrade and then the safety improvements that Government's delivering. There is full temporary exclusion fencing in the section for the Appin Road upgrade. That's completed. The full upgrade will put in permanent fencing, but the full temporary fencing is in place. The majority of the temporary fencing is in place on the other section that we're delivering. We had a slight delay due to weather, but it will all be in by September.

The CHAIR: There has been reported as well, about the underpass at Noorumba, that the delivery of that underpass is being held up because of a stalemate, if you like, between Lendlease and Stockland. Is that happening?

TRUDI MARES: I don't know if it's actually delaying that delivery, but I do know there are some legal proceedings between the two at the moment.

The CHAIR: Just to be clear in terms of the construction of that underpass at Noorumba, is it being delayed as a result of that?

TRUDI MARES: I would have to take that on notice. I'm not sure if it's impacting that, but I do know they are in legal discussions.

The CHAIR: Okay. The land, I understand—no, I think this is for environment, in terms of the land being pledged, as well, to the Government for part of the national park. Thirty-six hectares or something. This is part of that legal dispute, is it?

SALLY WEBB: My understanding is that's a separate parcel of land.

The CHAIR: Has that been handed over to government? I think that was part of the commitment by Lendlease. Is that correct?

SALLY WEBB: I'd have to take that on notice.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Mr Collins, I might be pushing the friendship here, but are you able to provide the Committee with copies of the 46 successful applications for the Boating Infrastructure for Communities grant? Obviously, any redactions that need to be made in terms of personal information, I'm not interested in any of that. I just want the substance and more detail around what they're hoping to achieve.

HOWARD COLLINS: I mean, hopefully with further dialogue with the ED of Maritime Mark Hutchings, maybe that's something that he and you can have a look at in the future. To confirm, the caravan park for that boat ramp, part of the grant, 50 per cent by the caravan park, 50 per cent by Maritime grant, and it is access to the public at all times, so it's not a private wharf. But I will find out from the 46 projects what information we have available.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Sure. Thank you.

HOWARD COLLINS: The friendship's still good.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Excellent. Kamay ferry wharves—has there been any movement on the \$78 million? Is that the final amount?

HOWARD COLLINS: There are some final commercial arrangements, obviously, which are being dealt with now, which I can't talk about.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Will that impact the final cost?

HOWARD COLLINS: I don't know yet. It's a moveable feast, but we're just going through the final decisions made of the total cost.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I might check back in next estimates on that. The 2020 maritime stimulus projects is what I keep checking up on. It's probably easiest to ask which ones are still outstanding. This is the \$205 million—

HOWARD COLLINS: According to my note here, there are very few outstanding. I will get the team to provide you, on notice, the ones which are still either to be completed or started, but that is quite a small number.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Sure. The South Coast Boating Network Plan. Have any specific projects, I guess, that were identified in, I think, chapter three on improvement opportunities—have any of them been initiated? Or requests for funding?

HOWARD COLLINS: Again, that's the 2020 plan?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Yes.

HOWARD COLLINS: I'm not party to or have in front of me the details of that, but I will take that away. I think there have been a number of—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Sorry, 2023 plan.

HOWARD COLLINS: The 2023 plan. Yes, I think there have been a number of projects which have been initiated. But again, let me take that on notice and compare that plan in 2023 with any works which have been carried out since then.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Excellent, thank you. Just going back to the questions of the brand new whiz-bang boat that Mark's getting—

HOWARD COLLINS: Yes, I'm not sure whether it's Thunderbird 4 or 5, but we're working on it.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: No worries. Do you have a forecasted annual operational cost for that vessel at all?

HOWARD COLLINS: I haven't got the forecast, but obviously buying a brand new vessel as opposed to the 000, which is 27 or 28 years old, which are very inefficient, highly polluting diesels, this will be much more effective and efficient. A point you made earlier—I did go and look at that fisheries vessel. I thought this was an ideal opportunity to lease it or borrow it, but unfortunately we didn't come to an agreement at senior level as to how we could do that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I think there were some mechanical problems with it, too, so you don't want to buy a lemon.

HOWARD COLLINS: Definitely 2027, end of 2026-27, obviously this vessel will be ready for us. As you know, it has the capability of deploying RHIB and some PWC vessels, as well.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Is this going to be integrated into the broader disaster recovery strategies across New South Wales, or is it going to be integrated to LEMC and the REMC process?

HOWARD COLLINS: We want to work through that. As you know Mr Banasiak, SES made us a combat agency for the river floods, which worked really well and effective. We have got to carefully navigate the issues between ourselves and Marine Rescue, and obviously working with the water police as well about the designation of roles. But I do think common sense prevails. We have the capability. We're often in the area, and therefore saving someone's life or deploying them to site should be something that we all work on. I'm due to have a discussion with the NSW Marine Rescue Commissioner to discuss that very matter.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: The outgoing one or the new one.

HOWARD COLLINS: Well, he's outgoing but I'm sure there will be a new one fairly soon.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: What's the vessel going to be doing during non-disaster periods? It's obviously got to have a multipurpose. Have we given any thought to that?

