

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 6 - TRANSPORT AND THE ARTS

Tuesday 1 April 2025

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

ROADS, REGIONAL TRANSPORT

CORRECTED

The Committee met at 9:15.

MEMBERS

Ms Cate Faehrmann (Chair)
The Hon. Mark Banasiak (Deputy Chair)
The Hon. Mark Buttigieg
The Hon. Greg Donnelly
The Hon. Wes Fang
The Hon. Cameron Murphy
The Hon. Bob Nanva
The Hon. Nichole Overall

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 third hearing of Portfolio Committee No. 6 – Transport and the Arts for the additional round of the inquiry into budget estimates 2024-2025. 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 Faehrmann. I am 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 those procedures. All witnesses will be sworn prior to giving evidence. Minister, you do not need to be sworn as you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament. Witnesses who appeared at the initial hearing before the Committee during this inquiry also do not need to be sworn.

Mr JOSH MURRAY, Secretary, Transport for NSW, on former affirmation

Mr MATT FULLER, Deputy Secretary, Road Maintenance and Resilience, Transport for NSW, on former oath

Ms SALLY WEBB, Deputy Secretary, Safety, Policy, Environment and Regulation, Transport for NSW, on former affirmation

Mr BERNARD CARLON, Chief of Centre for Road Safety, Transport for NSW, on former affirmation

Ms CAMILLA DROVER, Deputy Secretary, Infrastructure, Projects and Engineering, Transport for NSW, on former affirmation

Mr ROGER WEEKS, Chief Executive, NSW Trains, on former oath

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

Ms BARBARA WISE, Acting Coordinator General, Transport for NSW, affirmed and examined

Mr JOHN HARDWICK, Executive Director, Asset Management, Transport for NSW, sworn and examined

The CHAIR: 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 a.m. In the afternoon, we will hear from departmental witnesses from 2.00 p.m. to 5.30 p.m., with a 15-break at 3.30 p.m. During the sessions, there will be questions from the Opposition and crossbench members only, with 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, Minister and officials. Minister, what is the purpose of the Regional Roads Fund?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Thanks for that question. It's nice to see you in the hearing. I just want to take a very quick second to thank the Committee for their forbearance in holding this hearing later. That was very helpful to a lot of the communities that we worked with on the North Coast during Ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred. I do appreciate that. In relation to the Regional Roads Fund, it is a fund that was established in the election process in 2023. It is designed to complete a lot of projects that, under the former Government, were half-finished, unfinished or had been called out for years by communities. That was the main purpose of that fund.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: The total of that fund, Minister?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: The total fund was \$335 million.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: How many projects are underway from the fund?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I would have to ask Mr Fuller to answer that one.

MATT FULLER: Mr Hayes.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Or Mr Hayes. Sorry, there has been a bit of a change since we started work on that. Mr Hayes, have you got those details?

ANTHONY HAYES: I am just pulling them up now, Minister. Bear with me for a moment.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Minister, do you know how many are on the list as a total?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Overall, I can probably find that for you, but not off the top of my head, no.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Mr Hayes, could you look at the total number of projects and those that are currently underway from the fund? Minister, do you know how much of the fund remains unallocated?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, it's approximately \$97 million on that one at this stage.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: In relation to that \$97 million, what's the process for how that remaining amount will be allocated?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: At this stage, that is still being worked out. The main focus for us has been to get on with the delivery. We know that some of the projects that were in the original fund won't have enough money to get them completed. That's partly due to a hyper-escalation in costs. That is a concern for us. That is one of the things that we are looking at. But we are still determining that and having those discussions through Cabinet.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Do you have a projected spend over four years?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We will be hoping to spend the money that we've committed over the four years.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: What projects is your Government investing in for western New South Wales?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We are doing quite a number of projects in western New South Wales?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: As part of this Regional Roads Fund? I should qualify that, Minister.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: The reason this fund was established was really because a lot of the projects that were done previously were not focused on some regions of our State. There had been quite an investment in the western region by the former Government, having two Regional Transport and Roads Ministers in the Central West. There was quite a lot of money that went there. There were also projects like the Silver City Highway, with the resealing, and the Cobb Highway. It wasn't really about picking projects by area. It was really looking at projects that communities had raised with us that had not had the investment. If you look at some of the projects, for example in the Monaro area, which I believe you used to represent for a short period of time—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Thanks for the qualification.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: —there were projects there that were cutting off communities: things like the Reschs Creek Bridge at Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council, Smiths Road at Snowy Monaro, Cow Bed Bridge at Snowy Monaro and quite a number of other roads, Tarago—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Indeed, and we will get to many of those that you have just mentioned on that list. Do we have the list yet, Mr Hayes?

ANTHONY HAYES: My apologies, I have to take that on notice. I've got the full list but I don't have the breakdown of the numbers on it.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I've got that now. I can give that to you. I will start.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Just the total number of projects to begin with.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Sorry, I don't have the total. I will count them up.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I can tell you the total. It's 28.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Great, okay.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That's correct. Call me the Minister. There are 28 of those projects. I can confirm, Minister, that none of them are in western New South Wales.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, but the Golden Highway and the Merriwa upgrades are around getting into western New South Wales and the Central West—the Merriwa upgrades.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That is not on this list, I don't believe, Minister.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: You mustn't have quite the right list.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I am pretty sure I have quite the right list. It's from your documentation.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: There is \$12 million for Golden Highway improvements.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: My apologies—Upper Hunter. The upgrades on the Golden Highway is what you are referring to?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Upper Hunter. That is on that list.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: That connects into western New South Wales in an area where you've got a lot of renewable energy zones and where you've got a lot of big material going. It is very difficult getting over the Great Dividing—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Absolutely. We will be getting to that as well. If we could just focus on these 28—

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Just to clarify, there are projects that are benefitting the western parts of the State. It may be that they are not located exactly in that—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Well, Upper Hunter. That's debatable, but thanks, Minister. We've qualified that now. Let's move on to the list of the 28 projects. At the moment, you can't tell me, Mr Hayes—you've taken it on notice—how many of them are currently underway. Is that correct?

ANTHONY HAYES: Yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Thank you. Where did the list of the 28 projects come from, Minister?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: When I was in opposition I was going around the State, talking with communities, councils and mayors, holding roundtables, talking to local members, and hearing what the concerns were about the things they weren't able to get funded or had been partially funded. One example of that is down in Tuross Head, where the Pacific Highway junction had not been upgraded on one side. The progress association there was very concerned about that. They were concerned about the safety risks and so they wanted to see some changes there.

For example, in Upper Hunter, with Dungog council having no State roads, they wanted to have some extra funding. They really needed it because they'd had quite a lot of damage to their roads. Others were like Kyogle, improving flood immunity at Clarence Way—projects which the former Government hadn't done. I think the highlight stand-out for me was Cuttagee Bridge, which the former Government had actually funded under Fixing Country Bridges, which was a program it wasn't actually eligible for, and then took the money away from the community. They were left with a bridge that, during a bushfire, would have been quite disastrous for them and no pathway to getting that fixed.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Great, thanks for the history. Can you confirm that these 28 projects were election commitments?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, I can, to my understanding.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So they were all election commitments?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: That is my understanding, yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: The election commitments, this particular list of 28 projects—did the list come from the Premier's Department?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'm not quite sure what you mean.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Did the finalised list of election commitments come from the Premier's Department?

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order: My point of order goes to relevance. I don't know that that's a question that falls within the purview of the terms of reference with respect to the estimates of expenditure from the Consolidated Fund.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: To the point of order: It will become apparent why it is absolutely relevant.

The CHAIR: I don't need to hear any more. I don't uphold the point of order. We generally have a very wide latitude for budget estimates. That's usually the situation. We do stop at a certain point, but you were within order, Ms Overall.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Did the list of 28 projects come from the Premier's Department?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: No, that's not my understanding. My understanding was that they were election commitments that we announced.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Election commitments that would have gone through a process, I imagine.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, through the PBO.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Was there an approval process for these projects?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: What do you mean by that? There's an ERC process that happens within all parties, in opposition and in—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Is that what you're saying—that they went through an ERC process?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'm not quite sure what approval you mean. Sorry, I just want to understand that, because I know Mr Faraway, when he was here, tried to prosecute this case before around the projects. Are

you talking about in government or are you talking about internal decisions in opposition? I'm just not quite sure what approval you're talking about.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: You've made election commitments, Minister, prior to an election.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: After having won that election, you have created a fund to pay for these election commitments. So what was the process involved in going from an election commitment to identifying these election commitments, and then the process in order to fund them from the \$334 million that you've created here? What's the process, Minister?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: It goes to Cabinet.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Okay, so it had gone to Cabinet—

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: And its budget, and I don't really propose to go through that process with you here in budget estimates.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'm not asking you to do that, Minister. You've said that it's gone to Cabinet. When did it go to Cabinet?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'd have to take that one on notice, Ms Overall.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'd like you to do that. Were there business cases required?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Again, this is something that your former colleague has asked questions about.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'm aware.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Those questions are on the record, so I would refer—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'm asking you, Minister.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: He asked me too. I refer to the previous answers.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'm asking you now. Were there business cases required for these 28 projects?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: There is a business case process, which was outlined in previous budget estimates, and I refer you to those questions.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Could you outline it for us now, please?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I can. I might get Mr Hayes to do that, though, I think. I'd hate to be non-specific about it.

ANTHONY HAYES: I apologise—your question?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Were business cases required for these 28 projects?

ANTHONY HAYES: It's managed on a case-by-case basis. I would need to come back to you with whether there were any specific business cases put together for them.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That would be great. I'd appreciate you doing that, thank you. Minister, were business cases submitted before the election, at the time the commitments were made?

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Point of order: I've been listening intently and I recognise your earlier ruling that there's a very wide latitude given. But these questions seem to go to the period before the Minister was a Minister, and they're asking about processes when the Minister was in opposition. I don't think they're covered by the resolution of the House.

The CHAIR: I think the Minister is able to respond any way she wishes, including taking things on notice. I think, with respect, we will be asking questions today about areas from when the Minister wasn't a Minister, if you think about roads, for example. I don't uphold the point of order.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'll just give you, if you would like, Ms Overall—INSW has an assurance process. There is a certain threshold for some of those projects, and that depends on whether they meet that threshold or not.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Yes, and I understand the threshold is \$10 million, so I'll be interested to hear which of them qualify and have had business cases prepared, and at what point, as well, Mr Hayes. Minister, from the list of 28 projects announced, can you tell us how many Labor seats are benefitting?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: It depends on when you take that time frame from. If you take them at the time that that information was gathered about those projects and when they were announced, I think you'll find they're actually—I have to remember back to this; I haven't been asked about it for so long now. But I think the majority were in Coalition seats, and then after the election, obviously, with the change of government, that was no longer the case. But I will get you the numbers on notice, for sure.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: The really important phrase that you've used there, Minister, is "when they were announced". So when were these announced?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Prior to the election.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: At that point there was not a fund that had been created in order to pay for these election commitments, was there?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Because we weren't in government, yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Correct, you weren't in government. So, essentially, you announced projects before an election, to be paid for from a fund that didn't even exist, and then after you got into government you created this fund in order to cover—a taxpayer-funded election commitment fund. Is that not correct?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Overall, I understand that you were not in the Parliament for the first period of this term. That is something that oppositions do; it's something that governments do. They announce projects in an election, and then hopefully they build them, which is what our Government is seeking to do. Sometimes, like your Government, they don't build them, and we are trying to build those ones as well.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Isn't good governance about good process, Minister? This sounds like there is no process whatsoever.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: That's not correct, Ms Overall, because there is a process and there was a process when we were in opposition.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Of making election commitments prior to an election—

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, there was. Certainly there was.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: —and then determining how you were going to pay for them after you were elected. That's the process, is it?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: These were all put through the Parliamentary Budget Office.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Before the election, Minister?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Absolutely.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So it was all signed off before the election—all of these 28 projects?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: That is my understanding. If there's one in particular that you are pointing to that you would like to—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'm looking at all 28 of them, Minister. You're saying that these were costed prior to the election, not subsequently.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: That is my understanding.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: On 25 September 2024 Minister Hoenig answered on your behalf that more than half of the projects that got funding were in Coalition-held seats when they were announced. That's not an entirely accurate statement, is it?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: No, that's what I just said.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I apologise, I withdraw. That was when they were announced. But, subsequently, this list doesn't reflect what Minister Hoenig said in September 2024. Can you tell us how many on that list of 28 projects are in Labor-held seats?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I will take some time to look at that and give it to you.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Again, I can let you know, because obviously you know that I have the list. It shows that 87 per cent of these projects are in Labor seats. In fact, you keep referring to Monaro. When

I held the seat, nine of 28 of them are in Monaro alone—or 32 per cent of all of those projects in a seat that Labor targeted very heavily.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: You're actually arguing against your own case there.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: No, I'm not, Minister.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, you are, with respect, Ms Overall, because it was—

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order: Courtesy to the witness—the Minister is trying to answer the question, and there are constant interjections over the top.

The CHAIR: This time I will uphold the point of order, which is correct. The Minister hadn't got, I think, two words out. If we could allow the Minister to respond.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Certainly, Chair.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I reject the premise of this question because at the time those election commitments were made—which was before the election—the majority of those seats were Coalition, but it wasn't determined on that. It was by talking to communities that were very left out in terms of funding that they required to do significant works on their projects in their communities. Now, the election changed—you go into an election. You don't know which seats are going to change. I don't know what it is in your party—well, I do know what it is in your party, because it has been quite clearly articulated in a number of different inquiries by this Parliament and by others that there were determinations based on seat. This was determined on the basis of communities that had not had proper investment. They had grants that were given to them but then taken away later because they would never fit the eligibility of the programs. That's the kind of show that your Government when you were in government, was holding onto.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Minister, 23 of the 28 projects that are held by Labor—and I will also qualify there's one for independently held Lake Macquarie, one for Liberal-held Goulburn and three for currently National Party-held seat of Upper Hunter. Of those two Coalition seats, Goulburn and Upper Hunter were also heavily targeted by Labor at the 2023 election. When you say that you were going around talking to communities, you were also going around talking to communities, attempting to win those seats at the election, were you not?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: No, Ms Overall. I was—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: You weren't trying to win those seats?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Overall, I totally reject the premise that you are putting there.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order—

The CHAIR: I know what you are about to say. However, I think realistically we do allow a little bit of healthy banter and response. I'm not going to be super pedantic about interruptions, which I think that may have been. Continue, Ms Overall.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Thank you, Chair. Of those seats, only five of these 28 projects have gone to seats that are not held by Labor, Minister.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Overall, if you look at—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Five of 28.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: You are making the premise and the assertion that these were only targeting seats that were winnable. That is completely incorrect. If you look at all of the seats that were there, there were some seats that were not marginal at all, where there was no hope, potentially, of them ever changing. The fact that some of those ones were marginal and didn't change—it wasn't the way. One of the projects—take, for example, Melville Ford Bridge. Providing funding so that that bridge would actually be flood-proof in a future flood event—these were projects that had been ignored by your Government for 12 years. They covered a variety of seats, on a variety of margins. They were in need.

If you talk to anyone in regional New South Wales, you will know that I have been one of the most travelled members of the Government—and in opposition, certainly the most. Of course I listened to communities, and I asked them for their challenges, and where we saw that there was an opportunity to assist them, we did. Now, I'm sorry if that some of these projects were in your former electorate, and you are not happy that money was being spent to address them. Potentially, perhaps your Government should have made commitments to do those issues as well, and maybe the future will change.

The CHAIR: Order! Minister, we're now into crossbench time, so I will interrupt you. Minister, when does Transport for NSW now expect the first new regional train to enter service? On which regional and interstate lines is it going to be?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Thanks for that question. I know it's something that we've been trying to pull out of the fire from the former Government. I will defer to Ms Drover on that particular question to give you more detail.

CAMILLA DROVER: We have three of the regional rail fleet here in New South Wales. We expect up to another six to arrive in 2025. I'm hoping the next train arrives in May—so next month. We did start the dynamic testing of the train towards the back end of February this year. That was after we received—

The CHAIR: With the dynamic testing, what do you mean by that?

CAMILLA DROVER: As I mentioned at budget estimates before, the trains are here. We now need to dynamically test them. They go through a range of static testing, where they're not moving, and then dynamic.

The CHAIR: This is what you said last budget estimates as well, though, Ms Drover. Is that correct?

CAMILLA DROVER: That's right. We're still in that process. We started that—

The CHAIR: Can I just jump in? Did you just say they're going to start the testing or you're testing them?

CAMILLA DROVER: No, the dynamic testing started on 25 February this year. That involves, initially, them running across the Sydney electrified network, and then, after that, they will go out further across New South Wales and eventually up to Brisbane and down to Melbourne and out to Broken Hill.

The CHAIR: Eventually? It just sounds like a long, long way into the future.

CAMILLA DROVER: It is a long and complex process. You may remember it's a bi-mode train, so we need to test them both on the electrified network and also on the non-electrified, where they'll run under diesel power. Given this is the first train of this type in New South Wales, it needs to go through very, very thorough testing processes. It is normal, as we go through that process, that—

The CHAIR: What's the timetable for testing? This was, I think, floated and discussed at the last budget estimates. If the testing has started in February, how long does that need to test for, and how many times a day or a week is it tested? Does Transport for NSW say, "Okay, you have six weeks, or eight weeks. We need to stick to this time frame"? It just seems like it's constantly stretched out and constant delays and constant excuses for not getting these trains on the track.

CAMILLA DROVER: As with any fleet, it takes many months, particularly—

The CHAIR: Years, I think, this is taking.

CAMILLA DROVER: The testing process, this dynamic testing, only started in February this year. It does take many months. As I said, this train is going across a very long network and across great distances of geography. It's got that bi-mode capability. The testing will be a function of what we actually find. As we test, there will be issues identified. They may require adjustment; they may require fixes, in some instances. We're not going to hurry the process.

The CHAIR: Well, that's obvious.

CAMILLA DROVER: We need to ensure that the train is safe, and, ultimately, we need to meet national rail safety law and get ONRSR accreditation for this train. That's why we'll—

The CHAIR: So this is one train that's being tested out of the 29—is that correct?

CAMILLA DROVER: Yes, that's the first train that has commenced this process.

The CHAIR: Does every single train have to go through the testing or does this train do the testing of the network? Do you think this one train is going to be the longest in terms of testing, this first one?

CAMILLA DROVER: Yes, it's usually the first train that has the longest testing process, but there will be different tests applied to all the fleet when they come in. There's a provisional testing process for every train.

The CHAIR: Have you got the time frame for the testing, Ms Drover? If it started in February this year, when can you expect that testing to be complete—say everything goes pretty well and no alarm bells are raised in terms of that testing, best-case scenario?

CAMILLA DROVER: We do have a target program, but, of course, it is a function of what we observe and how the train performs, and we're not going to accelerate that process.

The CHAIR: What is that target? The reason I'm pushing this is, obviously, the community has been waiting and waiting for these 29 new trains that were announced many years ago. Every time questions are asked, it's testing, modifications, testing. Is there any sense—I think I started with the question, "When can New South Wales now expect the first new regional train to enter service?" Do we have any likelihood of it being in the second half of this year?

CAMILLA DROVER: I'm not willing to, in budget estimates, publicly commit to a date, because it will be a function of that testing process. We, of course, want to get that train into service as soon as we can. We do think it will be a massive step change for the community of New South Wales and interstate, but we cannot compromise that testing process. But I can convey to you that it is going to be many months. It's not a matter of weeks.

The CHAIR: I'll delve into more detail of that later. With the 29 new trains, what's the expectation for New South Wales to receive all of those from the Spanish manufacturer CAF? Is that on track?

CAMILLA DROVER: All the trains are being manufactured by CAF in Spain, and they will all be arriving at the full fleet of 29.

The CHAIR: What is the time frame for that? Is there a staggered time frame? I assume there's a staggered time frame.

CAMILLA DROVER: There is.

The CHAIR: What does the contract say with them, firstly, in terms of when they should all arrive?

CAMILLA DROVER: As I said, we've already got three in the country. We're expecting up to six in 2025, and then the balance of the fleet will come after that.

The CHAIR: An additional six in 2025. From when we receive the trains, with the testing, and then getting those trains on the tracks, what's the expectation in terms of a time frame?

CAMILLA DROVER: It can take many, many months, but it will be a function, as I said, of the dynamic testing of that first train. Once we've done that process thoroughly for what we call the LR02—the long regional second train—then that will flow onto the balance of the fleet.

The CHAIR: Infrastructure NSW previously estimated, in terms of a delay in all of this, that it could be as late as December 2025—this year—before the first train enters service. From this conversation today, it sounds like even that late December 2025 can't be guaranteed by the Government.

CAMILLA DROVER: That's right, because we need to go through that dynamic testing process. I do acknowledge there has been significant delays to this fleet of trains. I don't think we've ever backed away from that. The detailed design for this train happened to coincide with the start of COVID in 2020. The manufacture is in Spain, and Spain was one of the most heavily hit by COVID in those early months of 2020. We're not shying away from the fact that this fleet has had issues, but we are pleased now that the fleet is starting to arrive. We're putting it through its paces across the network.