HOWARD COLLINS: Yes, 000 is often used for major events—for example, Sydney to Hobart, New Year's Eve, lots of activities. But also its capability now is to cover the whole State, and its ability to move across the whole State when required, and also to be set up to support if there are any natural disasters, flooding or fires. As we know, Maritime actually rescued a lot of people from the south using and deploying vessels which weren't ideal, but this one has the capability of being able to take on board a lot of people and deploy its watercraft to get inshore and deal with those incidents.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Do we have any projected response times for some of our more remote locations, like Lord Howe and Clarence and Bega?

HOWARD COLLINS: One of the capabilities of this new vessel is that it has the capability of getting to Lord Howe. Previously, Maritime has had to hire a vessel to do that. We have Maritime work in Lord Howe, so this is something that was considered in the business case for the procurement of such a vessel.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: But no exact trajectory or response times?

HOWARD COLLINS: Well, we have, as you know—I don't know whether you when you went to Rozelle you saw the SMIC, as we call it—the incident centre?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Yes.

HOWARD COLLINS: Maritime's capability has much been enhanced by Mark Hutchings' arrival. As you know, he was the commander of the water police.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Yes.

HOWARD COLLINS: And therefore the 300 staff and 100 boating officers and boating education officers obviously can be redeployed to deal with incident management as well.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: You briefly mentioned before the break the restructure of Maritime and Mark was going through that process when I met him. Has that been finalised?

HOWARD COLLINS: No, not yet. We're still in the consultation phase. What we certainly are proposing is to protect regional jobs, frontline roles. There is always some efficiency you can find in, perhaps, some of the support functions, and I know the management team are pretty lean in that organisation when it comes to numbers of staff.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: But there's no projected losses to boating safety officers at all?

HOWARD COLLINS: No. I think we're clear about the importance of retaining those people out on the water doing tens of thousands of engagements with our boaters and other people on watercraft.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Thank you. I think that's all I've got for that. Who should I speak to about the drone response system?

JOSH MURRAY: Also Mr Collins?

HOWARD COLLINS: Yes, are you talking about drone in the box?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Yes, drone in the box.

HOWARD COLLINS: What do you want to know?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: What are the KPIs you're going to be using to measure the success of this? Are you going to publish that in a quarterly fashion?

HOWARD COLLINS: Already, the technology has been extremely useful for a number of incidences. If Minister Aitchison was here, the M1 is a real challenge for us in terms of understanding the current condition. Whilst we have some cameras and some capability for Transport commanders, the drone in the box has allowed us to see congestion delays, ongoing things like truck fires and car fires. There have been dozens of deployments. In terms of evaluation, what we want to work out is how many of these things do we need, how does it complement our live response from the Transport Management Centre, and how do we share that information with other agencies, which includes obviously police and rescue services. But we'll make an evaluation. There's a proposal to ensure that, after a 12-month use, we'll carry out a qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the product, but so far it's a fantastic bit of technology.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Yes, the Minister and the press release cites a significant reduction in disruption time. Can we quantify that beyond a vague "significant"?

HOWARD COLLINS: It's too early to say, but I think it does give you eyes and ears to actually see congestion points and respond accordingly with deployment of resources. Also it's been heavily used, as Matt knows, when we had that flooding north of the State. The images that you saw on most of the media channels were actually our drone-in-a-box images.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I have one question about the renewable energy transport routes. Who am I directing that to?

TRUDI MARES: You can start with me.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: With Labor not progressing the Great Western Highway tunnel, the member for Bathurst is very concerned about the ability to transport renewable energy components to projects in his electorate, and specifically the Dubbo to Oberon part of the route. I'm wondering where that is at at this point.

TRUDI MARES: Yes, there's actually a cross-Government steering committee that I'm on, and Mr Hayes leads the transport logistics working group for the statewide view. We're currently working through access studies. We've been meeting with a lot of councils and working closely with EnergyCo. We are taking on board all the feedback from councils. We know they have a range of questions that they need answered. We do not have determined routes for all of the zones. There are different arrangements depending on the agreements, but we are working to look at a statewide view for all of that logistics and access management right now.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Okay, and so just specifically—and you may not know, given that answer there—is there planning around O'Connell Road and the Oberon War Memorial trees?

TRUDI MARES: I don't have any specifics on that. I don't know if Mr Hayes does.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Obviously that's from a heritage perspective as well, so perhaps that could be taken on notice.

TRUDI MARES: We'll take that on board. We'll reach out.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That would be great. Just quickly, Mr Murray, I will pose this one to you, please. Is it possible to get a percentage of the number of mobile phone camera fines that have been incorrectly issued and subsequently challenged—challenged and then cancelled, challenged in writing and cancelled when they're at court?

JOSH MURRAY: Yes, we can get that. Bernard?

BERNARD CARLON: Yes, we could get that on notice. Those notices are relatively low compared to the total quantum of fines and detections, and we've seen the detection rate actually also decline significantly by about 12 times since we started the program six years ago.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: When you say relatively low, what sort of percentage do you think, just off the top of your head?

BERNARD CARLON: Rather than hazard a guess, we'll answer it on notice. I think that would be best, but we do have that data.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Okay. Because the figures that I've been made aware of are suggesting it's certainly not single figures.

BERNARD CARLON: My understanding was that it would be, but we'll get that to you.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Okay, that'd be great to clarify.

SALLY WEBB: I can give you that number if you like. It's 0.09 per cent, and that's during the 2024-25 period. That's the infringement rate.

BERNARD CARLON: This is the court elect—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Yes, so when they're challenging the fines in court and then subsequently cancelled—the percentage of that.

SALLY WEBB: My apologies.

JOSH MURRAY: We'll take that on notice.

BERNARD CARLON: But it's not significant.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Can you please clarify that the technology being used with that is that that's now being used to monitor seatbelt fines as well?

BERNARD CARLON: That's correct.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Okay, great. I just wanted to clarify. Now farm firefighting vehicles?

SALLY WEBB: Yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Thanks, Ms Webb. Where are we up to with the farm firefighting vehicles? It was the second trial. Have the results been released? Will they be released?

SALLY WEBB: We're looking at finalising the details of a conditional registration scheme, with the details of that to be released shortly.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Does that relate to the second trial?

SALLY WEBB: The first trial and the second trial have been considered and evaluated. We've been liaising with stakeholders, so that includes obviously RFS, the SIRA and farmers—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'm sorry to cut you off there, but have those results been released publicly?

SALLY WEBB: The final details of the scheme are yet to be released publicly.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Okay, and will they be?

SALLY WEBB: Yes, the final details will be released. As I mentioned, we're finalising the details of a conditional registration scheme.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Will it all be in place before the start of the fire season?

SALLY WEBB: Yes, that's the intention.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Excellent, that's great. I have just one more very quickly on flooding technology. Who might I talk to about that from a road safety perspective? I'm specifically talking about the flash flooding tragedy in the Hunter Valley region just two weeks ago that's been attributed to the poor state of the road there. Is anything further planned? For example, are trials of flash flooding safety technology such as automated lights and boom gates to block flooded roads like in Queensland being considered, or would it be considered?

JOSH MURRAY: I'll certainly begin the answer, and perhaps one of my colleagues may also have something to add. Certainly through our security and crisis management teams, we do have integrated flood mapping technology, which is live overlaid with our first-response maps and linked in with other response agencies. In the most recent floods of the Hunter and Taree regions, that was used quite significantly. On the North Coast in terms of resupply, in particular of towns that had been cut off, we were able to use that live tracking of flood levels and projected AI-based flood levels to great effect during that process, which really sped up the ability to get help to where it was required. With regard to automated technology—Matt?

MATT FULLER: I guess the answer is we're absolutely open to any new technology and any advancement in road safety that might benefit safety outcomes. The short answer, obviously, is that tragic circumstance occurred on a council road, so we would be very happy to, as part of our ongoing conversations with that council, have a discussion with them about what technology might be relevant and pertinent to deploying in that and what road safety programs and other things they may be able to access. We use technology to very good use at the moment to monitor and pre-emptively close other roads. We have it on corridors like Waterfall Way and Macquarie Pass, which we talked earlier about, with different rain triggers et cetera, so we certainly use that. And between my team and Mr Collins' team, we'd certainly be very happy to have discussions about what might be appropriate for safety enhancements.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That's great, because being proactive in this sort of area is much better than reactive when it's too late as such, so that's great to hear.

MATT FULLER: You've heard already today about the rail crossing trials. We have other trials with school zones. We're always open to new safety technologies to look at how we make the network safer.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The Warringah Freeway upgrade and Western Harbour tunnel trees—Ms Mares? No?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: I'll take that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you. Three thousand trees were removed for the projects and it's a condition of the project's approval that those trees be replaced two for one on public land, prioritised within 500 metres of the construction boundary. Will this condition still be met?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: It's always our intent to meet the conditions of the approval. We are working closely with the councils as to where those can go. I don't have the exact details of where they're going to go, but if you want more specific details, I can get those for you.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: If you would take that on notice, that'd be—as at today, will that target be met? Will 6,000 trees be planted?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: That's always our intent, yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I understand. But you're happy to take on notice where that might be at the moment, any challenges with that, understanding there may be some?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: Correct.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How are discussions proceeding with North Sydney Council? You mentioned that you're having those ongoing discussions.

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: We have various consultation groups that we meet, whether it be for intersection works, whether it be for the wider network.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Just on the trees specifically.

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: On the trees? I don't have those exact details, but I'll come back to you.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: On notice?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: Yes, on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is Transport looking at putting some of their replacement trees beyond the 500-metre construction boundary?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: We would do that under consultation, and we would have that pre-agreed before we did that. That's tied up with the initial, and on notice we'll come back with the plan for where those replacement trees are going, whether they're within or without the boundary.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: And how many might be likely to be beyond the 500 metres.

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is private land also being considered for the tree plantings?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: I can't answer that right now. I'll take that on notice and wrap all that up together.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When can the public expect an update on that tree replacement strategy and an indication of exactly where those 6,000 trees have and will be planted?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: Thank you, but I'll take that on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That would be helpful. Back to the staff cuts, Mr Murray, will there be a reduction in the Centre for Road Safety head count?