The CHAIR: That's dynamic testing, potentially, for another 10 months or 11 months or so. What about the upgrades to the tracks and station infrastructure? Again, I keep asking is everything on track but that's the language, isn't it? Is that all on track, as well?

CAMILLA DROVER: Yes, that's proceeding well. We've got adjustments to the physical network and some stations right across New South Wales. Eventually, there'll be adjustments made up in Queensland and also at Spencer Street station in Melbourne. That work has all been scoped and programmed and is being delivered at the moment.

The CHAIR: What's the track end station upgrade? What's the infrastructure required to be upgraded so that new trains are able to run on interstate and regional roads? What exactly are those upgrades?

CAMILLA DROVER: It depends on the location. For example, the fuelling location on this train is different from the existing fleet, so where that fuelling point occurs may need to be relocated for the new fleet.

The CHAIR: Is there a plan, as well for that? For example, let's say the first train arrives in late 2025; let's just be an optimist and stick with December 2025. The station and track infrastructure upgrades, is there a plan for their completion by the end of 2025?

CAMILLA DROVER: We've matched the rollout and the completion of those enabling works in line with our target program for the rollout of the train. There's a number of things that are happening in parallel.

The CHAIR: Are those deadlines public?

CAMILLA DROVER: No, it's not public. We've got the maintenance facility complete. That's where the trains are stabled, except for the train that's here in Sydney, which is part of the dynamic testing program. We've got infrastructure works happening right across the network, and then we've got that testing process. There's also some—

The CHAIR: I'll just turn to the Minister quickly. Minister, I wonder whether you could table as much as you possibly can in relation to that timetable of the track and station infrastructure upgrades, as well as the potential expected deadlines for those trains to be on the tracks? It's very opaque, and communities, especially in regional New South Wales, are wanting to know when they're getting the new trains they were promised years ago.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Just to be clear, the Minister for Transport is the Minister in charge of procurement, so I would have to have that discussion with him about releasing that information and what's appropriate to be in the public domain. Obviously we'll try to be as open as we can. I do understand the frustration. These trains were first promised in 2015 and not one landed under those opposite, so it's very difficult. We have been working hard. I take this opportunity to congratulate Ms Drover for her enormous work and energy to get this to the stage it is at now. It was a very difficult thing and it continues to be.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Minister, have you been briefed on the recent SO 52 for silica in tunnelling projects across Sydney?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I haven't been briefed specifically on the SO 52, but I've been briefed, basically, on the issues that are in there—like the general issue. Sorry, I've been two weeks in for the Sydney space but, yes, I have had some.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: As part of that briefing, were you aware of the number of unroadworthy and unsafe vehicles being used by the contractors and subcontractors doing this work, historically?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I would refer that question on. Obviously I know there have been some cases of silicosis. I know there have been attempts to ensure proper health safety in terms of equipment offered to workers and I know it is a really big concern for our Government. We have worked on the silicosis issue relentlessly and have made significant changes to legislation in New South Wales for things like your benchtops et cetera, and obviously tunnels are another part. I think that one would probably be best referred to Ms Drover in terms of particular issues. But I understand there's a SafeWork investigation as well, so I wouldn't want to be pre-empting that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Some of these cross into the Transport space, because we're looking at the roadworthiness of vehicles—to give some examples, like having vehicles with doors that don't shut or rags being used in place of a fuel cap. If a car like that drove down a main street, it would be stopped, but they are on a Transport for NSW job site and nothing is being done about it.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Since it's been brought to our attention, we are working on it. But we're taking a very methodical approach to fixing this issue. That's why we've got the taskforce going through that work now.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Through you, Minister, to Ms Drover, what systems have you put in place to ensure that all site vehicles are actually registered, roadworthy and compliant with New South Wales road rules?

CAMILLA DROVER: Can I just clarify a few things? Are we talking about crystalline silica?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: It was. That was the SO 52, but within those documents we've picked up reports of vehicles that wouldn't meet the roadworthiness standards to actually be on the road and they're working on major infrastructure road projects. Obviously if it doesn't have working doors, that's going to increase the risk of silica dust exposure, because the doors can't be shut to keep that dust out. That's where it has come from, but it raises a more broader issue of unsafe, unroadworthy vehicles being used by contractors and subcontractors on New South Wales Government jobs.

CAMILLA DROVER: I'm happy to take that issue away, because it hasn't been raised with me previously. I can say that we do welcome the establishment of the new expert taskforce on crystalline silica. I also mention that there are a number of controls in place for tunnelling projects. There are obviously ventilation systems within the tunnel. There are dust suppression systems that occur right at the cutting face of the rock.

There's obviously the equipment itself, whether it's a tunnel boring machine or a roadheader. Those machines, particularly the roadheaders, are enclosed and sealed with positive pressure to keep out dust. We have installed new measures, particularly in the Western Harbour Tunnel project, to support that. Your point about non-excavation type vehicles—light vehicles—in tunnels, with inappropriate compliant and safety features, I'm happy to take that away. I haven't heard of this issue before. It hasn't been raised with me. We can see what we can do in that regard.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Ms Drover, can I pick up on what you were speaking about in relation to increased safety around this work? If you've read the documents, it reads like a third world worksite: people not wearing PPE; surveyors coming in before the dust has actually settled to do their work because they're under this belief that there is some sort of time pressure and that they had to get in and do it, so they've been exposed; continual breaches by the contractors in terms of SafeWork. I know SafeWork is not your department, Minister, but at what point, as the agency managing these projects, do you step in and say, "The contractors and subcontractors aren't working to the standards that we expect. They're exposing their workers, continually"? At some point Transport NSW has to have a role in bringing the contractors in line.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I would say to that that we do take a zero-tolerance approach to this. As I said, our Government has been very strongly committed on this area of dust diseases. I know the relevant Minister in terms of SafeWork has said—and the Premier—that they need to be more proactive as SafeWork and a tougher cop on the beat when it comes to policing. I don't resile from the fact that, if we have contractors on our sites—and that is anywhere across the State on any project—they should be complying with work health and safety obligations. That is something that we are very concerned with. As Ms Drover said, we would be interested in hearing more and are happy to follow up those documents and to look at what we can.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: You just need to look at the documents. It's all there. Some of it is historical, to be fair, Minister, going back to the previous Government. But there clearly is a laissez-faire work culture going on in these tunnelling projects.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Certainly, Mr Banasiak, I am very concerned whenever I hear of anything like that, and we do ask the department to keep the contractors to account on those issues because I know that we want everyone who is working to come home safe at night and, in this particular case, it's such an insidious disease. We are really working on that. We've got the taskforce. We are working to get a silica worker register to track at-risk workers, to get the testing, to identify them and to intervene early to get them protected. Penalties for noncompliance have been increased and we've introduced industrial manslaughter laws with 20-year terms. We do take this very seriously. I know that it is a conversation we've been having within the department about what we can do better.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Picking up on some of what you said there, are any of the RCS exceedances that have been occurring in road-related projects directly reported to your department? Does the department see them or is it a case that they just go to SafeWork and there is no communication with your department about RCS exceedances in these projects?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'll have to ask Ms Drover.

CAMILLA DROVER: We are aware if there are exceedances. The ones I'm aware of for last year occurred as a result of incorrect wearing of PPE by personnel. That's obviously of concern, because that's readily addressable. So, yes, we are aware.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: How often do you become aware? How often do you receive these? Is it done on an annual basis, a quarterly basis?

CAMILLA DROVER: I would need to check exactly how regularly we receive them. But I do know that on our sites the contractors often post the results up on their boards so that the workforce can see the results. It's transparent. They're on the noticeboards on sites, is my knowledge.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I'm more interested about when the department sees it. It's all well and good to put it on a noticeboard in a tunnel where the workers can see it, but if the department is not being made aware of it, then the department is blind to an issue.

CAMILLA DROVER: I suspect it's with our monthly reporting for the project. I don't want to mislead the inquiry so I will take that away and confirm that for you.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Minister, are you willing to take action against contractors who repeatedly are involved in these RCS breaches, particularly not awarding them further projects or further government contracts if they continue to flout the rules around RCS?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Certainly in terms of contract determination or appraisal—whatever you want to call it—tender assessments, those issues are taken into account, obviously. Then, in terms of the contract, clauses warrant that contractors have to sign up to say they are compliant. Certainly that is something where we will look at action. It's appropriate. It depends, obviously, on what SafeWork investigations will find et cetera, but we want to make sure that we are doing the right thing by our workforce and extended workforce from there.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, I note in your opening you spoke about, obviously, the issues with Ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred in the north of the State. Is the fact that Mr Fuller's job title has changed since his last appearance at budget estimates an indication that the resilience of the regional transport areas in particular needs to be addressed?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: There has been a restructure in Transport over the last couple of years. Some of it is really around having one transport for all of New South Wales. I'm really pleased with the decision of the Premier to create one Roads portfolio because it is a network, it does connect. It's not like rail where there are closed systems which don't necessarily interact with each other in the same way. That's predominantly the first part of that. Just in terms of the title, resilience is an issue. We know that. Obviously, with the huge amount of damage that we've experienced on the road network since just 2020—in those five years—it has been a major focus for Transport in assisting and supporting councils across the State and communities to get back on track. That's part of that approach, to really ensure that a lot of the projects that have been left languishing since 2020, 2021, 2022 actually did get the attention that they deserved and needed.

The Hon. WES FANG: Do you think it is fair to say that this Government is removing the dual focus—one on being metropolitan areas and the other being on regional areas—and effectively is just looking at it as one broad system for roads?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Well, no, I wouldn't say that actually, Mr Fang. Part of the problem I think we've had in regional New South Wales has been there is not one regional New South Wales. I lived in Walcha. You live in Wagga Wagga. I've lived in Maitland. They are very different. You go out to Brewarrina, to Bourke. So regional, rural and remote—the ARIA areas of remoteness—all have different challenges and different concerns. With a straight regional-metro split, it was kind of, if you like, a binary system that didn't actually speak to those really strong needs—or severe needs, in some of those more remote areas. Then there were things in the metro area that didn't flow out.

Using that example of disaster relief, during Ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred I was in the centre at Macquarie Park, which Transport runs, which has some really amazing data points that it can use to look at predicative weather patterns et cetera, working with SES. That material directly related and is directly available for everyone in the State who is working in those regional areas. When I go out to places—I met with the workforce at Ballina and Grafton. They don't care who really is turning wheels in Macquarie Street or in Elizabeth Street for that matter, but the fact that they have that more direct and immediate access. The other thing is, when you have multiple regions having situations like natural disasters, to have a team that can go and can use the learnings from one area and apply them to another has been really valuable. That is the feedback, certainly, that we've been getting from the people on the ground.

The Hon. WES FANG: As a deputy secretary with "resilience" in his title, Mr Fuller, were you on the ground awaiting the arrival of Ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred?

MATT FULLER: I was on the ground immediately after. We were coordinating centrally with other government agencies right across—

The Hon. WES FANG: Was that at the Macquarie Park site that you were speaking about, Minister?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: There's a variety of sites. There's the SMICC—that's one of the sites I went to; that's the State maritime incident control centre—there's the Macquarie Park facility and there's also the State Emergency Operations Centre. I went to all those sites. I'm sure Mr Fuller, if he wasn't there, was being "Teamsed" in.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr Fuller, when did you arrive in the northern part of New South Wales?

MATT FULLER: I arrived in the northern part of New South Wales following the estimates hearing on the Tuesday immediately after. I was up there on Tuesday evening and spent the rest of the week up there with the Minister.

The Hon. WES FANG: That would have been—I don't have my calendar—about the 11th or 12th or something like that. Would that be reasonable?

MATT FULLER: I would have to check the date. It was in the immediacy after. It obviously crossed landfall on the Saturday. In the immediate pre time frame, myself, members of the Transport executive and our functional leads were involved in a lot of preparation and set-up. I myself was attending daily meetings with all the local members.

The Hon. WES FANG: I will come to some of those questions, Mr Fuller. What I will do is I will keep moving and then we will come to those arrangements that were made.

MATT FULLER: Sure.

The Hon. WES FANG: Of the attendees who are at this estimates today, who was on the ground up in the Northern Rivers area on 6 or 7 March? Was anybody there?

JOSH MURRAY: None of the Transport representatives present was on the ground. We had our representatives there throughout the different divisions.

The Hon. WES FANG: Was that because Minister Jihad Dib was on the ground up there and he had, in effect, lead control as the Minister for Emergency Services to control and delegate all the government responses—along with the Premier, who was also up there at the time?

JOSH MURRAY: While obviously we were aware that the Premier and Minister Dib were there, that wasn't fundamental to the decisions about who from this team was on the ground. We had the responsible senior leaders from Transport who know that region and work out of there, whether it be across the NSW Maritime Road Maintenance and Resilience division or other areas of the organisation.

The Hon. WES FANG: By leave: I table a document.

Document tabled.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, how well do you know David Elliott?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: As a colleague, basically.

The Hon. WES FANG: Did he make arrangements for you to attend an event early last month?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, he did.

The Hon. WES FANG: When were those arrangements made?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: The actual arrangements for the event?

The Hon. WES FANG: Yes.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I don't know. Some time previous to that. I can't remember off the top of my head.

The Hon. WES FANG: Do you remember what date that event was?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, I do. It was 6 March. It was a luncheon, and I did go to it. I get where you're going with this.

The Hon. WES FANG: I haven't asked anything yet.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: All of us were getting briefings here in Sydney and remotely. During the budget estimates hearing that was scheduled to take place, most of them were working with councils predominantly, responding to people like your colleague the member for Clarence around drain clearing in the Clarence area et cetera. I made it very clear to Mr Elliott that I would not cancel that but that I would go and do a 15- or 20-minute presentation—not stay for lunch—and then go back and do the work that I was doing. In fact, if I look at that day—I can find for you where I was that day.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, I haven't asked any questions about that.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: No, because it doesn't suit your narrative.

The Hon. WES FANG: What I might do is continue with my questions in relation to this.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, sure.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, you have indicated in answers to my questions previously that you were relying on the responsible leads that were on the ground up in that area. They were providing the coordination and they were providing any advanced works that needed to be done ahead of this. You would have been aware, Minister, that we obviously thought that budget estimates should have gone ahead at the time, and that it was

crucial that questions were asked of you at that time. You indicated that there was important work that needed to be done on the ground, which is why you and your department bureaucrats could not attend budget estimates. Yet now we discover that not one of your people was on the ground and you were at a luncheon.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Mr Fang, to answer your earlier question, my understanding is that I responded to that invitation on 22 January. I had always intended to attend after I was in the hearing. That made no relevance whatsoever to my attendance at this hearing or whatever, other than to cut it short—in the sense that I only spent that period of time in Parliament for that short period. But for the rest of that day—

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, if you can attend a lunch, how is it you cannot attend budget estimates?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Are you going to talk over me? Do we do that any more? Do I answer the questions and you ask them? No, we don't do that.

The Hon. WES FANG: You're providing irrelevant information. I'm seeking to understand—

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: No. Sorry, you asked me very specifically when I responded to that invitation, and I told you that.

The Hon. WES FANG: Yes, you told me it was in January 2023.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I've also tried to explain to you that the premise on which that request was made to the committee was because a number of the people who were called as witnesses to this hearing on 6 May were required, not to be on the ground in the middle of a cyclone, but to be doing their jobs, which was coordinating, as the central agency, Transport and Roads-related aspects, to ensure that preparation was in place—

The Hon. WES FANG: But, Minister, you just said that you relied on the people who were on the ground for those arrangements.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Pardon?

The Hon. WES FANG: You've said that you relied on the senior management teams that were on the ground up in the Northern Rivers for that coordination. Nobody here was actually on the ground.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: No, that's not correct.

JOSH MURRAY: Mr Fang, just to clarify, you asked who from this team was on the ground. This team was not directly required on the ground at that time. In fact, as secretary, I would have had a concern for additional people to be flying into an emergency zone, particularly given the warnings that were made. What the Transport team did over the course of those days, including the day that was scheduled for parliamentary estimates, was to set up our emergency management routines and schedules.

That meant we were constantly in contact with operations, the Reconstruction Authority, the State Emergency Service and the other government departments that we needed in order to operate that as a departmental responsibility. That also ensured getting all the Maritime resources stationed at Coffs, Ballina and Tweed, and making sure they were being protected. Also, as Mr Fuller reported during that period, we had to make the decision about where road crews couldn't any longer go out and do tree clearing or road clearing. We had to make that call, even though it meant roads would close faster. We couldn't have people out there as the cyclone bore down.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr Fuller, it was important enough for you to be away from budget estimates on the 6th, but you were unable to travel up to the Northern Rivers until after the other roads Minister John Graham's budget estimates because you had to attend that one. Is that correct?

MATT FULLER: The choice was taken to travel up afterwards because, as the secretary said—basically, in terms of emergency response, the SES is the combat agency and they are charged with response. They undertake coordination on behalf of government.

The Hon. WES FANG: Which is exactly the point we made when we said that the estimates hearing on the 6th should have gone ahead. Minister, you were able to attend a luncheon on the same day here at Parliament, yet you were unable to attend estimates. Do you now regret—

MATT FULLER: Mr Fang, I was going to go on to say that there was a series of other responsibilities borne by Transport to fit in with and within the lead of the SES, including our own executive incident management team set-ups across divisional functions that we had to set up and coordinate to ensure that, as the secretary said, our staff were available, present and attending the cyclone, but also at the same time to ensure that they were safe. We also had business continuity planning to undertake.

We had depots that were at risk of deluge of water. Myself, my executive team and other members of this team spent many hours—I would say probably from the Monday prior to that scheduled estimates hearing—working long into the night with local government and with SES. I was attending daily meetings that were led by the SES with all councils and with all local members in the Northern Rivers, helping them prepare and helping them establish what would be required in terms of recovery. When it moved from response to recovery, that was the appropriate time that Transport was represented on the ground by senior management, as with the Minister, and we moved into that phase of the operation in helping those communities attend to the cyclone.

The Hon. WES FANG: I'll move on to a different topic now. Mr Fuller, you've obviously had a change in your job title, and the Minister has indicated that the Government has taken the view that they will look at the road network as one whole network and change the focus away from having two separate Ministers with the separate responsibilities. As part of the restructure that's occurring, you are undertaking consultations with staff at the moment. Is that correct?

MATT FULLER: That is correct, yes. I'm undertaking consultations across our five branches within the road maintenance and resilience division for, effectively, leadership structures that exist under my executive directors, with the exception of one branch, which is the area that manages the Greater Sydney network. They have actually gone to consultation on their full branch right through.

The Hon. WES FANG: Do you, or does the Government, set diversity targets in relation to how you recruit into roles both at the bottom of the structure all the way to the top?

MATT FULLER: We have a range of diversity targets that have been long held within government organisations that we've worked very closely with the Public Service Commission on.

The Hon. WES FANG: What are those targets, Mr Fuller?

MATT FULLER: I'd have to take on notice the exact targets.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, do you know what the targets are?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'd have to take that on notice.

MATT FULLER: I can give you some broad—so, in essence, in terms of our female leadership, we're certainly working towards having equality across our leadership teams at 50 per cent representation. One of the things that I'm very proud of in our division is we have a significant Aboriginal representation of almost 5 per cent, acknowledging that we certainly want to do more to increase that. There are also disability targets set by the Public Service Commission. That has been a long-held position of the public sector.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, is it fair to say that you have got those three areas that you target in relation to diversity? You've got gender, you've got ethnicity—well, Aboriginality is probably a better way to frame that—and then disability. Are they the three areas that you target for inclusion in the workforce?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I would assume there is also cultural and linguistic diversity in there as well, but, yes. Obviously we look at regional people as well, trying to encourage regional—

The Hon. WES FANG: That's exactly where I was going. Is there a regional target for positions in the current restructure? Do you have a target to ensure that there is regional representation on the whole scale of the leadership and workforce matrix?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Transport is one of the most regional departments because we do have a footprint everywhere right across the State. I know this is something that your party has been trying to create fear and division around, which I find interesting.

The Hon. WES FANG: We're not creating the fear and division; we're just reflecting it from your workforce, Minister.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I don't tend to agree on that one. Anyway, be that as it may, I'm not sure that there is a specific target as such. But I'll refer to the secretary, who is in charge of staffing under the GSE Act.

JOSH MURRAY: We don't have a specific regional diversity target in terms of the geography of someone's residence or their workplace. However, one of the overarching plans of the changes to the structure has been to ensure that regional New South Wales is better represented—and I think we spoke about this at the last estimates—by not just having one regional division, where it was felt that if you need something for regional New South Wales, you just go to that division, but ensuring that all the leadership team have responsibility and have an eye to the whole of the State.

The Hon. WES FANG: You would agree though, Mr Murray, wouldn't you, that in order for that to occur, instead of having a division that's focused on regional, in saying that regional New South Wales needs to have better representation across Transport, you need to ensure that you've got regional people throughout Transport? That's the only way that you are going to achieve that goal. Is that correct?

JOSH MURRAY: Absolutely.