JOSH MURRAY: I can't answer that at the moment. The design processes of all of our branches—there are 50 branches—will be the next phase that is looked at.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is the Centre for Road Safety included in that as part of the whole of Transport being included in it, or is that something that is not being considered?

JOSH MURRAY: As I said, we are prioritising the corporate and support functions across the organisation, and they are the first areas that are being looked at.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sorry, the first areas?

JOSH MURRAY: That's right. The entire organisation is being remodelled to sit within the new operating model that has been announced and is being followed through. But the savings priorities are from the corporate and support functions, and that is being looked at at the moment. But all 50 branches need to be finalised in terms of their ongoing structure.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Carlon does a great job there so we hope he is more informed. When will Mona Vale Road West start construction?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: Give me one second please.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I think the Government cut that funding and shut it down and then has re-announced it recently, so that's starting up again. Presumably there's a construction date for that.

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: While I'm just furiously looking for this, I can answer the question about the M5 Moorebank.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's okay. We might do that at the end. While you're dealing with that, perhaps we might go onto the Eastern Creek truck rest stop.

TRUDI MARES: I can assist.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Ms Mares, why does a truck rest stop cost \$80 million?

TRUDI MARES: There is a property acquisition portion of that. It's six hectares of land in Western Sydney that we have to acquire as part of that work, and then we are working through design for the actual delivery cost portion.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: There was no availability of any other land anywhere that didn't have to be acquired?

TRUDI MARES: We searched long and hard for appropriate land that was in a good spot for freight. This was definitely the best location in Western Sydney.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Was there a procurement process for acquiring that land?

TRUDI MARES: We're going through that now.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Were any other sites considered?

TRUDI MARES: We did look at some other sites, but they weren't feasible either due to land cost or location.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is that a private landholder vendor?

TRUDI MARES: No, it's not.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What is it then, an entity or a commercial entity?

TRUDI MARES: The Office of Strategic Lands owns the site.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How many showers do you get for \$80 million?

TRUDI MARES: We finished the design. We will have the full fit-out design available to prepare, but we haven't finished that work yet. There are environmental studies that we have to do for the site alongside that design of the actual hardstand.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How many toilets do you get for \$80 million?

TRUDI MARES: We are still designing the site.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How many do you expect?

TRUDI MARES: I don't have an expectation. We are working through the design. We're actually going to work with industry. I met with some of the freight industry onsite who have input that they would like to provide, so we'll be working with them on design as well.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What's an acceptable number of showers and toilets on site for Transport for NSW?

TRUDI MARES: We will work to any Austroads standards. They're the guidelines that we will work to in the first instance. But, as I said, it will be a collective design process. I don't have an answer on how many would be there on this particular location.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How many trucks are expected to use this site each day?

TRUDI MARES: I would have to take that on notice. I think we may have given an indicative idea of numbers on there, but let me check that. I should be able to answer that now.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: If you could. Do we have an answer on Mona Vale Road West?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: We do. Mona Vale Road West, we're targeting 2028 but understanding—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: For construction to start?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: For the start of construction.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In 2028?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: We're just finalising the detailed design, environmental assessments and procurement, but we are looking to see how we can accelerate that. We do understand and appreciate the urgency of trying to get this completed.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Why does there have to be detailed design again? It was already in place and shut down and then re-announced. It's the same design, isn't it? Has the design changed?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: With any fund, we have to do the due diligence on the design. I'm not sure what has changed since the original announcement.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm not having a go at you. With respect, it's half-constructed. It's sitting there with tarpaulin over it. What needs to be redesigned?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: I don't have that specific detail.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Could you take on notice what needs to be redesigned on this project?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Could you take on notice what environmental impact statement needs to be done on this project that would differ from the previous environmental impact statement undertaken by the Coalition Government prior to construction and subsequent shutdown by this Labor Government?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: I'm happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Do we have a number on the trucks, Ms Mares?

TRUDI MARES: No, I'm just asking the question. I've just checked. I don't think we've ever quoted a number for the site.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can anyone watching at home, for those playing at home, give us one?

TRUDI MARES: Just checking. I'll let you know if I get any feedback.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Just back on Mona Vale Road West, is it guaranteed to start by 2028?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: That's the current forecast. We are looking at how to bring that forward with any efficiencies. The project is now funded.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You could dust off the previous design. I'm being cheeky, but I don't think it has changed.