The Hon. WES FANG: But you say there is no target to do that.

JOSH MURRAY: We have not established a target based on, as I say, the geography or the postcode of where someone lives.

The Hon. WES FANG: So how will you achieve it?

JOSH MURRAY: We certainly monitor the number of people that we have in regional New South Wales. My last advice on this—and I'd be happy to take it on notice and double-check—was that our regional New South Wales numbers, while we are obviously looking to manage the size of the overall organisation, it was our regional New South Wales footprint that was growing whereas the metropolitan was not.

The Hon. WES FANG: I've got 30 seconds left, so I'm going to squeeze this last question in. I imagine you will have to take it on notice, but if you are able to provide it by the end of the day I would really appreciate it. Could you break down where the roles are across, say, the leadership positions within Transport from when you came into government to now, as to how many positions are based in regional areas from when you came into government and then where we are now, so I can see whether the numbers have increased or decreased? Obviously you've got efficiency dividends that you need to meet and there's obviously a commitment that the senior workforce, the leadership team, will reduce. I'm just keen to see the ratio of the difference in the reduction between metropolitan-based staff and regionally based staff.

JOSH MURRAY: As you are aware, we have changed Transport structure from 10 divisions down to seven. I'm happy to give you the breakdown of the executive population.

The CHAIR: Minister, do you know what the latest estimated total cost is of the new regional train project that we have been talking about this morning?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Again, that's a procurement issue. I would refer to Ms Drover on that.

CAMILLA DROVER: There has been no change to the regional rail budget since it was reset to \$2.29 billion.

The CHAIR: In terms of the modifications to the trains, do you have an estimated or a completion date in terms of when those modifications will be complete?

CAMILLA DROVER: Are you referring to the intercity fleet?

The CHAIR: This is the regional fleet. Have there been modifications requested, I think, by the RTBU?

CAMILLA DROVER: There were some discussions with the RTBU about some modifications to the train, yes. Those modifications have not been implemented.

The CHAIR: So that request has been rejected in terms of what the RTBU was requesting?

CAMILLA DROVER: No, it hasn't been rejected. Those discussions continue. We are looking at the design, so how they may be implemented.

The CHAIR: What are the modifications that have been sought?

CAMILLA DROVER: I'll need to take it on notice. There are a few of them.

The CHAIR: Could you give me an example of a couple, if you are saying there are a few?

CAMILLA DROVER: Yes, there are a number. I'll take that on notice. Some of them are quite technical in nature, so we might bring that back, if that's okay.

The CHAIR: Maybe we can continue the discussion this afternoon. In terms of the CAF production facilities in Spain and making sure that we get all those trains, I understand that officials have visited the manufacturing production facilities in Spain. Has that happened recently, since July?

CAMILLA DROVER: I need to check. Yes, people are going regularly. We have got representatives of Transport for NSW based in Spain; that is obviously efficient. But from time to time, for specialist testing activities, we do send personnel across. They tend to be specialist engineers, and generally they are observing a particular test that is occurring in Spain.

The CHAIR: When was the most recent trip to that and how many people went on it?

CAMILLA DROVER: I'll need to take the exact dates on notice. Often we send two individuals to observe, but I can give you details of when the last trip was.

The CHAIR: If it could come back today, that would be great. In relation to the dispute with CAF over the design changes that I think we have been talking about here, has the Government reached an agreement yet in relation to that dispute? Is that all finalised or are you still in discussions with CAF?

CAMILLA DROVER: We haven't finalised all of those matters. We did have a without-prejudice commercial process that was running. We are still in discussions. There are a number of parties, obviously, given it's a PPP. There are discussions with the project company and its subcontractors, which includes CAF. In parallel to that without-prejudice commercial process, in the background we also have the arbitration process running as well. Preparation for that arbitration process is occurring, but the matter has not been heard in the courts yet, other than preliminary hearings.

The CHAIR: Does the lack of an agreement or dispute resolution being reached with CAF mean that there are delays to the ongoing production or manufacturing of those trains in Spain?

CAMILLA DROVER: We are treating the matters independently. One is the commercial resolution of the claims put by Momentum Trains. That process is running but, independent of that, the trains continue to be manufactured and shipped to Australia. They have some final fit-out works done locally in New South Wales, and then that testing processes commences. We have kept those two processes independent. We have made some progress in the commercial discussions, but I'm not at liberty to, obviously, discuss that in this forum.

The CHAIR: Is that \$2.29 billion expected to be spent over the forward estimates?

CAMILLA DROVER: It is to close out the whole project, so there may be some moneys that go beyond the forward estimates. I'd need to look at the exact cashflow for the project to confirm my answer.

The CHAIR: In terms of the public getting the full 29 in New South Wales, it's not, therefore, certain that we will actually receive that, say, over the next three to four years.

CAMILLA DROVER: With any project, whether it's a fleet project or an infrastructure project, when you put trains into service or you open a road to traffic, there are still other works that continue past the opening date. That's very normal. There is also contingency that is cashflowed at the end of a project as well, so it wouldn't be unusual for moneys to be cashflowed beyond the forwards for a project of that complexity and scale.

The CHAIR: As the Minister for Regional Transport—I have asked a lot of questions of Ms Drover in terms of the detail but, on the policy, commitment and promise to the people of New South Wales, what are you expecting to see and expecting to be able to deliver in terms of these trains? Are you wanting a certain amount on track before the next election? What are you committing to?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: As Ms Drover has stated, it's a very complicated project. It's one that the former Government failed to land anything on in eight years, in terms of a train on track. We are working to get that ahead as much as possible. But one thing I don't want to do is to make commitments about time frames or what that looks like in the end. We understand the concerns of regional New South Wales people who want to have those trains. That's why we're doing the refurbishment of the XPT trains: to improve their reliability but also their amenity for passengers so they have a more comfortable experience. That's why we are taking one of the services out from, I think, Sydney to Grafton. It's so that we can cycle those existing XPTs through that refurbishment process.

We have also done some consultations with TrainLink to look at what services we could provide for rail coach services. That's the long-distance coach services. We were doing that consultation up until probably the end of February, I'd say, or the 14th—I can't remember the exact date off the top of my head. We are trying to improve the services for our train commuters, but I'm really focused on making sure we deliver what we can now. The procurement—obviously, we are having conversations, and we will do our best on that to expedite it.

The CHAIR: Do you think there is any go-slow in terms of budgetary constraints?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: No, that's not my understanding.

The CHAIR: In terms of the budget and your department putting in a budget bid, surely it's your preference that we spend as much as we possibly can in order to hasten the delivery of those trains. Is that your approach?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: My approach is, really, to let the procurement people get on with it and get it done as quickly as possible. Ms Drover has been working on this for some time. I'm not in a position to advise her of what needs to happen in terms of budget bids or whatever.

The CHAIR: How often do you get an update on the situation?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Formally, probably every couple of months, but I probably get something in between that. We do talk about it when there are things that have changed or there are significant events with testing or whatever the thing is.

The CHAIR: Every couple of months doesn't sound like it's urgent or a priority.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I think it's important to say that I'm not the lead Minister on this, and dragging bureaucrats in to brief me when it's not my area of delivery—I would rather that she or any of the public servants are spending that time actually negotiating and doing the really complex and technical work that Ms Drover is doing. Again, I congratulate her for her determined doggedness in getting this project to where it is now because it really has not been easy. She knows that I would like to get those trains out as soon as possible on the network, and Ms Drover shares that, I am sure, from the conversations we have had, as does Minister Graham and as did Minister Haylen before him.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I will stick with silica for a few minutes. Given the high levels of RCS recorded at some of these worksites, what assurances can you provide to surrounding road users and pedestrians that they weren't exposed to airborne silica dust during these phases of construction?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I think I would have to refer that to Ms Drover, just in the sense that I'm not an expert on silica. It would not be appropriate for me, and I don't know that she will be able to do that either. Obviously, there have been investigations by SafeWork, and they are working on that. Obviously, the site will be examined for those issues, but I'll refer to Ms Drover on that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Ms Drover, can you give any assurances that pedestrians and nearby road users weren't exposed during this tunnelling and in areas where there were open-cut roadwork zones?

CAMILLA DROVER: I'd just confirm that our principal contractors have a legal obligation to meet the health and safety Act. It is absolutely their obligation to ensure that. We do provide a level of oversight.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: If you look at the documents, they are failing in their legal obligations. To be frank, they are treating the SafeWork infringement notices as a cost of doing business, if they are ever getting a fine. In general, if you look at the documents, SafeWork says, "We may fine you." It's pretty poor, what's going on under the ground.

CAMILLA DROVER: We do share your concern. There is no point delivering this project if workers are being harmed in any way. That is our primary consideration. If there are things we can do better in this field, we are. In recent years we have had a number of workshops, initiated by Transport for NSW, with our tunnelling contractors to see what additional measures or new innovation we can apply. Some of the innovation is being applied at the Western Harbour Tunnel project. For example, they are trialling a remote roadheader. That means that workers don't need to be at the cutting face where the silica is generated, and they can control the roadheader—the pilot is 30 metres away. But, eventually, the control of that roadheader could occur from on the surface, outside the tunnel. That's some of the technology that is currently being trialled.

It sounds rudimentary, but it is actually very effective—a boot wash. Before workers get in the cab of their roadheader, they wash their boots. Therefore, the dust doesn't get into that cab. There is a lot of focus on this. We do appreciate that this is a significant issue, and it's an emerging issue, but we are absolutely committed to providing the safest environment for the workforce. There has been a lot of attention on tunnelling projects. I think there perhaps could be more attention on other areas of works that generate silica, not just in tunnelling.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I'm sure we'll eventually get there. As you said, it's an emerging issue.

CAMILLA DROVER: I can share that in the tunnelling space we've also moved to different types of technology. Historically, face masks were the standard, but now on our tunnelling projects the contractors offer what we call a Versaflo apparatus, which is custom fitted for workers. It provides a high level of protection. It also allows workers to maintain their beard or facial hair, which is often a concern.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Picking up on the remote header technology, are you aware that some of the road headers they've been using have been open cab?

CAMILLA DROVER: No, I'm not aware. In my experience I've never seen an open-cab road header.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: The documents indicate that some of the headers that have been used have been open headers. Minister, does that concern you?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: It concerns me when any worker is placed at risk. Obviously, to the specific situation, that is something that I'm happy to take your advice on, if you want to give me more information specifically and there's something that we can specifically do. But I think the point is that we have set up the taskforce. We have been very clear with SafeWork that they need to be proactive and a tough cop on the beat. I've given you a commitment that we want to be, and we are being, more vigilant on this issue and we are looking at ways to reduce in all applications. So there's a number of initiatives there. For me, the people that have already suffered as a result of this, each one of them, it's too many. We need to do better and we don't want that happening on our watch. Obviously, we're doing everything we can to address that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Are we doing post-construction air quality assessments on completed projects to see whether there is still residual silica dust? Are those reports public?

CAMILLA DROVER: For tunnelling projects we do air quality monitoring before construction, there is monitoring done during construction and then there is post-construction air quality monitoring. Those results are published publicly.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Minister, I might jump to Sheahan Bridge. You made an announcement around contributing \$4 million out of a total funding envelope of \$20 million for some work being done there. Is that for the whole works or is that just for the planning?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I think that one is for the planning. Obviously, it's a very key bridge. It's \$20 million jointly funded, so it's on the 80-20. Basically, the contract that we awarded back at the end of January was for the concept design for the bridge's upgrade or replacement. The current bridge was built in about 1977, so it is pretty old. When the loading was increased from 68 to 85 tonnes in 2020 on the northbound bridge, that was for the safety of motorists. Higher productivity vehicles still have to use a permit to travel on the New South Wales section. It is challenging for us. Obviously, it's one of the oldest and busiest highways in New South Wales, so we are trying to ensure it can meet the challenges of twenty-first century freight.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: What criteria and evaluation processes were employed to select the contract for the concept design development and environmental assessment?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I will refer you to Ms Drover on that.

CAMILLA DROVER: Sorry, what was the question?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: What criteria and evaluation processes were employed to select the winning contractor for the concept design development and environmental assessment?

CAMILLA DROVER: We would usually run an open tender. So the specification—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Was that the case in this one? You said "usually".

CAMILLA DROVER: I wouldn't see why we wouldn't. I can double-check that and confirm, but usually it would be an open tender. Consultants would submit their pricing along with their capability, experience, availability of staff et cetera, and their program for that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: As part of that process, would you look at their successful or unsuccessful delivery of projects?

CAMILLA DROVER: If it's a concept design, it will be a consultant tendering for that work, not the construction contractor that will, therefore, come later and build the project. The reason I was distracted—I understand that in relation to the silica issue, that may have been SafeWork's standing order, which is why I'm not familiar with it.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: That's fine. Minister, according to your media release, WSP Australia has been selected to provide the concept design. Would I be correct in saying that WSP Australia is the holding company for WSP Structures, who were the structural engineering firm contracted to the Opal Tower building in Homebush, which infamously had cracking and needed a mass evacuation of 51 units? Is it the same company?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I don't know. I can't tell you that. I would have refer you to the department or take it on notice.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Does anyone within the department know whether it is the same company that built the Opal Tower that is potentially going to be designing a heavy vehicle bridge?

CAMILLA DROVER: I don't know that for certain. Obviously I am not across the Opal Tower procurement and issues. It would make sense that they are related entities. We can take that on notice and confirm.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Minister, would it concern you if it is the case that a company that clearly failed quite dramatically in the Opal Tower development is now potentially designing a piece of road infrastructure? I wouldn't trust them to build my backyard shed.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Mr Banasiak, I would hate to comment on that, not knowing the relationship for sure.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I am happy for you to take it on notice and then provide some comments back as to whether you are comfortable.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Between that event and now, there could have been a number of changes within company personnel and directors or relationships. To be frank, I don't think it would be appropriate to be running commentary on that, given that I would have to investigate all of the details of both companies to this point to then make comment. I just don't think that's an appropriate use. I am happy to take it on notice to give you that information, but I don't think it's appropriate to make that commentary.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Minister, our only dedicated regional train service provider, NSW Trains, is being axed and 100 people are going to lose their jobs, all to fund the pay rise for Sydney train drivers. What is your comment about that?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I reject the premise of your question.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: On what basis?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: On a number of bases. It is part of a negotiation between the union and Transport and I am not a facilitator. I am not in a position to comment on that. I am not in those negotiations, firstly. It has been a scare campaign run by your leader, if he still is your leader today, about the—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I don't think there is any need for the asides, Minister. Point of order—

The CHAIR: Order! We need to treat witnesses with respect at all times.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: There is scare campaign running, saying that jobs are going to be lost out of the regions, which is not necessarily the case, even if that does progress.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So you can commit and guarantee that those 100 jobs will not be lost, Minister?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I am saying to you very clearly that it was a topic of discussion in union negotiations. I am happy to let the secretary make more comment on that. But no, I am not going to be dragged into scare campaigns. It was your leader that was also putting out media releases when we were actually putting out consultation to increase TrainLink coach services to say that they were not going—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Can you tell us, Minister, how many people will lose their jobs?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Sorry, I am still giving you the example of your leader—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Can you tell us how many people will lose their jobs?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: —running scare campaigns to say we were going to cut rail coach services when the whole intention of that consultation was to increase them.

The Hon. WES FANG: Why don't you want to answer the question, Minister? Why don't you want to answer how many jobs will be cut?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Mr Fang, as I have said to you, that is a negotiation between the union and Transport.

The Hon. WES FANG: So the union gets to decide how many jobs are cut in regional New South Wales?

The CHAIR: Order!

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: That is not correct.

The Hon. WES FANG: That is what you just answered.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: That is not correct and you know that.

The CHAIR: Order! Thank you, Minister. I think you've answered that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Minister, what is the anticipated timeline for the Sheehan Bridge design phase?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I will just see if I've got that with me. Do you want to ask me the next question while I look for it?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: My next question is related. What are the expected key milestones?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: The expected preferred option will be identified for public display in mid 2026. That is when we are looking at doing that. Then, obviously, it goes through the rest of the processes.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: So mid 2026 it will go through a process of public consultation. Then what is your best estimate in terms of when it will enter into a construction phase if it requires construction?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I don't have that time frame. This is one project where I am particularly concerned that it got to this stage before we got to government. As I said, it is one of the oldest and busiest highways in Australia. It is a major connection between Sydney and Melbourne. It should have been looked at well before now. Unfortunately, it wasn't. We are doing everything we can to expedite that. That's why we've started on the concept design and environmental assessment to really get this work underway.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Is there going to be a local proponent involved in the planning and construction phases?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Certainly we will try to do that. We always do try to have local procurement throughout our projects.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Even in the planning phase you plan to have some local involvement in that, or is it more construction?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Across Transport and across government there is a desire to get more local procurement at all stages of procurement. It's not always possible in every project. We do as best we can.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Do Government members have any questions?

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Government members have no questions, Chair.

The CHAIR: Wonderful.

The Hon. WES FANG: Come on! You're going to need more than 15 minutes to clean up that mess.

The CHAIR: We will now break 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. NICHOLE OVERALL: Minister, in the Regional Roads Fund, to reiterate, 23 of 28 projects went to Labor seats, or 87 per cent of the list—more than \$290 million out of a \$334 million budget. Where did that \$334 million come from?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Overall, I'd just like to correct something there. Of the 28 projects in the Regional Roads Fund, when they were announced, 15 were in Coalition seats, so over half. One was in an Independent seat, and then there are also three in Nationals seats as we speak today as well. I think you said that they were—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'll qualify again there, Minister. My counting says 13, but let's not quibble. Let's move on. Where did the \$334 million come from?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: There were a couple of different places. One was on the failed election commitment of the former New South Wales Government on the reclassification, so with some money from that, and then I think some was from Restart in the end. But you would have to probably direct the exact breakdown to the Treasurer because he's in charge of the budget and where money comes from.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Did any of that money come from the Snowy Hydro fund?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Actually, you could be correct on that. That's what I'm saying—you should direct that to the Treasurer. My main concern is getting the roads in our State upgraded.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: You're the Minister for Regional Roads, Minister.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'm not the Minister for the budget. I'm not the Treasurer.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: This is your project that you have issued numerous releases on, but you can't tell us how you've been able to reallocate that funding.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: As I have said to you, it's not my decision where the money comes from. That's part of the budget processes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: But you think that it came from the Snowy Hydro fund.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: No, I said you should ask the Treasurer about that question.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: If it did come from the Snowy Hydro fund, your Government has also substantially cut the Snowy Mountains Special Activation Precinct. Have you robbed Peter to pay Paul for this election slush fund?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: As I said, Ms Overall, it's not my decision where the money comes from. That's a decision for Cabinet and the Treasurer and ERC—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: One of the projects on that list, Minister—

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: —so you should direct those questions there.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: —and, yes, as you very kindly pointed out earlier, when I was the member for Monaro, I am very aware of it—is the Ellerton Drive roundabout. On 15 March 2025 you issued yet another release on this multimillion-dollar intersection upgrade in the now Labor-held seat of Monaro. You claimed in that release, "we've already provided short term relief by installing the right-turn lane earlier this year". However, Minister, that isn't entirely truthful, is it?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: You've got the story there, so what are you trying to say?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I do. What I'm trying to say is that you have said in your media release that "we"—as in your Labor Government—have installed a right-turn lane.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Did I say "we", as in the Government? Did I say that? Just checking.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: You said:

... we've already provided short term relief by installing the pedestrian refuge and additional right-turn lane earlier this year.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: This is a problem in Monaro. You have this real thing about ownership of government. Government is government, isn't it?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: No, I'm just clarifying—

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I talk about Transport for NSW as "we" and the New South Wales Government as "we".

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: —some of the statements that you're making, Minister.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Pardon?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'm clarifying some of the statements that you're making, claiming things that are on your list. Here's a media release from 7 February 2023—and, wouldn't you know it, issued by me when I was the member for Monaro—to announce the modification of the Ellerton Drive approach to include an additional through lane and a right lane. "Critical work is funded and construction will commence as soon as possible." Minister, again, in your release you're talking about "12 years of neglect", and yet the information that you are producing is, at very best, misleading.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: You were part of the former Government.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I was—proudly so.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: The Government, which is what that release is issued to, is saying that it has—and government is continuous—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I don't see any credit in there for the former Government, Minister.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: It was here long before and will be here long after people like you and I are in these seats. It's a privilege and an honour.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Point of order: I've let it go five or six times, but we just have this situation where the Minister begins to answer, a couple of sentences come out of her mouth and then she's cut off with interjections from the questioner. As a matter of fairness, the Minister should be allowed to answer the question before another one is asked.