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: I think it's just the due diligence on the design that was previously done.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I just want to go back to one question on Fifteenth Avenue, just to be clear on that. Will the \$1 billion deliver all of stage one of Fifteenth Avenue?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: I did have a review of the media release. It is incredibly confusing, so I appreciate the questions. Because we are still in the planning and development phase, the billion-dollar budget is intended to fund as much as possible. The staged approach allows us to do that most efficiently.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I understand that, but will that billion dollars cover that first stage, stage one?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: Yes, certainly.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The entirety of the three sections within stage one?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: I think we have to wait till we've finished the planning for the whole of the three sections, but that's what we're looking at now and that's what we'll finalise within the planning phase.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So as at today, when you are planning stage one, are you saying there may be a possibility that the \$1 billion will not cover the three sections, as we stand here today?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: When we do the planning and the design, we look at the whole scheme. The staging is part of the construction and delivery approach of how we best deliver that. When we look at the estimates for it, we will look at the estimates for the whole thing and we will plan the whole thing in its entirety. I think until we've completed those works, I can't confirm or deny what that \$1 billion will include. But that's the intent. That's the budgetary number.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It's kind of the implication from the media release. I accept that you probably didn't draft it, but the \$1 billion seems to be that this project will be delivered. We have the billion dollars and this is stage one, let alone the additional parts that are announced in it. As at today, it seems we can't be confident that the \$1 billion will cover that stage one. Is that right? It's not fully funded.

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: Until we've finished the planning and the design and we understand what utilities and property procurement, and all the other good stuff that comes with construction, I can't confirm that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So you can't answer if the \$1 billion will fully fund Fifteenth Avenue?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: I know that that's the budget that we've been given, and we're working through the design and planning phases.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Murray, back to the restructuring of the department, why do we need a director of government priorities and acceleration? Isn't this an example of a waste of public money when deputy secretaries presumably should be accountable for the delivery of their government's priorities?

JOSH MURRAY: As we've talked about, this is a director's position in a much-reduced executive population in Transport for NSW. We want to make sure that the resources are going to community expectation. Some of the projects that you've asked about, including Fifteenth Avenue, including the aerotropolis projects, including the heavy vehicle rest stop, all form part of those highly publicised community expectations around Transport's deliverables. That's why we have a staff member who is ensuring that those elements are followed through.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So that staff member, the director of government priorities and acceleration, will be working on those projects. Is that right?

JOSH MURRAY: They assist within Ms Mares' unit, ensure that where government funding has been provided there is proper oversight and make sure that there is clarity around where those projects are up to.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So they're there to ensure Labor's agenda. I thought that was your job.

The CHAIR: You probably don't need to answer that, Mr Murray.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: One question from me, Chair, picking up on Ms Ward's question about the heavy vehicle rest stop. Ms Mares, you mentioned the Austroads guidelines. What class of rest stop are you envisaging that you'll be able to fit on this site? Class one, class two, class three, class four or class five?

TRUDI MARES: We will always start with looking at implementing the full guidelines for the best classification we can get for the site.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Which is class five—sorry, class one. Class five is the lower level.

TRUDI MARES: We haven't finished design at all, and we are working with all the industry on that. We are far away, but we will always start from the guidelines, being at class one, and then work through the environment that we're working within and see if we have to make any trade-offs to that through exemptions.

The CHAIR: Mr Carlon, I might ask you about something I believe I asked last time, which was around the speed zone reviews. Can I get an update on how many speed zone reviews have occurred? Do you know the average time they're taking? I assume that's very individual in terms of the individual council's experience. I'm particularly interested in how many councils are asking for 30 kilometres per hour. I understand there's an increasing call for some particular areas of main streets, suburbs, schools—everything—to be 30 kilometres instead of the 40 or 50.

BERNARD CARLON: I am happy to respond to that. Mr Hayes will have some information about our engagement with local councils as well. In terms of the reviews, 2,004 speed zone reviews have been completed over the last six years. Of these reviews, there have been around 3,000 speed zone changes over that period of time—2,216 in regional locations and 720 in metro locations. In the 2024-25 year there's a total of 542 speed zone changes in the regional and 152 in the metropolitan areas. Over that period of time as well we've seen a significant increase in councils coming forward wanting to do high-pedestrian activity areas. I think around 27 council areas over the last 18 months have completed high-pedestrian activity areas or increased high-pedestrian activity area zones within their local communities. I don't have the exact numbers for the 30 kilometres, but I understand that Cootamundra and a range of regional councils have over this last 18-month period also been implementing 30 kilometres in their local high-pedestrian activity areas as well.

The CHAIR: Are the majority of the requests granted? Do you have the statistics on that?

ANTHONY HAYES: It's not as simple as that because we find that there are a number of repetitive requests. Quite often you'll get 10 or 20 letters come in from a community group all requesting the same review of the same piece of road.

The CHAIR: I see. So the 2,004 could be multiple requests for the same thing.

ANTHONY HAYES: It can be multiple. There are websites where they can do that. We also obviously work very closely with councils, with the police and with other groups. What we're trying to do is become more strategic with the conversation, rather than being reactive. Working with the centre, they have identified a number of roads as key, dangerous roads that should be reviewed. We would like to spend more time focusing on those roads. Not to the detriment of responding to community nominations, but the experts within the centre have nominated some key roads that they believe we should be looking at, and that's where we would prefer to be focusing more of our attention as we go forward.

BERNARD CARLON: There were 2,004 actual speed zone reviews over that six-year period conducted in the regional areas.

The CHAIR: So 2,004 requests for—

BERNARD CARLON: No, actual speed zone reviews that were completed over that past six-year period. In 2024-25, we had 542 speed zone changes and 152 speed zone changes in regional and metro.