The CHAIR: I will uphold the point of order this time. Particularly for Hansard, but for everybody else as well, if we could allow the Minister to answer the question. But, Minister, that doesn't mean that you are allowed to speak for five minutes and waste the time of the member, because that's where we get frustrated. Ms Overall, if you could continue.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Sorry, I was interjecting there, Minister, but I am clarifying the point that you are claiming work here that has been done during the term of your Government; however, I don't see any credit for the former Government for the work that was commenced and funded as part of that. Again, I'll come back to the point that the information that you are producing is, at best, misleading.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Just to clarify, you're upset because eight weeks before you lost the seat, you put out a release saying that you were doing something. The government of the day, before the election and after the election, has done work and, as the Minister for the government of the day, we have referred to that.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: You have continued the work that was already funded and in train, Minister.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I am sorry, Ms Overall, that I didn't—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Not upset at all.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: —put in a big thank you.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: You can do so now.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Seven weeks before the election—I don't know. Was that an election commitment or had you done the work? Had you advocated? Were there other works you'd done? I'm sorry—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Yes, actually, we have.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: —if you felt hurt and left out.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Again, I'm happy to table this as well. "Concept designs have just been completed with the preferred line of traffic lights at this intersection"—something else that you're claiming in your media release there. "The next phase of detailed design is about to commence, and the project is currently funded to complete this stage and deliver the final business case." Let me get to that, Minister.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: So, Ms Overall, you are disagreeing that there should have been money spent. Did you have funding? My understanding, when I spoke to the council before the election—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: My release says there was funding.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: —was that you didn't have it.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Well, clearly my release says that there was funding.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: So was that funded, or was it an election commitment on behalf of your Government?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Moving on, Minister—

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Can you just check for me?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: You're not actually here to ask the questions; I am.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order—

The Hon. WES FANG: We ask the questions, Minister.

The CHAIR: Order! Mr Nanva has taken a point of order, not surprisingly.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Paragraph 19 of the procedural fairness resolution requires courtesy to be extended to the witness, which hasn't been happening. Also, I have great sympathy for the people in Hansard trying to transcribe whatever that was.

The CHAIR: I will uphold the point of order. Again, we'll treat witnesses with respect. We can get our issues across and hear the witness at the same time. Ms Overall, if you could continue with that in mind.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Minister, I'll also note that in your media release you state that \$19 million has been allocated to this Ellerton Drive roundabout project as part of the Regional Roads Fund election slush fund list.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: That's your words for it.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Can you tell us whether this project has had a business case prepared?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Overall, I think, in answering that, I just do want to look at your release, which I've just seen. You're saying in that release, "I'm pleased to announce the modification to include an additional through lane and right lane", so I don't believe you had completed that work.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: The funding, I think, is there.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: You said, "Construction will commence as supply resourcing allows", so it hadn't been completed.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Critical funding provided.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: So it was completed under our watch, not under yours—just talked about.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Funding provided.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: It doesn't matter. The work was done by the government of the day. The concept design had been completed, with the preferred option of traffic lights at the intersection, but you didn't have a funding pathway for that. We have delivered that funding pathway through our election commitment, and you can just say thank you—it's fine. Really, I don't know what you're complaining about. Do you want us to not do that, or do you want to re-prosecute the election campaign of 2023?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Again, if we can move on to the next question that I'll be asking you, Minister. The \$19 million—has this had a business case for this project as part of this regional roads list?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I can get an update for you from Mr Hayes there.

ANTHONY HAYES: I can provide an answer to that one. A final business case has been developed for the project. It's in the final stages of our internal assurance review at the moment, but I can confirm a final business case has been completed, yes.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I can also confirm—on this release, you talk about the additional \$7.926 million in funding for emergency repairs, and you haven't given us any credit there for our regional emergency road repair funding, which was more than double that figure. It was under your Government that regional councils got less than \$2,000 per kilometre for emergency road repairs and metro councils were getting \$10,000, and we put in our additional funding for that. You are welcome for that too.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Thanks. Minister, I reference yet another media release of yours from 8 October 2024 in relation to Towards Zero Safer Roads, claiming Labor Government "is continuing work to improve road safety in regional NSW with \$45 million to be provided to council-nominated road safety projects". How many projects are involved in that?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'll have to get you that number.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: There are 23, Minister.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Okay, good.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: The time frame for that?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I believe that one is over the next three years. Ms Webb, can you remember? I think it's over three years. Yes, three years.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Three years is correct. You say "council-nominated". I reckon there would be more than 23 projects for councils when it comes to road safety. That's an average of about \$2 million each. How was the final list compiled?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Certainly there was a lot, but the lack of maintenance under your previous Government was astounding and did create a lot of issues in that space. The road safety fund is determined within the Centre for Road Safety and Transport. I don't have any role in choosing which projects or whatever make it.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Who does?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: It's around the safety considerations of the projects.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So there is a process through that?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I will refer you to Mr Carlon.

BERNARD CARLON: Yes, there is a comprehensive process for analysis of all of the benefits associated with the upgrades. Councils submit through a portal, which actually identifies the benefits of each of the changes that are being implemented. Whether it happens to be audio tactile or barrier systems or wide centrelines, they are all based on evaluations that have been done on the road safety benefits and trauma reduction. Calculations are then done about what is the best road safety benefit, in terms of trauma reduction and risk reduction, and the projects are prioritised on that basis.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So there is the prioritisation of that. I imagine sometimes, if there are numerous projects that are put forward, it can be difficult around that prioritisation as well, even following the formula or the modelling that you rely on?

BERNARD CARLON: Yes. The strategy, or the business case, which has been established and that INSW have completed their assurance of, actually identifies that process. The most cost-effective trauma reduction projects are actually implemented through that process that I've identified.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: The most cost-effective?

BERNARD CARLON: Cost effective in reducing trauma, because the Government has a target for 50 per cent reduction of fatalities by 2030 and 30 per cent reduction on serious injuries. It's on that basis that the projects are actually identified and prioritised.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Thanks very much. Minister, in the media release you also note:

A highlight of the funding will be the delivery of three High Pedestrian Activity Areas to regional suburbs ... to protect pedestrians. Where are those projects located?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I would have to go back and have a look at the release and the full projects, unless it's in there. Are you reading from it? Do you want to give it up?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Fingal Bay, Charlestown and Wollombi Village.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: All right.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Are they all Labor-held seats, Minister?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I think they are, but that's not the case with all of the projects in that area.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: To quote from a great Aussie movie, "What a coincidence! Deidre Chambers!"

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Actually, I totally refute the imputation that you are making, because this is—

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Point of order—

The CHAIR: Order! Minister, we now have a point of order taken by Mr Buttigieg.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: The Minister attempts to articulate an answer fully, and just because the member doesn't like it, it doesn't mean she doesn't get to answer.

The CHAIR: I'm not sure you are taking a point of order on a particular—what's the word I'm looking for?

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: That interchange that was just had.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Yes, I remind the member once again to please treat the witness with respect. We can ask questions and get a lot of this without—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Certainly, Chair. I'm not trying to be disrespectful at all.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Overall, I note your interest, and I'm really pleased that you are interested in road safety funding, because it is important.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Absolutely.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I think that perhaps it would be good if we arranged a briefing for you with Mr Carlon to give you an understanding of how the program works, because there is no political intervention in the allocation of funds.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Great to hear.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: It is done in that way. If you go back and have a look at the other Towards Zero Safer Roads programs that were done on State projects, there was more than \$120 million in the western region, \$46 million in the southern region and \$15 million in the north of the State. You can see from that there is a geographic spread of these areas, and there is certainly no—one of the things I've been very clear on is that I don't play politics with road safety. I firmly reject and find it offensive that you would be making that imputation on road safety. I'm just appalled.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: No imputations at all, Minister. I'm simply saying that there are many regional areas crying out for better pedestrian safety and high-pedestrian activity areas. Just one—Kings Highway in Bungendore. I'm sure you're very aware. No imputations.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: If you go on the website, you can find the other ones, which might be in your former electorate, which might be of interest to you.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Let's move on, Minister. Again, you're talking about road safety, and, of course, we are all very passionate and committed about that. As of 31 August 2024 there were twice as many lives lost on regional roads than metropolitan. I suppose you might be aware of those numbers?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, it's a longstanding issue that regional—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Do you have the most recently updated numbers for the 2024 fatalities on New South Wales roads, particularly regional roads, after 31 August?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes. For that particular date, sorry?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Following—well, yes.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: You want me to go and find a particular date, 31 August 2024?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: For 2024 what were the final numbers?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: The final numbers for 2024 was, I believe, 340, and then in the regional, I think it was 248. The figures I have got say 344, but 340 was the overall view. Mr Carlon would be able to give you the more detailed explanation on that.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Very distressing. How has 2025 started?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: It was going better. In the last week, we've had a very bad week with losses of people on the road. We are actually currently running at six ahead, whereas a couple of weeks ago we were running behind. My genuine concern is that every death on our roads is one too many, and I am very concerned about the road toll. We have been throwing everything we can at it, with a number of legislative, financial and policy actions and promotion of road safety messaging. Every action we can take, we have been taking.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: What are the latest statistics around motorcyclists dying on our roads?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Motorcyclists is one where there has been a sharp increase. Hence, we are having the motorcycle road safety forum on 29 April, and that is to look at how we can improve those outcomes for motorcyclists. I'm happy to get Bernard to give you more detail on that. I can, if you want, but I think it's better if you hear it directly from Bernard.

BERNARD CARLON: Year to date, we have 24 motorcycle fatalities, which is eight more than the same period last year, and we had 68 motorcycle fatalities last year, which was a significant increase. So the forum—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Sorry to interrupt, but almost 20 per cent of deaths on New South Wales roads last year were of motorcycle riders and more than half of them in regional New South Wales. Is that correct?

BERNARD CARLON: That's correct, yes. So it is slightly less in terms of the proportion for all road fatalities in regional New South Wales. For motorcyclists, it's a significant proportion, which does happen within the metropolitan area as well. Certainly the round table taking place, which will include motorcycle advocates as well as road safety experts, academics and community organisations that are concerned about this area, will be

looking at what other measures can be implemented in order to tackle this increase that we have seen in fatalities but, also disturbingly, an increase in serious injuries as well over the last five years. There have been around 13,000 motorcyclists actually admitted to hospital, seriously injured on our roads. We will be looking at protective equipment and motorcycle gear, and how we can incentivise and potentially regulate the use of safety equipment. Looking at our graduated licensing system for motorcycle riders is one of the actions in the Road Safety Action Plan.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'm going to run out of time, so I'm sorry to interrupt. You or the Minister may be able to answer this question. It's obviously critical that we do this, but the safety round table that you are doing hasn't happened to this point. Do we have a time frame for when we can expect something to emerge from that?

BERNARD CARLON: There's already been substantial work done in terms of the Graduated Licensing Scheme for motorcycle riders, as it was an action in the Road Safety Action Plan and a comprehensive analysis of the systems operating in other jurisdictions has been done. That will be made available to all of those experts who gather on the 29th, for their input, as well as other initiatives that people bring forward on the day as well.

The CHAIR: Mr Carlon, in relation to that, have those statistics shown a greater uptake of motorcycles in terms of increasing usage per capita? Can any of that be accounted for in any way because of that?

BERNARD CARLON: We have seen an increase in licensing, particularly for the period over COVID. Essentially, though, this increase that we've seen in the last 12 months is the highest level it has reached in 10 years. So whilst we did have a reduction over the last couple of years of motorcycle fatalities, that has peaked. Therefore, the Government wants to respond and has asked us to put together this round table to see what other initiatives could be implemented to tackle that problem.

The CHAIR: Minister, turning to the issue of the lack of transport services in the Northern Rivers region, an example is the Casino train station, which I understand is the only station servicing the Northern Rivers. It has three daily departures to Sydney, which takes 12 hours, and one to Brisbane, which leaves at 2.19 a.m. Those services are frequently booked out in advance. What is being done to look at increasing train services to Casino, and the Northern Rivers more generally?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: This goes back to the questioning around the regional rail fleet. Obviously it's difficult to put on more train services when our existing XPT fleet is at capacity and needs significant work to keep it going until the new trains arrive. The rolling stock issue is a difficult one. That's one of the reasons why we wanted to do and why we did the TrainLink consultations, to look at how we can provide better services for people who want to use long-distance public transport. We're using the best available that we have to do that work. That's why we've also gone to the community. The other thing that we're doing as well is with the strategic regional integrated transport plans. We have a website up. We're asking people to look at that site to identify needs and that's going into the future planning. To my knowledge, that will be one of the most deep consultations that Transport has done, in terms of asking community what they need in terms of transport.

The CHAIR: Is the consultation that you were referring to currently open for submissions right now? I thought that had been undertaken for some time.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Every area can have input on the website. There are two—South East and Tablelands, and the Hunter—which have gone to the stage of having their final comments being collated into the draft. I always forget the exact dates for each one, but even if it's not open for formal consultation at this point, there's a pin drop function on the website for people to put their comments into and that is going to the planners as a regular update.

The CHAIR: This is the XPT Life Extension Project you're talking about, in terms of Grafton to Sydney?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes.

The CHAIR: I understand that a couple of the rail services between Grafton and Sydney have been replaced by premium coaches. Has that happened?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'm not sure, sorry.

The CHAIR: Is that why there are only two a day to Sydney, because there are coaches as well?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'll let Roger give you the details on it—to be clear.

ROGER WEEKS: We have not yet started the replacement coach service. We've just executed the contract. The successful coach operator is now in procurement to purchase brand-new coaches to run on that

service, so we will be able to offer that premium offering to people who use the Grafton service. At the moment we run six services a day, north and south. One from Sydney to Grafton, one from Sydney to Casino and one from Sydney to Brisbane, and of course the return services makes the six. We will be replacing the Sydney to Grafton service, as you've indicated, with that premium coach. We're expecting that to commence at the end of April.

The CHAIR: What's the expected time frame for the replacement coaches to be in operation? When are train travellers being told they can have their services back? Will services increase in frequency after that as a result?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: You can answer that.

ROGER WEEKS: The replacement coach service is scheduled for a 12-month period. That will enable us to accelerate the XPT power cars and all of the carriages through the life extension program. We will then return the XPT onto the Sydney to Grafton service. The life extension program is not going to give us any additional capacity, so we're not getting extra train sets. The current offering that we have across the network—the XPT runs to Dubbo. It runs, as I said, those six services on the North Coast and it runs to Melbourne. We have no capacity to increase the number of XPT services that we're running. Once the life extension—that 12 months—has concluded, we'll reinstate the XPT onto the Sydney to Grafton service.

The CHAIR: Minister, with the consultation that's being undertaken, for example, in the regional Northern Rivers area, I assume—I'm not sure what that time frame is. A lot of tourists go particularly to that area. It has a reasonably high population, especially over that time. Lots of people will request more frequent train services, more connection, in that area. Mr Weeks said that there's no capacity. Is that going into the future, despite this community consultation, that trains are not an option?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: At the moment with the XPTs, they're not having the regional rail fleet. That is the issue. That's why there are two—I know there's a lot of consultation going on. The SRITPs, the strategic regional integrated transport plans, have consultation upcoming, and I'll give you the date for that in a second. We also had the TrainLink consultation, which is for coach services. As part of that, we were looking at different services, for example, between Armidale and Port Macquarie and services to connect Wauchope with other rail services. We had put that out for consultation. Also, there were some Northern Rivers and Gold Coast and Brisbane connections and services that were put forward in that TrainLink coach consultation package, so that's one piece. Then the SRITPs are mode agnostic. It's looking at what is potentially available for all modes of transport—active transport, public transport, cars, everything—and that one is the North Coast plan. It's set to be delivered in early 2026.

The CHAIR: Are you talking about coaches at this point?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: There are two. The TrainLink coach consultation has completed. Transport is looking at that; TrainLink is looking at that and seeing where they can go. The North Coast Strategic Regional Integrated Transport Plan, which is the mode-agnostic plan, has got 285 contributions so far on the pin drop that people can do. They can also send feedback to us before we get involved in formal consultation processes. That will be looking at a broader remit than has been used before, to ensure that not just councils but also all local members, whatever their political affiliations, are involved.

The CHAIR: Yes, great. Another issue now, Minister: Have you been briefed on the situation of koala deaths on Appin Road in south-west Sydney since you came to your new portfolio?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I have been broadly briefed. I've seen stuff, but I haven't had a formal briefing with the two weeks of Parliament. But I have spoken to your colleague, Ms Smith, about her bill. Obviously we've been doing some trials on a whole range of things. I did see something come through around work that we are doing on that road.

The CHAIR: I'm particularly interested in the underpasses that I think Lendlease at some point had promised to build with consultation with Transport for NSW by mid-2025, which is only a couple of months away. My question—maybe we can come back to it—is how that is going?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I have got a presentation on it that I did receive earlier in the year. But there are a number of things there. It's probably something to talk—

The CHAIR: We can come back to it. That's fine.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Minister, I might go to the Richmond Bridge project. The community has long demanded a flood-free river crossing west of Richmond that also diverts traffic away from the township. Currently your Government's proposal does neither. The community was willing to somewhat accept your original

proposal of a bypass and duplication. Can you explain to us why you shifted from that original proposal to a proposal that doesn't satisfy the community?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I will get maybe the secretary to talk about that—Mr Hayes, sorry.

ANTHONY HAYES: I think it is defined as metropolitan, so unfortunately I don't have anything on Richmond.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I don't have the detail that you're wanting to probably get, given that I've only just taken over the portfolio in two weeks.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: There is no-one here that can answer a question about the Richmond Bridge project as a road project?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Camilla, have you got anything that you can talk to?

CAMILLA DROVER: Yes, I think \$500 million has been committed by the Federal and State governments for that project. We've looked at the staging of what can be delivered within that funding envelope and that's what we are proceeding with.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Can you explain why you shifted the design or proposal away from what was originally presented to the community? The council has written to me. They also provided a submission to Transport for NSW that they don't accept the proposal. They've got serious concerns around its ability to deliver a flood-free river crossing as well as several concerns around the impact on local traffic and safety of residents. I'm wondering why there was a shift in what was being proposed.

CAMILLA DROVER: I can take that on notice and bring back some more detailed information. I know when it was announced, a strategic scheme was presented. We have done a lot more work since then, including consultation with the community. We've now come forward with the preferred option for the first stages of that project. But, as I said, I'll bring you back some further detail about the exact process that was undertaken and the rationale for why we've arrived at where we have.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: How much will it cost to complete stage 2B? If we have the funding of \$500 million, why are we not funding it in full? Why are we staging it?

CAMILLA DROVER: My understanding is we are intending on spending that full \$500 million.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: On stage 2B?

CAMILLA DROVER: I'll just need to take that on notice.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Perhaps you can take on notice whether any of that funding will go to making improvements to the residential streets that will be impacted in the construction phase. There are concerns from the council as to whether a lot of those local roads will be able to handle the extra burden with the rat-running that will occur when detours are put in place—so whether any of that money has been earmarked for necessary upgrades and maintenance.

CAMILLA DROVER: I'll take that on notice.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: We might come back to that.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I would say that the review of environmental factors—the submissions only closed on 21 February. The most up-to-date information I've got is that there is a submissions report being done. But I'd also be keen to meet with council. Obviously I've met with a lot of the local members, particularly in Western Sydney.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Have you been provided a copy of the local council's submission?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: No, not at this stage.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Would you like one?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'd love one. I appreciate it.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Can I just go back to silica, Minister. CPB Contractors Pty Ltd is a fairly prominent player in our major infrastructure projects: M4 East, new M5, M4-M5 Link Tunnels, M12, M6 stage one, Rozelle interchange, Western Harbour Tunnel. They were recently fined \$30,000 by the NSW EPA for unauthorised night-time works on the Warringah Freeway upgrade. In the documents on the SO 52 regarding silica, they've been issued multiple improvement notices under section 191 of the Work Health and Safety Act spanning several projects in years all related to workplace safety breaches, which indicates a pattern of

noncompliance. Are past breaches, including SafeWork-issued improvement notices and EPA fines, considered during the tender assessment process for recent or current projects?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'd have to refer you to Ms Drover on the selection of contractors and the processes that are undertaken there.

CAMILLA DROVER: CPB Contractors do deliver a large volume of work for Transport for NSW. They are part of the joint venture contract for the M6. We're aware that SafeWork are doing an assessment of the silicosis risk on that project, so I'm not at liberty to talk about that at the moment, because that investigation is still underway. The matter that they were fined for relating to the Warringah Freeway—that was obviously a different issue not related to silica. It was to do with night-time works. What I can say is we have what we call the contract performance score. We measure all our contractors against this score. Safety is definitely one of the factors that is considered. We do take into consideration those contract performance scores when we are doing shortlistings both at the EOI—expression of interest—stage but also at the tender stage too. Yes, contractors' performance, including safety, is a consideration when we are awarding work.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Can you tell us how CPB Contractors scored?

CAMILLA DROVER: We do it on an ongoing basis, so their scores move from time to time.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: When they were awarded the contract for the Warringah Freeway upgrade, what was their score? To give us a sense of what that score means from a numerical or quantitative point of view, can you give us some detail—

CAMILLA DROVER: I don't have that at hand, given they were awarded that contract—it was, I think, 2021. What I can tell you, though—we do that score for individual projects and then we obviously aggregate that per contractor. It gets a little bit complex, given CPB is part of a JV for both the Warringah and the M6 and they're with different JV partners. Their partner for the Warringah Freeway is Downer and on the M6 it's Ghella and UGL. That is why we do it both at the individual project level and also at the aggregated contractor level. The other tool that we've also recently piloted and are now rolling out across all our projects is a 360 health tool, where we assess both the contractors, the consultants and our own team on these projects. That's looking at the culture and health of the project and that's providing some very valuable insights into overall project health, and success and culture. That again goes to safety, along with some other metrics as well, including the level and nature of commercial claims on the project. We're finding that very useful as an early warning sign of any issues on projects.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Is there any formal threshold or cap on the number or severity of breaches before a contractor would be disqualified from taking on any government work or future government work?

CAMILLA DROVER: It is more of a qualitative assessment, but we've got a healthy competition in this market. We want contractors that are behaving and performing, particularly in the safety space. If we've got concerns and repeat offenders and any signs of poor culture, we will absolutely be addressing that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: What safeguards do you have in place to prevent those repeat offenders from washing their record through joint ventures or subcontracting arrangements?

CAMILLA DROVER: I wouldn't characterise it as washing their record through joint ventures.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Sorry, that's my characterisation. Diluting, hiding or understating their breaches—whatever word you would like to use. What safeguards are in place to stop that from occurring through joint ventures or subcontracting?

CAMILLA DROVER: I think we know our contractors reasonably well. If we see any signs of poor or unacceptable behaviour, or breaches in any field, whether it's safety, the environment, community consultation et cetera, we will absolutely address it. I don't think the JV and their partnerships would influence our perception or understanding of those contractors.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: On notice, are you able to provide a list of all government projects currently awarded to CPB Contractors and, along with that, a breakdown of any compliance actions taken against them for each of those projects?

CAMILLA DROVER: I can provide that for the Transport for NSW projects.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Obviously for Transport for NSW projects. I should've specified.

CAMILLA DROVER: I am happy to take that away and see what we can bring back.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, in answer to a question from my colleague, you indicated that you don't play politics with road safety. In relation to the selection of the sites where you will trial the average speed cameras, did that go to Cabinet?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, it did.

The Hon. WES FANG: Was it a decision of Cabinet as to what sites you would use to trial the average speed camera introduction?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Sorry?

The Hon. WES FANG: Was it a decision of Cabinet as to where you would trial the introduction of average speed cameras?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Based on the advice from Transport.

The Hon. WES FANG: You realise, obviously, that the sites you selected were all in Coalition areas—correct?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: They are or they aren't. That doesn't matter. That's not the reason they were chosen. They were chosen for crash history and for one to be coastal and one to be more inland. There was a whole lot of different reasons.

The Hon. WES FANG: How many proposals were put to Cabinet?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I think we just put the two, from memory.

The Hon. WES FANG: Are you sure?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I can't remember, to be honest. I'm not really going to canvass what was put to that level—to Cabinet—I'm sorry.

The Hon. WES FANG: I want to interrogate some of the information you've provided. You said you don't play politics with road safety. How many sites were put to Cabinet for selection?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'm not going to answer that question. They were the two that were recommended.

The Hon. WES FANG: I think for the record there were three.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: That was a decision of Cabinet.

The Hon. WES FANG: I think it's on record that there were three. Do you recall that being the evidence at a previous estimates hearing?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: No, I can't remember that. I'm sorry.

The Hon. WES FANG: Interesting.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Which hearing? Can you remind me?

The Hon. WES FANG: The previous estimates hearing when we interrogated how many—Mr Carlon, are you able to provide us with anything?

BERNARD CARLON: No, I'm sorry. I would have to take that on notice.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, the introduction is one month away. Is that correct?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, 1 May.

The Hon. WES FANG: What works have you done to prepare the sites that you've selected for this program?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'll refer that to the department to do that. Mr Carlon?

BERNARD CARLON: Certainly. There's signage, which will be placed in advance, indicating that there is going to be enforcement of all vehicles in these two lengths. There are local campaigns, which are being rolled out currently, as well as going statewide and indicating to people that there will be a trial that will include enforcement of light vehicles at these two locations.

The Hon. WES FANG: The Minister, in previous estimates, indicated to us that there would be signage warning light vehicles—not heavy vehicles—that their speed will be monitored by the average speed cameras. When will that signage be installed?

BERNARD CARLON: From 1 May there will be a two-month warning letter period, and the signage will be put in place in order to—

The Hon. WES FANG: I appreciate that. You indicated to me that you've started the process of advising, at a local level, that these things are occurring. But I had the advantage of driving from Gundagai to Coolac—that was the direction I was travelling—area last night, and there were absolutely zero roadworks in relation to any signage that's to be installed. There was roadwork there, but there was nothing in relation to any warnings. We are now exactly one month away. When are you planning to install those warning signs to provide drivers with some pre-notice that these areas are going to be average speed camera locations?

BERNARD CARLON: There is a broad education campaign happening and localised education and social media campaigns are happening, indicating that the trial is going to commence on 1 May. At the location, once enforcement commences or the warning letter period for two months of warning commences, then the regulatory signage will be put in place at the time it commences.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, do you believe you are honouring the commitment that was made at the previous budget estimates to only have warning signs installed during the warning letter period and not have it in place prior to switching on the program, even if you are in the warning letter phase?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Mr Fang, I'm really interested in what's agitating you so much about this because the reality is—

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, this isn't about me.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Well, it is.

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm asking the questions here, Minister. I'm asking you—

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I was going to answer.

The Hon. WES FANG: No, you're making reflections on me, and I'd prefer you didn't do that. I'm asking you, Minister, do you think you are honouring the commitment your Government made in the previous estimates hearing that there would be warning signs and information signs in place before the program was switched on?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Mr Fang, we are not in the warning period. We are not in the actual enforcement period at this point in time. We have got campaigns out there warning people about this. We will comply with all of our obligations and our commitments that we have made.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, when will the signage be installed?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: At the appropriate time, in alignment with our commitment and obligations.

The Hon. WES FANG: Will you have the signage installed before you switch the system on?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: The signage will be installed in alignment with our commitments.

The Hon. WES FANG: In that case, by my interpretation, you've got less than a month to have that signage up. Is that correct?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, but Transport works pretty quick, and they will get the work done.

The Hon. WES FANG: We know how they go with signs. I do often take the Rozelle interchange, and we know there were some problems there. I'm now seeking to help you to alleviate some of those problems. Will you have that signage up in less than a month?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I appreciate your assistance, Mr Fang.

The Hon. WES FANG: Any time. I'm quite helpful like that.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: And your commitment to road safety. Of course we will have the signs up, as indicated.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, why were those two sites selected?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We have canvassed this on a number of occasions—at these estimates and at last estimates. They were chosen on a variety of factors which were to do with past crash history and a variety of conditions et cetera.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, since the announcement last August that there would be average speed camera monitoring of light vehicle drivers, has anything changed, particularly in the Coolac to Gundagai stretch, to reinforce that that was the right location to select?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Mr Fang, I'm not aware of whatever it is that you're alluding to. I'll say that.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, the problem I see, particularly in the Coolac to Gundagai stretch—and I'm obviously focused on that because that's the section that I live near—is that in the previous number of years there have been no fatalities in that area. How are you going to judge the effectiveness of this trial—and I use the word "trial" in inverted commas because I suspect that it's literally just an implementation before you do it in a much wider, broader area—if there have been no fatalities? If there is a fatality in that area, does that mean the program fails? If there isn't a fatality, how are you going to determine if it has worked or not?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: The two locations were chosen on consideration of a number of factors, including light vehicle trauma, not just fatalities; geography; and the ability to make the technical changes required to enforce light vehicles for the trial. The two areas do have a history of known fatal and serious injury crashes involving light vehicles. You may have other areas that you would like to nominate before those areas. I'm happy to take that on notice, and that's fine. But we have committed to trial two sites only, and they are the two that have been selected for a trial.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, I've made the point on numerous occasions, particularly in the media, that you could have trialled this program on the M4 or the M5 or the M7 or the M1—any of those metropolitan roads, where I would suspect that your fatality numbers are much higher—but you didn't choose to do that. You chose to do it in a regional area, impacting rural and regional drivers instead of impacting the drivers that the Labor Party needs to keep sweet, shall we say. Minister, you said it wasn't a political decision. It went to Cabinet. It was a decision of Cabinet. Why didn't you choose any of the metropolitan roads that could have and should have been trialled simultaneously with these other sites?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Mr Fang, the sites went to Cabinet as part of the overall legislative package to get a trial in place. I make no apologies for wanting to trial these—

The Hon. WES FANG: Why isn't there a metropolitan road, Minister? Why didn't you impact metropolitan drivers in this decision?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Mr Fang, did you want me to answer the question I was answering or the one you've asked me over the top?

The Hon. WES FANG: I'd love you to. By all means, Minister.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Sorry?

The Hon. WES FANG: By all means let me know.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I didn't hear your second question because you were talking over the top of me. I make no apology for prioritising deaths on regional roads as something we want to do something about. The geography—the fact is that one is a major inland route between Sydney and Melbourne and one is in a North Coast area where a lot of people travel. It will not just be regional people who are, if you like, targeted by these cameras; it will be a wide variety. They are used by a lot of metropolitan people as well as regional people. But the reality is that we know that there is a greater risk of death on a regional road in New South Wales at this time, so we are doing what we can to address that. This is one of the things—

The Hon. WES FANG: Just not in those locations, correct?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Pardon?

The Hon. WES FANG: Just not in those locations.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Mr Fang, we are trialling—

The Hon. WES FANG: If there is a death in the Coolac to Gundagai area while you are trialling this, will you interpret that as a complete failure of this program?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: No, Mr Fang. But if you would like to get some more—

The Hon. WES FANG: I will hand over to my colleague.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: —briefing from the Centre for Road Safety, I would invite you to maybe join your colleague and get some understanding of how the safety mechanisms work.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Enough of the asides, thank you, Minister. We move on.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: No, it is a genuine offer, Ms Overall.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Are you familiar with the—

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: It is a genuine offer. I just want to make that really clear. That is a genuine offer to yourselves to take time—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Not patronising at all.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: No, not to patronise you. But I do understand that it is a lot to get your head around, around road safety. It is a very important thing.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Can we move on, Minister?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: If you were going to make inquiries on regional transport and regional roads, it is important to have a good understanding of what the drivers of crashes are. Your colleague has said in the press repeatedly that he thinks it is safer to go at 130, which has been roundly rejected—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I think he also mentioned autobahns in the last budget estimates, which I did read, Minister. Anyway, let's move on, shall we? Are you familiar with the Freight Policy Reform Program currently being conducted by Transport for NSW?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Broadly familiar. It hasn't been something that I've led under my former portfolio, but obviously I've always had an interest in it with heavy vehicles.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Great. It talks about optimising the grain rail network. What does that mean to you?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Sorry, optimising the grain rail network, did you say?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Yes.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Obviously, trying to get more grain onto rail. We have different initiatives on that rolling out around the State.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: And that's all you have to say on the matter? Will you rule out closing any currently operational grain lines—

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: You asked me if I was aware of it, so I assumed there was a follow-up, sorry. What's the follow-up there that you've got?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Can I ask the question? Will you rule out closing any currently operational grain lines due to their importance for farming communities across the State?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Ms Overall, if you have a specific issue that you want to raise, I think it would be more beneficial for the grain growers that you are seeking to represent that you actually—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: The question is pretty clear, Minister. Will you rule out closing any currently operational grain lines due to their importance for farming communities across the State. I don't think it could be much clearer.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Well, it could be. If there's one that you have concerns about, you should probably raise that.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Will you rule out closing any currently operational—

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: They are run by ARTC or country regional—what exactly is your concern here? That would probably be more helpful as a question.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Do you accept that closing grain lines will increase the stress on already overburdened regional roads?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I reject the premise of the question.

The Hon. WES FANG: How can you reject the premise of the question when you won't provide clarity as to whether you are closing any rail lines or not? Minister, that's a question.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I would like to take that on notice.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Let's move to farm firefighting vehicles. Regarding the current trial into farm firefighting vehicles, how many people have registered?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I had figures on this—I think last week I was looking at it. I will have to look them up for you exactly. It has been less than in the previous one. The trial only finished yesterday, so obviously we are going through and analysing that data. I could probably get you that information if you would like to wait, but it's probably better to wait until we get the full ones from yesterday because there may have been someone who did it last minute.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: You said that the second trial finished yesterday?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: It was changed to address some of the concerns raised during the first trial?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, and to get more information and to give farmers more time to put their hand up or understand it. I think when we had conversations with NSW Farmers about it, there appeared to be potentially a disconnect between what their expectations were of what people were registering et cetera.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I think there were concerns around unsafe vehicles being registered under the scheme. That has been addressed?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: That was partly it, and then there were also the types of vehicles being registered under the scheme. I think it was originally looking at, say, ex-firefighting fleet that had been surplus to government requirements—other governments, not just New South Wales—which had been purchased by farmers to work on their farms. Then there were also people that were using, I guess it was called, a mosquito fleet, as such, with the old utes et cetera—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That's right—mozzies.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: —with the pallecons on the back of the trailer which would be used. But then there were concerns about the safety of some of those and then obviously the age of some of them, in terms of their mechanical capacity et cetera, and then also the use of trailers. There were a lot of things we were trying to really get an understanding of what farmers wanted. They were looking for a very light touch on regulation, so we thought it was more appropriate, particularly going into another fire season, to do it that way—to have another trial.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Do you support making the scheme permanent?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I want to see the results of the second trial before we make a decision about that. Obviously there will be consultation with the New South Wales emergency services Minister and then also NSW Farmers, the RFS and other stakeholders.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Do you have an idea of a time frame that we might be able to look at with this?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We have made commitments to NSW Farmers that we would look at this and we'd have something in place before next fire season.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Sorry, before next fire season?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We'd have a decision, yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: The refurbishment of the XPT rail fleet that services Grafton—where's that up to?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'm not sure, you might have missed it—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Yes, I did miss it, I'm sorry.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: That's all right. Mr Weeks gave a bit of an update. It will be starting soon—I think it's the end of the month—and then it will take about 12 months for that refurbishment.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: The Premier recently promised a fare-free day for commuters in Sydney. Minister, will you commit to regional commuters outside of the Opal network, like in Grafton, also receiving a fare-free day?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: It is a bit more complicated than doing it in that way. I will maybe give Mr Weeks the opportunity to talk about some of the fare-free days, the history of those and where that has come from in the past. I think, under your Government, previously, there weren't many of those in the regions, but Mr Weeks—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So some of them would be considered—

The Hon. WES FANG: How many have been under your Government, Minister?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Sorry, the secretary will answer that one.

JOSH MURRAY: The Government has asked Transport to be mindful of the commitments that have been made around fare-free and to produce some options. But the comments to date have also been clear that we should ensure that priority is given to sorting out the enterprise agreement discussions, making sure that commuters can have a reliable rail service, and then revisiting that issue of a fare-free day to acknowledge the disruptions that have occurred.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Sounds great. Minister, can you provide an update on the critical natural disaster repairs on Brown Mountain?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes. There has been quite a lot of work done in recent times. I have to think of exactly where we are up to with that.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Will it be complete for the busy Easter period?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'll get Mr Fuller to do it, because it is a very fast-moving piece of work.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: It is very complex.

MATT FULLER: We will, unfortunately, have one of those projects remaining down to one lane, it is anticipated, until the end of June. We have made really good progress on those projects but, obviously, it will still be under management until the end of June at this point. That's what we are forecasting.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Following that, it will be completely open—so completed?

MATT FULLER: That's one of the projects that's underway at the moment. Then there's a second project that will continue. It's basically under procurement at the moment, and that will run into the financial year 2026. It will run through the second half of this year into early next year. As you may appreciate, some of these slope works are very complex projects. Not only do they take some time to procure due to their specific design in terms of the geotechnical nature of the requirements but, obviously, as they are doing the work, and to do it safely in a live traffic environment, it makes it very difficult for the crews to have the set-up. They generally take the lane closure to ensure safe operation while they undertake that work, and that work can have quite a degree of variability in it. Unfortunately, during a lot of the work that has taken place over the past couple of years, we have had a higher frequency and higher severity of other events that have then exacerbated and created some variation to the work on those projects.

The CHAIR: Minister, I want to go back to koalas and Appin Road. I have correspondence from the former roads Minister after questions that I asked in last budget estimates about this situation. A question was taken on notice, and I was advised that—this was on 13 November last year—the most recent advice from Lendlease is that the permanent fencing and koala grids will be completed by early 2025. The underpasses—this is what has been promised—will be completed by mid-2025. Has work on the underpasses on Appin Road started?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I'd have to check in on that one.

MATT FULLER: I understand they were the developer commitments, but I think we will take it on notice to check on the progress of the projects you have asked about.

The CHAIR: This was taken on notice last time. If you could get some information so we have got some kind of an update for this afternoon, that would be good. We did get some updates—I think it may have even been in Parliament, to a question without notice. No, in fact, it was in this budget estimates, by Minister Graham, about the new wildlife technology trial, but there wasn't anything about underpasses. My question is deliberately about underpasses, because it does seem as though this new wildlife technology trial doesn't seem to have underpasses. The question is specifically around underpasses. Minister, can I get some kind of a commitment from you, as the new roads Minister, that you understand the importance of underpasses, particularly in that area, and the history of the chief scientist saying they are necessary for the survival of the koala population in south-west Sydney, and that you will take it upon yourself, if you don't know the answer, to look at when those underpasses will be built?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, I definitely will. I do take that commitment seriously, but I will get the secretary to give you an update too.

JOSH MURRAY: Ms Fachrmann, I have an update here. Based around your earlier question, 75 per cent of the Appin Road upgrade permanent koala fencing is now complete. The box culvert underpass that is

scheduled for the Noorumba Reserve is still expected to be completed by midyear, and a second underpass is being constructed at Browns Bush.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for that update. The box culvert underpass is expected to be built and completed by mid this year, and there is one other with no time frame yet.

JOSH MURRAY: That's correct.

The CHAIR: That is good to know. Minister, we will keep communicating about that issue.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, and I'll see how we can go with that.

The CHAIR: Can I just check, with other wildlife underpasses and overpasses in other parts of regional New South Wales, particularly where it's known that there is a lot of wildlife crossing in those areas, I note there is the technology, again, but does that trial indicate that the Government is looking at alternatives other than, for example, overpasses and underpasses that have been shown to be very effective?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Before I pass to Sally on that, I just want to say, with the technology, my personal view is that we have been trying to look at different ways of alerting motorists. For example, the technology around getting the signs to identify that wildlife and then change so you don't have the habituation of the driver thinking, "I always drive this road. That sign is there, and I don't really see it anymore because I'm focusing on new things in there." That's something I think is important to trial, and the road pavement issues as well. There are a few things in there. I think it is worthwhile, and we should look at that because, to be honest—and everyone would understand this—it is not possible to put a culvert under every road that is there or an overpass for animals. I think there is a role to play. Obviously, we are looking the most effective solutions in the most critical places, and there is a delineation there. But I do take, overall, the commitment to ensuring the safety of koalas and, obviously, to ensuring their preservation. But I'll pass to Sally.

The CHAIR: Just quickly on this, because I think this is my last round of questioning and we can come back to Ms Webb in the afternoon, what consideration was undertaken or given in the department—to you first, Minister. When pulling together these options for dealing with wildlife fatalities, what consideration was given to reducing speed at some time in some areas to cope with that? Clearly, that is one tool, but it doesn't appear anywhere. Was it considered?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I can't give you chapter and verse on every road, but I do know that I have been in conversations where there has been a consideration of reducing speed in particular areas. So I know that it must be. I can't say to you categorically because I'm not—

The CHAIR: But we don't do it, do we? I don't think we do it in this State, except maybe in some national parks.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: There is the review of environmental factors and, I know that, even on projects that I've had some of the Sydney MPs talking to me about today, and some of the regional ones, actually—not today but this week, over Parliament, I spent a lot of time catching up with colleagues, and I hadn't met—to be honest—with some of them from the Sydney area, but even some of those whom I knew quite well from the regional area. It was looking at how, if we do this particular treatment to the road to address, potentially, a road safety or a road resilience issue, that would require a reduction in speed due to koalas. It is actually a live conversation that's happening in Transport, so I can categorically say that is happening. Whether it happens for every single road, I know that, obviously, we have to do the planning, and there is the review of environmental factors. Where we see wildlife impacts on any of the projects we are working on, we have to put in place mitigation measures et cetera. So it is being taken into consideration.

The CHAIR: In terms of the review of the environmental factors, that's for new projects or upgrades of existing projects, isn't it? It is not like an assessment of—I understand what you are saying, but I'm also talking about existing roads where there is no review of the environmental factors.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: You should delve into this with Ms Webb later, but even in some of our maintenance projects out west, in the recovery space and getting roads back in place, we have environmental considerations and constraints. Sometimes you can't just put that road back in there because there will be a wildlife impact or a fauna or flora—either-or—impact that we have to address. So it's not just about new projects. In terms of the REF, obviously for new projects but also for recovery, it is a challenge that we do have to look at as well.