ANTHONY HAYES: We have 167 reviews in progress at the moment. Seventy-five new reviews have been identified. There are currently 242 outstanding reviews just across regional New South Wales. So it's an ongoing focus and obviously quite a dedicated group of people work on this full-time.

The CHAIR: You mentioned being more strategic. Is there dedicated support in a proactive way for councils who are looking at a people friendly, place-making, 30 kilometres per hour centre? Is that what the

department is doing or is it still very piecemeal in terms of the councils identifying this as something they are wanting to pursue going to you? Do you treat them all individually?

ANTHONY HAYES: I'll go first, if you like. It is absolutely essential that we work in really close partnership with the councils on this. One of the real risks we have is a council pushing back on the new speed zone standard that we're trying to implement. If a council isn't on the same journey that we are, they can certainly make it a challenge with the local community. So it's very important that we're working in partnership with council. Obviously each council is different, has a different focus and different priorities, but a number of councils are very focused on reducing the speed through the centre of their town. We're very supportive of that, for obvious reasons. Then there's obviously the conversation at the other end, which is the standard of a road that's currently 100 kilometres an hour or should it be 100 kilometres an hour based on its safety record.

BERNARD CARLON: In terms of our prioritisation, we have identified, from a trauma-reduction perspective, where the highest priority speed zone reductions would be best to implement in terms of funding. We've provided that to our regional colleagues in terms of if we really want to reduce the trauma on these roads in relation to speed-related fatalities, here are the locations where we should be focusing our attention over the network. That's partly on some local government roads and regional and also the State roads, noting that 68 per cent of our fatalities and around 62 per cent of our serious injuries happen on regional and State roads.

The CHAIR: Thank you, that's very useful. With that data around the parts of our road network which are more dangerous than others, that goes to councils if they're council roads and they're able to consider it. Is it the same for the State? The Government, rightly so, continues to have targets to reduce the road toll. But at this stage, there's nothing that requires the State Government or councils to actually implement that. You're just giving them the information. Is that right, Mr Carlon, in terms of the more dangerous roads?

BERNARD CARLON: No. What I'd say in relation to that is we have a targeted program as well. We've allocated around \$177 million to—

The CHAIR: For State, is that right?

BERNARD CARLON: —those road upgrades, which include a combination of both speed zone management and physical upgrades like, as we heard earlier, wide centrelines and barrier systems and audio tactile, so matching the infrastructure system, Safe System, to also a combination of speed zone management in those locations to get the best outcome in terms of trauma reduction. There is a significant program, a \$2.2-billion program, in terms of the Towards Zero Safer Roads investment that funds both those town centre upgrades for high pedestrian activity areas, as well as the infrastructure and speed zone management on those higher speed roads in the regions.

The CHAIR: I have something provided to me by a constituent in Yass that says the local community association has been requesting for years, apparently—this is in Murrumbateman—a pedestrian crossing across the highway. This is where Murrumbateman Road meets the Barton Highway. They've requested a pedestrian crossing around the part where the main shops are to the public toilets. This has been requested for quite some time, no luck. There's also apparently no lighting at the intersection at night, which makes it particularly dangerous. Why is it so hard? That's Transport for NSW; it's not local council, is it, in terms of pedestrians? Or has that been handed to local councils, in terms of pedestrians on highways? That is pedestrian crossings, just to be clear.

ANTHONY HAYES: Is that a State road or a council road?

The CHAIR: Murrumbateman Road meets the Barton Highway—I'm not sure, actually.

ANTHONY HAYES: I'll have to look into that. If you would like to provide me the details, I'd be happy to investigate.

The CHAIR: They're suggesting that it's Transport for NSW which has rejected the—that it's been difficult to get an approval from Transport for NSW for this.

ANTHONY HAYES: I'm very happy to investigate if you wish to pass me the details, absolutely.

The CHAIR: I'll do that, thank you. Excellent. Back to the Opposition.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Just a couple of quick ones, and perhaps just following on from the Chair's questions about pedestrian safety and Mr Carlon talking about safety more broadly, specifically the safer school zones and what's being worked on in that regard. That program is a joint venture with the Federal Government. Is that right?

BERNARD CARLON: There has been significant investment in safety around schools in a combination of the State Government program, and funding from the Community Road Safety Fund and the Federal Government, where a significant number of school zone areas and infrastructure treatments were implemented as part of that combination of funding. In terms of safe school zones, there has been a review conducted as well, based on community feedback around a range of schools that approached Transport for NSW with concerns about the existing structure for school zones. The technical standard for school zones is currently being reviewed in response to that.

A number of those school zones have now been planned to be extended. This is in relation to concerns that the current technical guideline suggests that the school zone is on the road where the primary entrance to the school is. There are some locations where there are trips to school where kids are getting off buses on roads which are not the entrance road, so extending the school zone would be a practical solution to protecting them in that case. That technical standard has been upgraded but also a number of those schools are now funded to have their school zones upgraded as well.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Do you know how many schools have been or will be part of this?

BERNARD CARLON: There were 35 schools, in my understanding, reviewed as part of that process. Certainly that was in relation to them providing feedback to us, but the new technical rewrite of the standard would affect all school zones across the State.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Of the 35, are you aware how many are regional schools?