The CHAIR: I want to follow on from the questions around speeding on country roads—well, speeding everywhere, but the questions were particularly around some of the trials. Is there a speed zoning program in New South Wales, Mr Carlon?

BERNARD CARLON: Yes, there is a speed zoning program that's a component of the Towards Zero Safer Roads program. It's funded to the tune of around \$4.5 million.

The CHAIR: Is that for one financial year?

BERNARD CARLON: Yes. There are other projects, clearly, that also have speed zone reviews done, depending on urban encroachment and other factors, but this is specifically targeted at the reduction of trauma in the context of the safer roads program.

The CHAIR: Is that a proactive process within the department where there's a unit of a number of people? Is it something that local councils put in? How were those areas nominated?

BERNARD CARLON: We have a lot of nominations from local government in that program, as well as community nominations through our portal. For example, in the high pedestrian activity area speed zone reviews we had 22 local centres that were implemented last year—12 of them in the regions and 10 of them in the metropolitan area. Those projects were funded as individual projects under that program, rather than just speed zone reviews.

The CHAIR: Is there data or science behind this information?

BERNARD CARLON: Absolutely. The high pedestrian activity areas in particular were evaluated, and there were significant reductions in crashes associated with that because we know that if you go from 50 to 40, you halve the likelihood of a pedestrian being killed. In fact, that program in the evaluation indicated that the speed zone reductions for those high pedestrian activity areas virtually eliminated pedestrian fatalities, but also had an impact on other vehicle and casualty crashes involving all vehicles in those areas.

The CHAIR: We can come back to that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Through you, Minister, I might go back to Ms Drover with one final question regarding CPB and this issue I've been exploring. Does the Government require contractors to submit a corrective action plan when they've been found to have breached environmental or safety regulations? Has CPB can submitted such a plan in response to past breaches?

CAMILLA DROVER: Yes. Usually the regulatory body that has imposed the fine or the notice of breach et cetera will ask for that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Is Transport, as the lead agency, provided a copy of those?

CAMILLA DROVER: Yes, we are. I am checking which contracts we have with CPB. To my knowledge, off the top of my head, they are in joint venture for the Warringah Freeway, as you mentioned, and they are in joint venture for the M6. They are also in joint venture for one package of the M12, which is coming towards the end of its time, given that we will open that for the opening of Western Sydney airport. I'll check if there are any other projects we have with them, but that's off the top of my head what we have at this stage.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Minister, I might go to you and your joint announcement on 30 January regarding flood resilience in Kempsey shire with the Dungay Creek causeway being changed to a 75-metre bridge. You made reference to \$3 million in natural disaster betterment funding. What is the total cost of the actual bridge? Is it the \$3 million or is that just part funding?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I will get it out so I can have a look at it to be exactly sure. Sorry, what was the question again?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: The \$3 million that was mentioned in your joint media release—is that the total funding envelope? What's the total cost of this?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: My understanding is—I can give you exact figures. Is this right?

MATT FULLER: Yes.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: It is \$3,037,501, so more than \$3 million.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: And will that build the 75-metre bridge? What's the projected total cost? Is it that 3,375,000?

MATT FULLER: My understanding, Mr Banasiak, is that that's the full cost, but we might take it on notice and confirm that the council is not making any co-contribution.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: We might skip that and come back. Can I go to Wallerawang station? You made a recent announcement around doing some early works to reopen rail services to that town. Are you able to tell us who was awarded the contract for those early works?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I will have to quickly look that one up because I can't remember off the top of my head. I might come back on it, sorry. I don't want to hold up your time, but I'll look as we go.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Sure. So we can have some clarity, is Wallerawang officially becoming part of the Blue Mountains line? Is it going to be included in the Blue Mountains top-line timetable or is it going to run on a separate service similar to the Bathurst Bullet?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: My understanding is that once it's operational, the plan was that the Dubbo XPT would stop there, and also potentially Bathurst intercity. So part of it wasn't to be a full station, if you like. It was like a stop station, if you like.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Yes, sure. As part of this upgrade, what are you proposing for facilities around the train station in terms of disabled access? What other facilities will be included in this upgrade?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I think we're still doing the site investigations and that, so I will have to come back to you. I'll keep looking, but I don't want to hold up your time.

ANTHONY HAYES: I can provide a little bit of information. It is still very early days. We are currently developing the scope, looking at the costings, and then there will be a round of community consultation to make sure we hear the community's needs. It is not proposed to be a major upgrade. It is to ensure that the station can be operational and it can be added to existing services to provide passengers with greater access to Sydney. But at this early stage in the process, we don't have a lot of the details.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Basically, contracts were awarded for the early enabling works, building assessments and improvements to adjacent buildings, including painting, cleaning and refurbishment. I think that was about a month ago. We are hoping to have more conversations, as Mr Hayes has said, with the community on the final stage, which will be some minor infrastructure works to bring it up to the standard which will allow trains to stop there.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Have we done any modelling or do we have any data on what the usage of this station will be and what those needs will be, or is that something that will form part of the community consultation?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Certainly the views of the community will be brought to bear on that, obviously remembering that this was a commitment of the former Government that gave funding. We are working on that project to make sure that it gets delivered, because it has been some time since it was there. Obviously, it's not just the 2,000 people who live in Wallerawang; it's also those people from the surrounding areas like Portland, Marrangaroo and Lidsdale that it will assist. Obviously there's tourism there. It's one that the funding had been there for from October 2022, so we are trying to get it happening.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Just following up on a question that I have been asking regularly regarding the Yarrawonga to Mulwala bridge crossing, in the last answer that you gave you said that the Murray River crossing strategic business case was being finalised and was going to be released to key stakeholders. Has that business case been finalised and released? Last time I was dealing with Mr Fuller.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Probably the most recent thing I have directly been involved in with that one was that we had a meeting with the two cross-border commissioners for Victoria and New South Wales, and also Minister Horne from Victoria, to try to give everyone the understanding that we wanted to have some action on those Murray River crossings. In terms of where the business case is up to, I think Mr Hayes could probably help with that.

MATT FULLER: I can probably help with that. We have literally just had our team down in the Murray and we renegotiated the moiety agreement which covers off the different Murray River crossings, working with the Victorians. On the Victorian side they're doing a movement and place study just to help inform the preferred option, if you like, which is subject to the business case. That is in the final stages of being refined and agreed between the two border towns in terms of what is the best option. Then we will be looking to present that for delivery.

ANTHONY HAYES: Our understanding is that our view on the preferred crossing is also shared by the two councils. Our Victorian counterparts are just finishing off their work now.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: You mentioned the Victorian Government leading a movement network study. Is that the work that you are talking about?

MATT FULLER: Correct.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: You said that they're seeking funding. Have they approached you for any co-contribution?

MATT FULLER: No, I don't think they are necessarily seeking funding. They are doing that movement and place study on the other side just to help inform the selection of the options. Once that is all agreed by both sides then we will be looking at options for the delivery funding component.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Sure. The other part of your answer speaks about recent maintenance works, including rehabilitation plates for enforcing spans. Has any assessment been conducted on those works to see how much that extends the bridge's life span?

MATT FULLER: I think at the moment, in terms of those Murray River crossings, we are comfortable that our current maintenance regimes give them the life span while we undertake work for some of the replacements. In some cases it expands their life spans as they've been identified as structures that we want to retain as part of our overall Timber Truss Bridge Conservation Strategy.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: So you don't have a projected deadline where you would have to have a replacement bridge up and established?

MATT FULLER: I am sure some of our bridge engineers have got some time frames that they would like project teams to work to but at this point in time there is no immediate concern. The bridge is being maintained and is able to meet the existing requirements.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, we were talking about fare-free days earlier. How many fare-free days has this Government implemented since it came to office?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I would have to take that on notice. Wait, no—the secretary has got it for you.

JOSH MURRAY: There have been two, Mr Fang.

The Hon. WES FANG: Were they concurrent days?

JOSH MURRAY: No. They were both weekends. One was on the Sydney Light Rail network and one was on the Sydney Trains and TrainLink network.

The Hon. WES FANG: How many regional commuters were eligible to access that fare-free day?

JOSH MURRAY: On those, for the regional commuters, through NSW TrainLink, what we did is we refunded tickets that were already purchased. Then we opened up further bookings at no cost if people wanted to join those services on that weekend.

The Hon. WES FANG: In relation to people who were affected during the Christmas period who had bookings who then had to change their bookings because they got notifications through text messages or the like that there was a likelihood that their services may be impacted by rail strikes, how did you look to assist those regional commuters that were impacted?

JOSH MURRAY: I'd have to look at exactly the dates that you are referring to. Certainly the services have run across those periods. We have at all times sought to give our passengers the most information we possibly could. That included when there were either delays or potential staffing issues across those periods. Really, when we have looked at those days of larger disruptions, there have been a couple where the system was overwhelmed by the amount of disputation that was occurring. They were not in the Christmas period.

The Hon. WES FANG: You accept, however, that when there is an impact to rural and regional commuters it is disproportionately more impactful? For example, if somebody was planning to travel to Sydney for the Christmas period, was booked on the train and then received notification that their travel in 24 hours may not occur because of union disruption on the rail lines, that would mean that they would not be sure whether they were going to leave their home or be able to get to Sydney for Christmas and get home in time. That has a greater impact than if you are travelling in metropolitan areas. What are you going to do to help those people?

JOSH MURRAY: Certainly we're very aware of that impact. It is very difficult if someone has booked on the TrainLink service, sometimes weeks or months in advance, and they are expecting to use that service for that time. I would say, though, we also trade that off against looking at how the impacts actually then do carry through. I'm pleased to say that even on some of the days when there was significant disruption in Sydney, we did maintain a very good service level on trains.

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm just very aware that some of those commuters then had to book alternative transport which cost multiples more than what they had originally spent.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: It's like when you shut the trains down and you had people from Newcastle that weren't able to do that.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, that's not helpful.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Under your Government, you had three out of the six days when you provided free fares that did not get—

The Hon. WES FANG: I've got one last question I want to ask Mr Murray in the 10 seconds I've got left. Mr Murray, on the Rozelle Interchange, the continual announcements that come through over the radio broadcasts are quite annoying and, I think, are not beneficial to the travellers, particularly from rural and regional communities, that are trying to navigate. Do you think that with the incessant broadcasting that occurs during morning peak hour—and I'm pretty sure people know that they're in peak hour because they're not travelling more than one or two kilometres per hour—people might find those announcements slightly distracting?

JOSH MURRAY: You're referring to the automated broadcasts within the tunnels themselves?

The Hon. WES FANG: Yes.

JOSH MURRAY: I'd have to take that on notice and look into your concerns about it more closely. I'm happy to do that.

The CHAIR: Minister, back to regional rail, the Canberra to Sydney intercity train service remains at three services per day in each direction, with five-hour gaps. I've been told that's unchanged since 1993. Passenger demand has increased and you're improving regional rail. Will the Government increase service frequency in these areas? That's Queanbeyan-Palerang, Goulburn Mulwaree, Wingecarribee and Wollondilly LGAs.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: This goes back to the same issue. We just don't have rolling stock to put on additional trains because the former Government failed to deliver their project of new trains in eight years. We are working hard to get more trains on the network and we will continue to do that.

The CHAIR: What have your discussions been with the ACT Chief Minister? I understand that they've been actively campaigning for improvements to the service. Has this Government been in consultation with the ACT Chief Minister?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I've had a brief meeting with Chief Minister Barr, more around, to be clear, the actual station in Kingston. But I can see Mr Hayes—there has been much more officer-level discussion, so I'll pass to him.

ANTHONY HAYES: If I may, we have established a working group with the ACT Government. I was down in Canberra a few weeks back to meet with them, and there are a number of priorities that we're working on. Probably the most important one is to look at opportunities to reduce travel time on the current service, increase patronage and then looking at broader issues. The main priority has not been to look at increasing the number of services; it's been to try to make the current service perform more efficiently.

The CHAIR: In terms of the current service, what do you think the most could be in terms of reducing the time taken to travel between Canberra and Sydney? Will it make that much of a difference?

ANTHONY HAYES: The usual story—it depends on the amount of money that we're willing to spend. There are a number of short-term opportunities that we've identified that may help to increase it, for a relatively cost-effective solution. Obviously, there are sections that would require significant investment to make them faster, and that would be a pretty big discussion.

The CHAIR: Minister, with the new trains that are coming on, are you saying that once we've got them into service, that will mean that there'll be more intercity train services running between Canberra and Sydney?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: No, it's not as direct a relationship as that, if I can say it that way. Obviously, we have the trains that were ordered by the previous Government, which we are working to deliver, and then we will have refurbished XPTs—there may be opportunities—or other trains.

The CHAIR: Does that mean that New South Wales is going to these discussions with the ACT saying, "Additional train services are out of the question. What can we do instead?"

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We're going there to try to work out how we can improve that rail service. It is about doing whatever we can, and obviously that is looking at the procurement of the new fleet, what opportunities that has for the existing fleet, and then just all those other issues that Mr Hayes raised around the reliability, the speed and other patronage issues on the train. It's a broad discussion, and we are engaged in it and very engaged.

The CHAIR: Questions from Government members?

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: No questions.

The CHAIR: Minister, thank you so much for your time. That is all that will be required of you for today. To the officials, we'll be back at 2.00.

(The Minister withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back. We'll go straight to questions again, starting with the Opposition.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr Murray, when you came into the role as secretary, obviously you hadn't been part of the then Opposition or government for a period of time. Obviously that meant that you were coming into the role perhaps without some of the knowledge that the Opposition brought into government. Would that be a fair assumption to say?

JOSH MURRAY: Knowledge of the Opposition?

The Hon. WES FANG: Knowledge of some of their commitments and the like—like detailed knowledge. You weren't involved in the policy decisions of the then Opposition?

JOSH MURRAY: That's correct. I joined Transport in August 2023, and then when I came on board, I was obviously briefed on election commitments and the like.

The Hon. WES FANG: And they would have asked you to deliver those election commitments. Is that a reasonable assumption?

JOSH MURRAY: Yes, we have a within the department where we review our election commitment progress. We report that up to the Cabinet Office so that they keep a central record of what's being delivered and where it's up to, and we go through that on a quarterly basis in Transport.

The Hon. WES FANG: How was the list of election commitments made communicated to you?

JOSH MURRAY: We have a register. It names the commitments, the number, the value, the progress—

The Hon. WES FANG: Was that created by the Minister's office or was that part of Transport for NSW?

JOSH MURRAY: No, we collate that within Transport, and we manage that.

The Hon. WES FANG: When the incoming government swore their oaths to the Governor and then formed their offices, they would have detailed those election commitments. How was it that Transport for NSW collated them? Did the Minister or staffers provide them with the lists so that they could form those spreadsheets that Transport keeps?

JOSH MURRAY: Thanks for the question. I'd have to take that on notice, just as to how they were translated from the list of commitments into what Transport would then see as approved and would manage on the way through. I would anticipate that that would come through Premier's and the Cabinet Office, which at the time was one body.

The Hon. WES FANG: I think you can see where I'm going with this. I'm just trying to understand, in my own mind, how an election commitment has gone from being something that a candidate or the shadow Minister might have announced before or during the election campaign and that announcement to actually getting on the list. Given that Transport is, effectively, public servants that are apolitical, they must have been provided by either the Premier's office, the Minister's office or somebody that, "These are the priority election commitments that we've said we will deliver prior to the election." That's what I'm seeking to understand—how they were collated, who collated them and where they're kept.

JOSH MURRAY: Also, those commitments would have all gone through the budgeting process. That register would have been—at the date of the election—

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm getting there, because I've actually got in front of me now—I won't table it, because it's freely available on the website—the election costing request form that the Parliamentary Budget Office has used to assess a lot of these projects. I've got the one here for the Regional Roads Fund. Are you familiar with that, Mr Murray?

JOSH MURRAY: I'm not familiar with that document.

The Hon. WES FANG: They'd create a capped \$334 million Regional Roads Fund as part of that election commitment. It's all above board; I understand that. I'm just trying to seek to understand that process behind that. In relation to the election commitments that are made under that Regional Roads Fund, can you outline to me the process of Transport having a list of these commitments and how it is that you're going to deliver those?

JOSH MURRAY: Yes, I might ask Mr Hayes to assist me on this. The projects in the Regional Roads Fund—there is a mix. Many of them are delivered by councils, depending on the value and the complexity and the road in question. A number of others are delivered by Transport, and we are working through those. For those that have business cases, they are going through a process at the moment. Each is up to a different level through that.

ANTHONY HAYES: To reiterate the secretary's comments, 18 of the current election commitments were to provide funds to council for specific projects. Deeds have been signed with all councils to match those commitments, and then the remainder are being delivered within Transport resources.

The Hon. WES FANG: So that would leave 10 as a remainder? Is that correct?

ANTHONY HAYES: Yes.

The Hon. WES FANG: Are you able to tell me what those 10 are?

ANTHONY HAYES: I can, indeed. They are \$15 million for duplication of the Thornton rail bridge; \$12 million for Golden Highway improvements; \$1.5 million for Tuross Head intersection; \$20 million for Bulli bypass investigations; an additional \$6 million for the Speers Point roundabout at Lake Macquarie; \$40 million towards planning and design for the Gosford bypass; and \$10 million for investigation of on-ramps at the M1 Princes motorway.

The Hon. WES FANG: So that's seven.

ANTHONY HAYES: Apologies. Sorry. Over the page—

The Hon. WES FANG: You said the Thornton Bridge rail upgrade. Is that correct?

ANTHONY HAYES: Yes.

The Hon. WES FANG: There should be three more?

ANTHONY HAYES: Yes, my apologies. There is \$10 million to upgrade the Yass Road, Bungendore and Ellerton roads.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: You say \$10 million?

ANTHONY HAYES: That was the initial election commitment. The last one on my list here is \$7.5 million for Alphadale crossroads on the Bruxner Highway.

The Hon. WES FANG: So that's nine, by my calculation.

ANTHONY HAYES: Then I probably missed one along the way. I apologise. I can certainly double-check on that.

The Hon. WES FANG: If you wouldn't mind. Mr Murray, the deeds are signed with the councils to deliver those projects, and all of those 18 that are council-deliverable are underway. Is that correct? Or are they funded, at least?

JOSH MURRAY: They've been funded. There has been correspondence with councils, and they are progressing. They're all up to individual levels of delivery.

The Hon. WES FANG: And then obviously Transport for NSW is taking on the delivery of the remainder of those projects. Is that correct?

JOSH MURRAY: That's correct.

The Hon. WES FANG: Okay. The Regional Roads Fund, as it stands at the moment—how was that formed and created by Transport for NSW?

JOSH MURRAY: It's a budget allocation. It's something that was received in the budget of the time after the commitment was made by Government.

The Hon. WES FANG: What are the criteria that are applied to projects that are funded out of that Regional Roads Fund?

ANTHONY HAYES: They are election commitments.

The Hon. WES FANG: So there are no criteria that are applied to them?

ANTHONY HAYES: There are specific rules regarding how the funding is spent, but, no, my understanding is they're election commitments.

The Hon. WES FANG: In that case, then, why is there a business case process that's being undertaken for certain projects, given that they're going to be funded regardless?

ANTHONY HAYES: For good governance to make sure that we are looking at all of the options and defining the best way to go ahead with a specific project.

The Hon. WES FANG: I think that's quite admirable. Good governance is important, especially when it's taxpayers' money. But, Mr Hayes, here is the question: What happens if the business case doesn't stack up after the Government has already made the election commitment? What then?

ANTHONY HAYES: My understanding is if it's an election commitment, our role is not to be deciding whether we do it or not, but to be deciding on the most appropriate way to do it.

The Hon. WES FANG: You've used the words "good governance". Would you agree that if a business case is conducted for a project that's an election commitment that doesn't stack up but goes ahead anyway, that would demonstrate a failure of governance?

JOSH MURRAY: I might jump in on that one, Mr Hayes. I won't comment on a hypothetical that a business case doesn't stack up, but I would state that business cases in this regard are not just a—they're different to business cases that we might talk about, like what's a business case for the Sydney Metro or something. These cases will consider local conditions and logistics in building the road. It is those broader logistics, as well as "What's the road going to cost?" that goes into that. We often get into this debate about what's a business case—particularly, as you mentioned, for things that are election commitments—and what is the extent of surveying and studies that should go in if the Government has committed to it or it has been an election mandate. But, as I say, they're often much broader in terms of what is the actual delivery logistics that are required, and therefore the business case provides a good first step before any pre-construction work.

The Hon. WES FANG: While I agree with you, Mr Murray, I'm going to use the words that Mr Hayes so eloquently put, which is "It's good governance". Should these matters not have been addressed prior to the election commitment occurring?

JOSH MURRAY: That's not for us to comment, I think. We have a process. We have a fund. We have a number of projects that we're looking at. Obviously, if there were concerns about any of those projects, then we would take that back to Government and we would have that discussion.

The Hon. WES FANG: Where you have a fund called the Regional Roads Fund and you identify the projects and what you're seeking to achieve with that pot of money, as you do on the Transport for NSW website, wouldn't you consider that to be, potentially, something that people would look at and think that there was a level of scrutiny applied to the projects that were committed to under that list?