BERNARD CARLON: I don't have the breakdown in front of me but I'm happy to provide that on notice.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That would be great. If it could be a list, that would be wonderful as well. Mr Macey, this one might be for you. We've talked a bit about XPT services and the reinvigoration project that's underway. We've been hearing accounts that the ticketing system is very confusing and travellers are often turning up expecting a train but getting a bus instead. How is this being communicated? Can we look at ways in which that might be better communicated to customers?

ROBERT MACEY: Sure, we'll certainly put in efforts to communicate that more so with customers.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Excellent. That's what you call good service. You mentioned the new regional fleet. Will that be specifically XPT services returning to Grafton?

ROBERT MACEY: They will certainly be returned to Grafton. The services currently transition through Grafton. But what we've done over the preceding few months is replace one of those services to carry out the XPT life extension work, which I've spoken about earlier on.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So when they return to Grafton, that will increase to how many?

ROBERT MACEY: That'll be just a further two trains.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That will happen by April 2026?

ROBERT MACEY: That is the plan.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: The Minister mentioned earlier, talking to the Hon. Mark Banasiak, who talked about taxis—the Minister touched on and then was diverted on wheelchair-accessible taxis for the regions. Is there any further information about that?

SALLY WEBB: Yes, I can provide you some more information regarding that. We have a \$5 million wheelchair-accessible taxi loan scheme that's available to taxi drivers. The interest-free loans are up to \$125,000. They're available to successful applicants with repayment terms over 10 years.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So that's out there and available now. Has there been an uptake?

SALLY WEBB: I think they've only been released this month. The application forms et cetera are on the Transport internet site.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I want to ask about the demerit point trial—it may be Mr Carlon; I'm not sure. In an earlier estimates session, the previous roads Minister stated, when I asked him about the demerit point trial, "We'll assess the trial properly. We won't be making a political judgement halfway through a trial before it's finally concluded. We'll be using the Centre for Road Safety to assess this." Mr Carlon or Ms Webb, in what form has the Centre for Road Safety assessed the program?

SALLY WEBB: An initial review of the results of the first year of the trial—an interim report—has been prepared. The trial has been renewed and there will be further evaluation of the next phase of the trial.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When was that initial review completed?

SALLY WEBB: It was earlier this year, Bernard, wasn't it? It was about April, I would say—no, maybe later, in June.

BERNARD CARLON: We did commission an independent evaluation process for the trial, and that has been extended so that we get more data in terms of the time frames. That has now been extended, I think, just until the next year for a final report to be completed for government.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Did the independent evaluation say it should continue or did it say, "We don't have enough data and we're going to continue it so we can get more data"?

BERNARD CARLON: We're continuing to monitor the program, so there will be an update that will be provided to government.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When will that update be provided to government?

SALLY WEBB: The current year of the trial will conclude in January 2026. There will then be a period of months through till, I think, about April where we will distribute the points and wait for any court processes to work their way through in terms of court outcomes, appeal outcomes et cetera. When that data is concluded, that will enable the independent expert to review the data and evaluate the trial.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What review would you need of court processes? For people who haven't had a demerit point for 12 months, there is no court process involved in that. They would get one back.

SALLY WEBB: If someone has a court process that is upheld, it depends whether they receive a point back or don't receive a point.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Pending all the others. So everyone's points will be given back in April. Is that what you're saying?

SALLY WEBB: That's right.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So no-one has been given a point back yet?

SALLY WEBB: Yes, they have been.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The assessment will conclude in January—sorry, the whole process. The review will finish in April 2026. Is that right?

SALLY WEBB: No, the review will commence after we conclude the next year of the trial. But it takes some months to do that assessment. What they will need is the data to be completed, and that will be completed when the points transfer occurs or is finalised in April.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So the points will be transferred in April. The data will be completed. The trial is extended to then. When can we expect all of this to be finished?

SALLY WEBB: The evaluation will occur and will be concluded mid next year.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: After April, so mid June.

SALLY WEBB: Around about that time. I can't commit to a precise time. We'll have to get the data from the trial and wait for those court processes to go through et cetera. The data will be completed around about April, and then the expert will come in and evaluate the data.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How long will it take for the expert to evaluate the data after April?

SALLY WEBB: As I mentioned, in the interim evaluation that occurred, it took a couple of months—two to three months—for the data to be completed. I anticipate it will take a similar amount of time for that review to occur.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Has the road toll increased or decreased since the trial started?

SALLY WEBB: The road toll has increased since the trial started. We know that there are more drivers on the road. There are a range of factors as to why the road toll has increased but, yes, it has increased.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In what form has the Centre for Road Safety assessed the program? Are you saying, Mr Carlon, that that has all been given to the independent expert?

BERNARD CARLON: The data is being independently analysed and an independent evaluation process has been put in place. As Ms Webb pointed out, that will come to its conclusion following the last set of demerit points that will be managed in the beginning of next year in April, and then that will be finalised.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But I guess my question is, more specifically, what involvement has the Centre for Road Safety had in assessing the program?

BERNARD CARLON: Staff associated with the centre have actually been involved and our evaluation people have been involved internally, who have actually scoped the evaluation framework and road safety expertise in that area. Our policy people have been involved and our road safety regulation people who actually administer the scheme have been involved in that whole process.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: With respect—I'm not having a go, but just to clarify—that is not the assessment; that is putting together for the independent party that assesses it. It's not doing the assessment. It's either independent or it's not.

BERNARD CARLON: The design of the evaluation that's being done by our experts within that area, yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But the actual evaluation work—looking at the data, making an assessment and making recommendations—has not involved the Centre for Road Safety. Am I correct in understanding that to be the case?

BERNARD CARLON: No, that is being managed by staff within the Centre for Road Safety, absolutely.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The process is being managed or the assessment and evaluation of the success of the trial?

BERNARD CARLON: With an independent evaluation expert, and we've also done community engagement associated with that as well. There is a range of different components of the evaluation which have been put together and are being tracked over the time frame for the delivery of this program over a number of years. We need a number of years of data in order to make an assessment about its impact.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Who is making that assessment of its impact?

BERNARD CARLON: That is being done by staff within the Centre for Road Safety, in terms of the evaluation, the policy and the road safety regulations staff, with a contractor providing services for those expert external evaluation skills.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So those staff in the Centre for Road Safety, not in the independent assessor, are doing that assessment, evaluating the data?

BERNARD CARLON: Yes, and providing the advice back to government.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Who decided that the trial needed to be continued?

SALLY WEBB: The Minister.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Why was that?

SALLY WEBB: That's a matter of Government policy and this is a trial that's been commenced by the Minister—Minister Graham.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But now Minister Aitchison? Or has that been continued by Minister Graham?

SALLY WEBB: It was undertaken by Minister Graham in his capacity as roads Minister and that trial has now transitioned across to Minister Aitchison.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Do I understand your evidence to be that Minister Graham, when he was roads Minister, asked for this to continue? It was his direction that it continue?

SALLY WEBB: The timing at which the extension of the trial occurred was—I believe Minister Graham was the Minister at the time.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Carlon, is the Government's road safety focus satisfactory, in your view?

BERNARD CARLON: Yes. We have a government and a Minister and a whole community and a range of partner agencies like police and justice and health and education who are all committed to reducing road trauma

on our roads across New South Wales. Whilst we do have an increase in the number of fatalities on our roads over the last 18 months, the community and a whole range of people right across the New South Wales community are committed to investing their time and effort in reducing trauma on our roads. It's clear that we're at a point where we've had more than half a million additional licences over the last four or five years. We've had more than half a million new vehicles registered on our roads. We've had a population increase of 400,000. All of those things create an upward pressure on road trauma. Clearly, we're all committed to contributing to new ways of reducing road trauma, like the seatbelt automated enforcement and the average speed camera trial.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I acknowledge the intent and commitment, but is the record and allocation of funding adequate to be reducing the road toll? It seems like it is going in the wrong direction.

BERNARD CARLON: What I'd say to that is that, incrementally over the last decade, every year has seen an increased forward estimates allocation for road safety within New South Wales. We have a \$2.8 billion allocation over the forward estimates for investment in road safety. We are at the point of the Road Safety Action Plan, a five-year plan completing in 2026.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I can read that, thank you.

BERNARD CARLON: We've already commenced work with our partners and with the Road Safety Advisory Council, who we'll be briefing shortly to have a look at the modelling for where we're at and start to design the next five-year plan to try to get to our target of 50 per cent reduction.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can I just go back to the M6. Ms Rubalcaba, how much has been spent on legal fees to date on the M6?

RAQUEL RUBALCABA: Thank you for the question. I don't have the detailed breakdown of that level and I'm not sure—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm not after a detailed breakdown. I'm just asking what has been spent on legal fees on the M6.

JOSH MURRAY: We'll take that on notice at this stage.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: If we can get an answer, that would be helpful. Who is dealing with potholes? I think we had some mention of potholes earlier today.

JOSH MURRAY: Mr Fuller?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I think you mentioned some of the work that has been done. I appreciate that's an ongoing thing, particularly with all of this rain at the moment. Is the cold mix still being used to deal with—there was a trial. That is something that seems to prosper in rain—doesn't need to wait for it to dry out. Is that still being used?

MATT FULLER: We use varying forms of different approaches in different parts of the State and my understanding is we're still utilising the cold mix where it's appropriate.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Could you take on notice where the cold mix is being used post that trial?

MATT FULLER: Sure.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: At what sites and what integration that is being used—or is that trial over and it's finished?

MATT FULLER: I can take that on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That would be helpful. And any other options—you said you have other options. What are they and where are they being used?

MATT FULLER: It depends on the road surface. There are different methods that are appropriate for obviously the different road surfaces that apply, so they're spread far and wide right across the State.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: If you could take on notice what those different methods are, that would be great.

MATT FULLER: Sure.

The CHAIR: Excellent. Mr Lawrence?

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: No Government questions.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much, once again, for attending budget estimates. You know that we will get in touch—or the secretariat will—in terms of questions you've taken on notice and supplementary questions from the members. Thanks for the work you do. That's the end of our session.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.