JOSH MURRAY: Again—

The Hon. WES FANG: It was pretty closed, wasn't it, Mr Murray? There was no competitive nature to this. This was, literally, a decision of the then Opposition that it has sought to fund.

JOSH MURRAY: I think the Minister, in the earlier session, talked to some of the considerations that went into listening to local communities. I can't comment to that.

The Hon. WES FANG: Looking at the list—and my colleague has explained some of the analysis we've done in relation to the Regional Roads Funds—how is it that one electorate has 32 per cent of the funding from this Regional Roads Fund? Did it create any alarm bells within Transport for NSW that out of this fund, one electorate gets 32 per cent of the money?

JOSH MURRAY: Again, I'd just point to the discussion earlier about election commitments. These were priorities identified by the former Opposition and brought to government.

The Hon. WES FANG: Is there a mechanism within Transport for NSW that says, "Hang on a second. That's \$334 million of taxpayers' money that's being expended at this point by the now Government. Of these projects, 32 per cent is flowing to one electorate"? It's certainly the case that, as my colleague indicated, 82 per cent of those projects are now in Labor-held electorates. Does that not ring some alarm bells within Transport for NSW about pork-barrelling?

JOSH MURRAY: Mr Fang, the projects that have been identified, we look at on an individual basis. They're all progressing on an individual basis. They are funded. They have their good governance processes that Mr Hayes has referred to. It is our job to deliver those. They have been outlined by the Government as priorities. They put those out publicly before the election, as any incoming government—State or Federal—has the ability to do, which is to put their commitments, should they be elected, out there. It's then up to the agencies to work out the ways to implement.

The Hon. WES FANG: But, ultimately, the agency has a limited budget. It has limited manpower. You've, effectively, been tasked with delivering nine, ten or whatever—

ANTHONY HAYES: I apologise. I will come back to you.

The Hon. WES FANG: We'll come back to that exact number of projects. Does Transport for NSW not think to say to the Minister, "Hang on, we've got limited resources here. You're directing 32 per cent of that total fund to one electorate, 82 per cent—"

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Eighty-seven.

The Hon. WES FANG: My apologies. "Eighty-seven per cent is being delivered in ALP seats. There's nothing being delivered west of the Great Dividing Range out of this \$334 million. There are perhaps some issues here. We need to look at what we're doing in relation to this Regional Roads Fund. It's not very regional. It's not a very well dispersed fund."

JOSH MURRAY: I would say, just to also put on record, it's not as though these are the only regional road projects that are going on around the State. This is a particular fund that was set up or committed to by the Government when in opposition that it would have a \$334 million fund to outline these projects. We, of course, have a range of other projects in development and delivery across regional New South Wales of varying sizes. To your question about resourcing, many of these are council grants, as you understand. Our teams in the regions are very tightly linked with councils to help administer those, but I wouldn't see that it would be an additional resource constraint, in terms of administering those.

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm sure, Mr Murray, as somebody who's well versed in the media, you would have been keeping abreast of the revelations that have come out of the small commitments allocation grants inquiry. Can you offer me some insight as to how that process differs from what we've got here?

JOSH MURRAY: Contrary to your assertion, I'm not well versed in that matter, and I prefer to stick to the issues of transport for today.

The Hon. WES FANG: I'll assist you, then, Mr Murray. There are commitments that were made prior to the election. The Government is now seeking mechanisms to fund those commitments. While that program was more evenly distributed than this one, what we're seeing here is cherrypicking of certain projects which are in seats that the then Opposition was seeking to get electoral success in. Now a slush fund has been created in order to provide these projects with the funding to move forward. You can see that there's perhaps some concern from members of Parliament and from people in New South Wales that this is another ALP slush fund that's being used to fund projects that are in seats that they want to win.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Point of order: The member, somewhat valiantly, attempts repeatedly to make what are, in essence, political points about the Government's priorities or the then Opposition's priorities. The secretary has answered this on probably three occasions now in the sense that it is up to the Opposition what they promise in opposition and it's up to the bureaucracy to deliver in government. That's exactly the answer that has been given. I understand the member wants to make a political point, but it's a bit gratuitous. I think you should call him to order. It's not in the remit of the secretary to make decisions about political priorities.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Buttigieg. I remind the member to ask questions which are generally relevant to the proposed expenditure within this portfolio area. I think he was starting to also—the witness has taken this question a lot. They can take it on notice or choose to answer how they see fit. I'll give the Opposition one more question.

The Hon. WES FANG: I was seeking to understand how it may differ given that there has been some controversy in relation to that project. What rigour, what conflict-of-interest assessments were put over these projects before Transport for NSW has simply just committed to delivering them?

JOSH MURRAY: The process, as I've outlined, is that the Government went through a process when in opposition of consultation with councils and other groups. Transport was presented with a list of priorities. The budget committed to that process and I would also raise that there was also a further election commitment of \$390 million for the regional emergency repair fund, which went to every council. Transport looks at all of these

and our job is to then ensure we can deliver and we can deliver projects that are feasible and deliver the outcomes that the Government is looking for in terms of safer roadways, which is what the aim of the Regional Road Fund was.

The CHAIR: Ms Drover, I wanted to go back to the new regional train fleet. When I asked you when the first train would be in service, which I think was—at some point we may have had a deadline of end of December this year. Is that correct? Has that ever been a public deadline?

CAMILLA DROVER: The first public deadline was some years ago. I think it was 2023. But we acknowledge there have been significant delays to this fleet. As I understand it, when the trains were first procured, the deadline for the first passenger service was some years ago. We are, I acknowledge, well past that. What we're trying to do is get the train into service as quickly as we can. But that necessitates thorough and diligent dynamic testing of the train. That is what we're in the process of undertaking at the moment.

The CHAIR: In terms of what Transport for NSW is working towards in terms of a deadline—because you're not clearly working to no deadline in terms of having that first train in service—what are people being told? What are you working towards? It can't just be, "When we can make it happen". There has to be a deadline you're working towards. Is it December '25 or is it later now?

CAMILLA DROVER: We are trying to put the trains into service as quickly as we can. That is the most efficient way, the most cost effective, and, of course, that delivers the benefit to community as fast as we can. But it is one thing leads to the other, and the train must be dynamically tested. It needs to go through that process and issues will arise as they arise with any new fleet of trains coming into service. As they arise, they are addressed and tweaks are made. That's the process we're going through. I'm not willing to commit to a hard and fast date. My instructions to the team and the contractor is: Do it as soon as we can.

The team worked over the Christmas break. They worked very hard to get the ONRSR accreditation and the information from the contractor to support that ONRSR accreditation. We've got the crew trained and ready to undertake the testing. But I can't magic up a date where we're going to be through the dynamic testing process, because there is a whole series of tests we have to undertake. The train will fail some of those tests, I imagine. They always do. That's the nature of why we do the testing: to check that this train will work safely and efficiently and meet customer expectations on our network. That hasn't occurred before. That's why we're going through the process.

The CHAIR: When you say trains always fail testing, that's automatically, I assume, taken into what would be a standard time frame. The way in which you're talking about the testing that is going to be undertaken in the next, say, eight months, 12 months, you don't sound very optimistic about how that's going to go.

CAMILLA DROVER: I just don't want to mislead the Committee nor the community. We will do it as quickly as we can. It will take some months. That is our expectation.

The CHAIR: There are some months to undertake the testing in the best-case scenario?

CAMILLA DROVER: Yes. That was always the plan. If you look at the original program before the delays occurred, it was always envisaged that it would take months to undertake this testing process because we've got a long geography to test across and we've got two types of running to test—the electric mode and also the diesel mode—and we are also modifying the surrounding network to accommodate this new fleet of trains, which was always envisaged.

The CHAIR: With the testing that started in February—you might have to take this on notice, but it would be good to know the frequency of the testing on the tracks. It's in Sydney now, I understand, being tested on the electric network—obviously at night to not be too disruptive.

CAMILLA DROVER: That's right. It's generally at night.

The CHAIR: It would be very useful for the Committee to know what the frequency of testing on the tracks is. Would you be able to take that on notice?

CAMILLA DROVER: I can take that on notice, yes.

The CHAIR: I just want to turn again to the strategic regional integrated transport plans that are being undertaken and the consultation of those. When the community is promised—having a look at, for example, the website for the Illawarra Shoalhaven, it says that the plan is set to be delivered in 2025. There have been 419 contributions so far on that interactive map. What can the community expect to be delivered? Has a draft plan now been prepared for the community based on these 419 contributions? Let's use Illawarra Shoalhaven as an example. What can they expect? I don't mean specific individual changes to buses but broadly speaking.

ANTHONY HAYES: Thank you very much for the question because we're actually quite excited about where we're trying to get to with these new plans. It's been an iterative process throughout. We started by seeking feedback from the community. We then put a plan together and we put that back out for further feedback from the community. The aim of the plan—and there'll be nine of them when we're finished. But the aim is, instead of Transport having, "Here's a plan for your region", what we really want to do is have one piece of paper that has been agreed on between ourselves, council, the chamber of commerce, the local Country Women's Association—all key stakeholders in a specific area. We want to end up with one piece of paper that we all agree are our list of priorities.

We still have a lot of work to do once we come up with the initial SRITP for each region and we'll be doing a lot of work behind the scenes then at looking at prioritisation to identify what we believe are the key priority projects from within each list that we come up with. But it's about taking a holistic approach to the region—understanding that the people of Tamworth have completely different priorities to the people of Byron Bay, so let's listen to that community, understand what their priorities are and see if we can come up with an agreed strategic plan that we can all work towards together. That makes it a much easier conversation when we're talking to our Minister but also when we're talking to Treasury, when we're talking to the Federal Government. To be able to say, "This is an agreed plan", we think, is a wonderful step forward.

The CHAIR: The Hunter plan has been released for public exhibition and has closed. There is one other. Is that correct?

ANTHONY HAYES: There's one other in the south region at the moment. There are three tranches of three. I can provide the dates. I haven't got them right in front of me right now, but I can provide the dates of each tranche. But there are significant periods of time allocated for community feedback but also working with local MPs, local council, as I said, chambers of commerce et cetera. What we're trying to do at each stage in the process is take it back to the community and say, "Right, this is this is where we're at now. Can we have further feedback to make sure that we end up with an agreed plan?"

The CHAIR: The time frame, for example—I think the Hunter is the earliest one. Is that right?

ANTHONY HAYES: Yes.

The CHAIR: For the zero to five years time frame, is it commencing in early 2026 for the Hunter, for example, or is that this year? Can we see it at the next budget?

ANTHONY HAYES: The tranche 1 draft plans for the Hunter, South East and Tablelands are now on public exhibition.

The CHAIR: I think the Hunter's closed.

ANTHONY HAYES: They've just closed. That's right. Tranche 2 is Central Coast, Central-West Orana and Illawarra-Shoalhaven, and engagement will continue until April. Tranche 3 is Far West, North Coast, New England, North West and Riverina Murray, and they'll continue through until January 25.

The CHAIR: For example, the short-term and in-flight draft initiatives for the Hunter draft plan zero to five years time frame—just as an example, say the Lake Macquarie-Newcastle review ferry service improvements. If that was in the final plan, when is the final plan expected to be adopted? Is the beginning of the operationalising of this strategic plan expected next year, within this term of government? What does that look like?

ANTHONY HAYES: The Minister has been very clear that she has an expectation that all these plans will be done in this term. Part of that will be the work the team is now beginning to undertake in terms of prioritising what are the key projects. Obviously that depends on the projects. It depends on whether it's public transport or infrastructure, or whatever the key projects are. We then need to work our way through. But what we're trying to do is, instead of it appearing ad hoc, where Transport is just making decisions without that engagement—one of the things I've heard is that Transport makes these decisions and then consults. What we're trying to do this time is consult before we come up with the key list of priorities.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I might go to questions I asked of the Minister at last estimates around the heavy vehicle safety upgrades on the Golden Highway between Dubbo and Dunedoo. The answer I got back was that the civil works for the project were complete at the end of 2023 but there were some integrated works that were to be completed by November 2024. Have those works been completed on the heavy vehicle inspection station?

SALLY WEBB: My understanding is that those works have now been completed. I'm confident that those have been completed by now.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Do we have a final cost? The final cost couldn't be given to me because we were waiting on the integrated works to be completed. Do we have that?

SALLY WEBB: I'll take that question on notice.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Can you provide any details on the specific infrastructure and technology that was included as part of these integrated works and whether that testing station is operational at the moment?

SALLY WEBB: I'll take the specifics of that question on notice.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: It's just been described to me by a heavy vehicle operator as a demountable with a building and a weigh pad, so I'm curious about where that \$7 million or more in expenditure has gone. Ms Drover, are you in a position to answer some more questions on Richmond Bridge?

CAMILLA DROVER: Yes, I can provide some better clarity. You mentioned there was a submission that the local council had prepared. I can confirm that our consultation process finished on 21 February, so just over a month ago. We are obviously assessing and reviewing all those submissions, and then we will come out, probably by the middle of this year, with a submissions report. With that, we'll follow the determination for the REF. The REF covers the whole project, so we are getting on and delivering stage one. But the REF covers both stages 2A and 2B, so the full project. Given the current funding allocation, and subject to feedback from the community, we anticipate that we'll be proceeding with the procurement of stage 2A in the near term, this year. But depending on that feedback from community and the available funding, we're still making a decision on the 2B section of the project. The four-lane bridge will be delivered as part of 2A. A bridge will be delivered as an absolute minimum for that project.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: In terms of the community's view, which they put quite strongly, they want to seek an alternative proposal or route that doesn't divert traffic through the township, which was their original request. Is it possible that that will occur as part of your response to their feedback, or is the route set?

CAMILLA DROVER: We haven't determined the REF because, of course, we do need to receive that feedback from the community. It's all in. The team is diligently going through it. Based on that feedback, the REF will be determined, and then we'll know exactly what we are going to build.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: One thing they did mention to me was a former proposal that would have provided a long-term solution, which is the Castlereagh freeway. That was originally planned but abandoned. Can you provide any feedback as to why that project or proposal was abandoned?

CAMILLA DROVER: I'm happy to take that on notice. I know there were about half a dozen original schemes for the area, and I think we went to consultation with a lesser number, but I'll take that on notice.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: They just specifically mentioned that one, so obviously it was a sticking point for some of the community. Can I go to the green dot reflector program? Mr Murray, feel free to direct it to whoever.

ANTHONY HAYES: That's me.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Mr Hayes, can you tell us how the \$11.9 million was allocated across those 14 green reflector sites?

ANTHONY HAYES: In terms of what the funding was spent on or the destinations that we've chosen?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I've got the list of destinations, so a breakdown of how much was spent across each of those 14. Was it just evenly distributed or were there some sites that required a bit more work?

ANTHONY HAYES: There were seven sites in the south and then the remaining seven were split relatively evenly for west and north.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Were there any specific factors that required more cost at different sites where it wasn't evenly spread?

ANTHONY HAYES: I apologise. This is not my specific area.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I'm sorry. I am getting into the weeds a bit.

ANTHONY HAYES: Yes. I believe it was done in consultation with the freight industry. It was identified that they were the priorities they would like to see us do.

MATT FULLER: Mr Banasiak, I can probably add that it's not \$11.9 million just for those green reflector sites. It's an \$11.9 million program. It's a minor works program across heavy vehicle rest areas. The 11 reflector sites were part of that program.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Do you have the breakdown of what the green dot reflector program makes up of that \$11.9 million?

MATT FULLER: No, not specifically. We'd have to take that on notice.

ANTHONY HAYES: Yes, we'd have to take that on notice.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Who is responsible for maintaining these sites once they're all established, and what does that maintenance look like?

MATT FULLER: Once they're agreed to, they come to my part of the operation under road maintenance. The heavy vehicle rest areas and the green reflector sites, which are primarily agreed sites with industry—you'd be well aware of the engagement with Mr Hannifey and the set-up and establishment of those. Largely speaking, quite a lot of those are just pull-off areas. We're maintaining shoulders and access, as we do as part of our normal network maintenance through those parts of the corridor.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: So you don't need an additional funding allocation for that maintenance?

MATT FULLER: It's all part of the overall maintenance allocation in terms of what we do, with the exception of some of these discrete packages as they come along for upgrades and for renewal—so in this case, that \$11.9 million heavy vehicle improvement program.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Is it the department's view to expand beyond these 14 locations at some point? Are these 14 locations acting like a trial to see how it goes?

MATT FULLER: There are quite a lot more than these sites that were just recently announced. They were in addition. I'd have to take the exact number on notice, but certainly the freight branch, who is part of Transport, are actively engaged with the heavy vehicle industry to look at the opportunities for green reflector sites, for other heavy vehicle rest areas, for the election commitments that we're seeking to fulfil in Western Sydney et cetera. So there's a number of additional opportunities. We're looking to make travel on the network safer for heavy vehicle drivers, yes.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: How are we measuring improvements in rest stop usage or road safety with these reflector sites? Is there a mechanism we're using to measure their impact?

MATT FULLER: It's my understanding that the freight branch, particularly where heavy vehicle participants use telematics, they are able to get information back, working with the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator, on the use and frequency of the different rest sites around the State, and that informs part of their planning process. That's certainly really valuable information to inform movement and where rest breaks are really critically required.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Are these locatable on people's GPS like other heavy vehicle rest stops?

MATT FULLER: I'd have to take that on notice. I think you're right in saying that. Certainly the idea of the green reflector sites is it provides that advance warning for trucks. But I think they are well known and potentially tracked through GPS.

The CHAIR: In the little time the crossbench has left, why don't we get a quick update on what I ask about every time: roll-on bikes. You were expecting it, weren't you? You prepped for it.

ROGER WEEKS: I have prepped for it. Thanks, Ms Faehrmann. We had our last meeting with the bike users group that we're engaging with that is helping us design the solution here. That meeting was on 5 March. We have another meeting scheduled in June. There has been really strong and positive engagement with the group. You'd be aware we did do a limited trial just before Christmas. It did get postponed as a result of protected industrial action, and then running into the school holidays, where we were never going to run it on that service. That provided us with only limited data points. We did actually only have one of the users bring their bike as a roll-on onto that service. So we're very keen this financial year to run the trial again so that we're getting more data points.

The engagement that we're having with the user groups does tell us that there are some enhancements that we can make in terms of additional days that we might be able to offer that trial. At the moment, or in the previous trial, it was only during weekdays, so we're looking at how we might expand that across weekends. We're also looking at whether we can include additional stops—at the moment, or in the previous trial, it was simply

Central through to Dubbo—so whether there was the opportunity for us to have other locations where people could bring their roll-on bike. All of these things are being factored into the redesign of the trial, which, as I say, we expect to roll out before the end of this financial year.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr Murray, you'll recall that my colleague asked the Minister earlier this morning about the source of the funds for the Regional Roads Fund. Do you recall the answer that the Minister gave?

JOSH MURRAY: Not off the top of my head, no.

The Hon. WES FANG: I think she indicated that the funding had come from some of the previous commitments that the then Government had made that perhaps weren't delivered within the time frame since the Minister has come to government. The reason we asked the question was the election costing request form that was given to the Parliamentary Budget Office indicated that these funds were going to come from a single source. Do you recall what that source is, Mr Murray?

JOSH MURRAY: No, I'm not aware of that.

The Hon. WES FANG: They were to come from the Snowy Hydro fund. As a result, the Parliamentary Budget Office effectively put a costing of zero against this fund because it was to come from unallocated or redirected funds from that source funding. Are you aware of what criteria these projects needed to satisfy in order to be able to access that fund?

JOSH MURRAY: On the specifics of the funding, as the Minister said earlier, I think that's a question best asked of the Treasurer in the session.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr Murray, I would agree with you, but in this instance, in order to access that block of funding, these projects needed to satisfy certain criteria. Who has determined that these projects have satisfied that criteria?

JOSH MURRAY: I'll have to take that on notice in terms of the criteria of the individual projects in the fund.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr Hayes, of the projects that have been either funded through deeds to councils or work has commenced by Transport for NSW, how many of those projects have business cases attached to them?

ANTHONY HAYES: Of the council projects, I am aware that council has commenced a business case for the East Nowra Sub Arterial. Transport, we have commenced business cases on four of the projects and we have completed business cases on Yass Road and the Gosford Bypass.

The Hon. WES FANG: Where the business case is ongoing or hasn't been commenced yet, how are you determining whether they are able to fit criteria that will allow them to receive funding from the Snowy Hydro fund?

ANTHONY HAYES: I can't comment on the Snowy Hydro fund. I know nothing about that at all, other than our role is to deliver on the election commitments as we've been asked to do by the Government and that's what we are doing.

The Hon. WES FANG: Let me read you this section from the Parliamentary Budget Office assessment of the Regional Roads Fund:

To use the funds from SHLF they would need to meet the purpose of fund which is to improve economic development in regional NSW by investing in infrastructure projects of primary benefit to the regions. The PBO considers it reasonable that the funds could be re-purposed for building new roads in rural and regional areas as they align with this purpose and support one of the key focus areas, rail and road passenger connectivity.

Surely there needs to be a process to ensure that each of these projects that are committed under this fund will meet that criteria before it can access funds from Snowy Hydro Legacy Fund. Who is doing that work, Mr Murray?

JOSH MURRAY: I'd have to check that exact wording that you've just put out. However, it did just align with the building of roads in regional New South Wales, which is the entire purpose of the Regional Roads Fund. I would also say that election commitments made prior to the 2023 election were then considered as a whole by the new Government when they were elected and went through a central-agencies process to be authorised and to be given back to us as delivery agencies. So these processes have been followed through in terms of allowing us to now get on with the delivery of that work.

The Hon. WES FANG: Who is responsible, though, in relation to ensuring that this assessment work has occurred before any funds are delivered in these projects?

JOSH MURRAY: Going back to Mr Hayes's earlier question, our role here is to deliver on these approved projects. We have an allocation through the budget process. We have clear visibility on that money and what we need to go and deliver, and we're working with councils and our delivery partners to make that happen. These processes to which you refer, I think, relate to the transition to government, which I can't comment on.

The Hon. WES FANG: Whilst I appreciate that, I think what we're trying to do is understand the rigour that's gone over these projects and how the funding and the expenditure is being assessed and monitored by not only Transport for NSW but the Government. There's not a lot of clarity here in relation to the period from when the commitments were made until now. Certainly, the shadow regional roads Minister and those of us here asking questions aren't actually convinced that there has been any assessment process other than the commitment being given prior to the election and now simply handing over the funds. Can you provide me with any certainty that this isn't the case and that there has been some level of assessment and criteria applied to these commitments prior to the funding?

JOSH MURRAY: As I say, I can only comment on Transport's process, which is to seek approval through the budgeting process to get allocations to do this work, which we have done. It's in line with the commitments that were made, and I would only be able to refer you to other agencies, if it's about the Snowy fund or any other elements that may have an impact on where this money was originally repurposed from.

The Hon. WES FANG: Before I hand over to my colleague, I've got one final question on this matter. I may come back to it later but, at this stage, I want to reaffirm an answer that I got earlier, which was that, because these are election commitments made by the then Opposition, regardless of what business case, assessment or level of criteria might be applied to these projects post the election that might indicate that these projects aren't good value for money, are undeliverable or are deliverable within the budget range that was identified—regardless of all of that, these projects will go ahead. Is that correct?

JOSH MURRAY: We don't see any impediments to delivering these projects. We're underway across the board. As Mr Hayes has detailed, we're in a range of either delivery, signing off the funds to councils to deliver, or going through our own delivery. But, on a more broad principle, when it comes to election commitments, certainly, it's been made clear to me as secretary that if during the course of delivery of any transport-related budget election commitments there was to be some impediment to delivery, cost or actual ability to make it happen, or impact on the community—any of those things that were not foreseen when the commitment was made—then it should be raised, and it would be considered by the Government.

The Hon. WES FANG: And you haven't had to do that as yet.

JOSH MURRAY: I've not had to do that, no.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: If we could move on to some other topics, can I ask about Armidale Road in Clarence? Mr Fuller?

MATT FULLER: In terms of the impact from natural disasters on the Kempsey-Armidale Road? Or is it—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: No, not quite that, but you can get to that as well, if you'd like. I'm more broad than that for these questions, but then we can go to that. But it's a really important road with a lot of traffic movements, yes?

MATT FULLER: Sorry, just to clarify, which road?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Armidale Road.

MATT FULLER: The one that runs from Grafton across to Armidale up through Coutts Crossing et cetera?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That's right, yes. Sorry. There are a lot of traffic movements on that road.

MATT FULLER: It's a regional road. It has a number of traffic communities. It is an important connection, particularly to the communities that are situated along it.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Coming to the point of being a regional road and the classification of it, it remains a State government responsibility.

MATT FULLER: No, my understanding is that it's a regional road, and it's maintained by Clarence Valley Council.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So it's not being reclassified. Are there negotiations with council about that?

MATT FULLER: That's not something that sits in my space. I'm certainly aware that council has sought on a couple of occasions for Transport to consider its classification.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Mr Hayes, are you able to answer that more directly?

ANTHONY HAYES: Yes. It remains a council responsibility at this stage. They have certainly raised, on numerous occasions, that they believe it should be transferred. The Minister has tasked us with looking at road reclassification and making it a business as usual function within Transport. We're working through that project at the moment to be able to work with each council so they understand criteria, process and how they would actually go about submitting a road for consideration. That will work in both directions. There are some roads that are State roads that perhaps should be council roads and vice versa. We're working through that process now.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: For this particular road, are you at that stage of negotiations with the council around that?

ANTHONY HAYES: No, not at this stage. What we're working on at the moment is to finalise the criteria and the process and working with councils through that process so that they are involved in coming up with the process and the criteria. There are still several months of work ahead of us to finalise that process.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Talking about the Kempsey-Armidale Road in Oxley and Northern Tablelands—again, I'm not sure if that is for Mr Fuller.

ANTHONY HAYES: If it's a flood-related question, that would be Mr Fuller.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Can I get an update of where that is at and what has transpired?

MATT FULLER: Sure. I should just say, on the Armidale Road, in the recent event, we were in contact with Clarence Valley Council about their ability to prioritise response to different sections of roads in their network, and we did offer, on the basis of looking at what was happening around the network, to assist them with support on Armidale Road. I should have mentioned that. We were in discussions with the council and the local member on that, to do what we could to step in and help during a pretty intense period for all road network managers. We didn't need to do that at that point, and we did say to them, at that stage, the team—I guess, the important thing to consider is that we rely on about 60 councils to deliver work on the State road network, for us.

We operate a maintenance program that is delivered through a blended model, and we have the Regional Maintenance Council Contracts, where we have almost half of our network under maintenance by councils. It's very much a support structure that we share across the State with different councils and, at that time, particularly thinking about the priorities that the team were faced with that are based in Grafton, the Gwydir Highway would have taken precedent on any response that was required, even though we did say to Clarence Valley Council that we would assist them if we could. The Gwydir—simply, the main reason for that is that it's the primary B-double route that connects the east and west of the State. I just thought I'd add that.

On the Kempsey-Armidale Road, my understanding at the moment is that we've been working intently with Armidale council to get the approval for their EPAR submission—the essential public asset restoration submission—with the Reconstruction Authority and NEMA, and that has been successful. That was approved late last year. They are working through, at the moment, the options for design and delivery. We have, through my team, been assisting them recently in discussions of delivery models—how the construction will be undertaken. You're talking about something like 45 kilometres of road that's impacted by multiple slips with very complex geotechnical work along that route. It is a project that is going to take some time to deliver, but it's in good shape now in terms of having the availability of funding and moving into that important, detailed design phase.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So 43 kilometres of road—have we identified which area is selected for works?

MATT FULLER: Yes, absolutely. There's a detailed scope that has been submitted to the Reconstruction Authority and to NEMA that outlines that corridor and the large number of slope repairs and other surface restoration works that are required.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: At this point, is it not feasible to have a time frame on that, given the complexity of the work?

MATT FULLER: No. All I would say, at this point, is that project will run for some years. As I said, it's in the detailed design phase at the moment. It's the critical point in terms of the construction method and how they would undertake the work on the varying aspects of that corridor, and that will help determine the time

frames. I'm sure we'll continue to support council with that, and I'm sure, once they've got that better established and they're looking at the constructability and the contractor base that they would go to for that, they would be sharing more information publicly about time frames.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Working with council—that's great to hear. So Northern Tablelands again—the New England Highway and the Puddledock Road intersection, specifically. Were there safety issues around that intersection? Are you aware of that one?

ANTHONY HAYES: I regret to advise that I am not familiar with Puddledock Road.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'm very disappointed, Mr Hayes!

ANTHONY HAYES: I would have to take that one on notice. I'm sorry.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Around that, an update on the plans for the intersection, might we be able to obtain that? I have another similar one here as well that might be a little more known to you. It's Goldfields Way and the Olympic Highway—Cootamundra and Old Junee. It's the same thing—a little bit more niche, perhaps—the possibility to change the sign at the intersection of Goldfields Way and the Olympic Highway from a give-way to a stop sign. Apparently, there are quite heavy flows of traffic and there are safety issues around all of that. Has that been presented to Transport to be looked into at this point? Have there been any representations from council about the signage?

ANTHONY HAYES: I am not familiar with that, but obviously we have literally thousands. I would be very happy to take that on notice and report back.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'm sure the member for Cootamundra will be very happy with me if you are able to do that. There's another one. Intersections seem to be a big thing, obviously. We've got Oxley, the Valla Beach Road intersection. Again, has it been identified by Transport for NSW as an intersection of concern?

ANTHONY HAYES: Yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: It has?

ANTHONY HAYES: It certainly has.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Yes, we've got one out of four.

ANTHONY HAYES: The local member is very passionate about this particular topic, and meetings have been had within the last few days. Our commitment is to reduce the speed zone to 60 kilometres an hour as a short-term solution while we look at the longer term speed zone. But our view is that that would be a more appropriate solution in the longer term, so we're working through that at the moment.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Terrific. Excellent. It's not a bad hit rate, I guess. Finally, when it comes to Tweed light rail, is there any progress on engagement with the Queensland Government about undertaking investigations into extending it further—any progress, any heads-up?

ANTHONY HAYES: Again, I can take that one. A meeting was held earlier this week in Tweed, where discussions were held with our Queensland colleagues to look at a partnership model to work through longer term planning. It is early days but we're talking to the Queenslanders, again more broadly, about congestion solutions for that whole region, and that's obviously a key discussion point within those discussions.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That's great. Good to hear. I have to make the declaration that I had the pleasure to be the patron of the Cooma Monaro Railway society. The Transport for NSW regional rail heritage strategy, what's happening with that?

SALLY WEBB: We are looking at the way to meet our obligations under heritage legislation to preserve the significant rail heritage that we have in New South Wales. We've been working with heritage specialists from within Transport to develop a rail heritage strategy which aligns and takes into account asset maintenance and management. We have developed that. Many of the assets are owned by TAM, and we are working with TAM to progress that. Obviously, we are working with heritage New South Wales and the Heritage Council in relation to that as well. John, I don't know if you've got anything to add.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Maybe anything about readaptive use that's being looked at.

SALLY WEBB: Absolutely. It's an appropriate strategy under that to look at readaptive use.

The CHAIR: This question is probably for Ms Webb or Mr Carlon. It's about pedestrian crossings for local communities when local communities request them and they're on State roads. How are they assessed?

BERNARD CARLON: That's probably something that's better dealt with by our operational people.

ANTHONY HAYES: I am happy at a broad level to respond. We have a large number of safety experts that spend their life assessing the various requests and proposals that come in. Again, if a proposal were to arrive to assess the concept of a pedestrian crossing, our people would look at that.

The CHAIR: I've got an example that's come to me from a constituent about repeated requests from Bungendore residents for a safe pedestrian crossing on Kings Highway in the town centre. Apparently these have been denied. Bungendore Public School is currently accommodating high school students until 2026. That's located on the highway. Why do you think that request to install a pedestrian crossing on Kings Highway has been refused, particularly after the evidence of how they're assessed, leading the State Government to say, "No, we're not going to put a pedestrian crossing there."

ANTHONY HAYES: I don't know that one specifically, so I'm happy to take that on notice. As a broader response, though, there are a number of guidelines that we obviously use. A highway is a different conversation to any other kind of road, so sometimes it's a matter of balancing what is the appropriate safety response. But I'm very happy to take that one on notice and come back to you.

The CHAIR: For that particular example there's obviously the broader question around how they're assessed generally and the process for that, and then specifically why the Bungendore request was rejected. Community transport is the next thing that people are talking to me about. I think we've asked a number of times about residents in regional New South Wales needing to travel to medical appointments. This is from the same constituent in the same area. This time it's Braidwood. Their community transport system service has apparently collapsed due to a reliance on volunteer drivers, clearly something that's unsustainable over the longer term. Where is government support for community transport solutions up to, particularly in smaller regional areas that regional residents rely upon so much to get to medical appointments and other things?

ANTHONY HAYES: I might start, unless Ms Wise wants to add in anything. The starting point for this is that community transport is a real challenge in regional communities. Particularly as we're seeing a lot of the taxi drivers retire as they get older et cetera, it is a real challenge.

The CHAIR: Yes, I was going to get to taxi services.

ANTHONY HAYES: Community transport is certainly one solution of many in the mix. Then finding bus drivers is actually an extraordinary challenge in the regions on an ongoing basis. So there are a number of issues with it. We have a relatively modest budget to support various community transport initiatives throughout the State.

The CHAIR: What's that budget?

ANTHONY HAYES: I would have to take that on notice. I don't have that number in front of me. It's a real focus for us to try and see where we can step in and provide support. We've recently engaged and set up a working group with our colleagues in Health to talk about whether there are opportunities for us to team up and work on this challenge together. Because it's quite often a conversation about helping people get to medical appointments, and it may well be that if we work on it together, we can provide a broader number of solutions that get people to go shopping when they need to get their groceries but also allow them to get to medical appointments. So we're very focused on trying to work with Health and with other departments to try and find solutions, but it's genuinely a real challenge.

The CHAIR: That's the community transport situation, which isn't great. I think I've asked about wheelchair-accessible taxis in the regions as well. There was an emergency funding package that was announced in December. Have we started seeing any improvements as a result of that package or is it too soon to say?

SALLY WEBB: That package was announced in December, but the rollout of that package is only just commencing now. We haven't seen outcomes from that new package as of yet.

The CHAIR: At the last hearing—or maybe it was the one before that—the data and figures around wheelchair-accessible taxis weren't great and were declining. That was six months ago or 12 months ago. Is that still the case in terms of the number of taxis and drivers that are specifically wheelchair accessible at this point? Do you have the figures there?

SALLY WEBB: Yes. They have declined by one-third in the past five years. Currently, there are 625 registered wheelchair-accessible taxis.

The CHAIR: Do you have the breakdown for the past 12 months, Ms Webb, or the breakdown year by year in a table?

SALLY WEBB: I'll have to take that question on the breakdown on notice.

The CHAIR: From that five-year figure—sorry, I don't have the statistics in front of me in terms of what I asked last time—do you know whether it is still declining at the same rate?

SALLY WEBB: I am aware that it is continuing to decline and it is challenging, which is the reason for the emergency funding package that has been put in place. It is the reason for that key findings report. I'll have to take on notice the year-on-year decline.

JOSH MURRAY: The advice that we have had from those communities and also the delivery groups was that COVID was the biggest contributor to the decline in local providers just not being able to continue that during the lockdown years. That saw a lot of people exit. As Ms Webb says, while the decline is continuing, it is probably on a slightly lower rate than what we saw in the previous few years.

The CHAIR: Right. That would incorporate that five-year period. Mr Hayes, with the strategic regional integrated transport plans, regardless of the community consultation and feedback, are there principles that the department will meet around, for example, accessibility, connection and active transport? Are there principles of good strategic transport plans so communities can know that there will be targets to improve the number of, for example, wheelchair-accessible taxis and smaller community transport solutions? Can communities be guaranteed that some founding, basic principles are non-negotiable and will be part of every plan?

ANTHONY HAYES: They will certainly be a part of every conversation for every plan. There will be different outcomes for each plan. One of the things we are trying to do is view the plans from a different perspective and say, "Right, what are the housing needs, what are the Aboriginal engagement needs, what are the education needs, what are the health needs?" We don't want to just look at it purely from a Transport perspective and want to try to look at it with different eyes. We want to engage with different parts of government and different parts of community and have the conversation from their perspective and try to include that into the plans. That is a very good example of where there is a real challenge with public transport. That should be the key focus, rather than a conversation about infrastructure. You've got to have both, obviously. But it's about trying to reflect what the key priorities are, and in some instances it may well be, "Are there opportunities for community transport or should other things be closer to the top of the list?"

The CHAIR: Just in terms of starting with the principles behind the plans, I think you said, "Yes, we're having conversations. They may be in conversations about the plan." But the question was will they be in the plan? Across the State, every regional community will have increasing needs in terms of older people, an ageing population, a growing population needing to get to medical services. I see a fair bit on the Government's website about how that will be incorporated in the plans for regional transport. The question is, surely accessibility and having transport for the people who need it—elderly people and people who don't have cars—have to be core principles and fundamental aspects of each plan?

ANTHONY HAYES: Yes. In fact, the plan must necessarily reflect the Government's priorities, including housing, renewable energy and transport equity. Those are key principles that need to be incorporated into the plan, yes.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Just going to some questions that were asked in the last budget estimates around EnergyCo and oversize and overmass vehicle movements, I just want to get a sense of how accurate the current projections are for those oversize and overmass vehicle movements based on what you have been provided in terms of developer planning documents?

ANTHONY HAYES: We have daily partnership discussions with EnergyCo. We are also working very closely with a number of the proponents that are engaged with EnergyCo. It is a massive undertaking. It is now being addressed very seriously at a whole-of-government level. A number of whole-of-government steering committees are looking at the challenge. The timelines are very steep. I am happy to answer any more specific questions, but we are very focused on that. We have an ever-increasing team that is working on it in partnership with EnergyCo to make sure we get it done.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Just to go to some specifics, what are some specific modifications or enforcements that we are looking at for Denman Bridge to accommodate those loads?

ANTHONY HAYES: Again, that's a very specific question.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I have a bad habit of going into the weeds.

ANTHONY HAYES: I might have to come back to you with specific examples of what we are doing on a specific bridge. But certainly for the first round of work we have identified that there are 19 pain points along the route that need to be dealt with. We are working with EnergyCo to make sure the oversize and overmass

movements can get there when they need to get there. We are also working with the councils in between to make sure that we are taking into account the impact that we are likely to have on those local communities.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: On notice, are you able to provide those pain or pinch points?

ANTHONY HAYES: Yes, I'm happy to.

CAMILLA DROVER: I can also share that we've got a project in the Hunter—the Hexham Straight project. We've also undertaken some oversize and overmass intersection upgrades that support both the delivery of that project and the M1 to Raymond Terrace project. Its primary purpose is actually to leave that legacy of better oversized movements through that corridor, which, of course, supports EnergyCo in their endeavours. That has been delivered already. Just last week, we saw a 70-metre bridge truss go through that new infrastructure. It is working.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Thank you for that. Mr Hayes, if possible, when you are coming back with details on Denman Bridge, could you also provide what alternative routes the department is considering to ensure those oversize and overmass vehicles can get to where they need to go if the modifications aren't feasible? That would be great.

ANTHONY HAYES: I can take that on notice.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Who can I speak to about the regional rail network and axle loads?

JOHN HARDWICK: That would be me.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: My understanding is that we're looking to upgrade the axle load to deal with the more modern locomotives. Is that correct? Are we considering that?

JOHN HARDWICK: There is work to consider that, yes.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: It is my understanding that we are considering six routes. Is that right?

JOHN HARDWICK: I would have to take the exact number and which one they are on notice.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Sure. Could you take on notice the specific sections you are considering to upgrade and whether those enhancements will achieve that 25-tonne axle load capacity, which is what some constituents are asking me about? In particular, some New South Wales farmers are concerned about that upgrade. Do you have a timeline for this work?

JOHN HARDWICK: No, that is still in the planning phase at the moment for that work.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Is there a specific funding stream for that planning, or is it just part of day-to-day business?

JOHN HARDWICK: At the moment it's part of the normal planning processes.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: So you probably have no estimated costs for what that might entail.

JOHN HARDWICK: No, and in the interim, whilst that's going on, we still have train operating conditions waivers that we can use as well, which allows us to get higher axle loads across the network as well. We may reduce speed, we may change the dimensions of that, but we do have those options available to us as well to move heavier freight if needed. It depends on the route itself and the condition of the assets on that route.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: How often would you be making those adjustments?

JOHN HARDWICK: The train operators—if they have an unusual load they want to move or changes they want to make, they would submit that through to the rail infrastructure manager and ourselves. We would assess those on a case-by-case basis.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: How early would they have to do that? How responsive is that process?

JOHN HARDWICK: How long it would take to achieve that depends on the route. Some routes would be quite easy to do the assessment; others are quite difficult, especially if it spans across multiple rail infrastructure managers, because it may be wanting to travel across the ARTC network as well as the country regional network. So we need to look at it on a case-by-case basis.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: How is this project to upgrade the TAL going to work in and around the Inland Rail project? I know Inland Rail is Federal, but are there any connections there?

JOHN HARDWICK: Sorry, I just missed the start of that question.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: So the look to upgrade the axle load, is that to bring it more in line with what's happening with Inland Rail, or are there any connections with Inland Rail?

JOHN HARDWICK: It's to do with the integration of the overall network of rail networks, so it depends which rail networks are connecting where across the State. We do it on a case-by-case basis.

ANTHONY HAYES: Mr Banasiak, just following up on Denman, the proposed route is to use Wybong Road for the western section and Bengalla in Muswellbrook. We have actually offered to Muswellbrook council that we will take back reclassification. We'll take back the classification and make those State roads, to take the burden away from the council. So we'll look after those roads to make that work.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Was that based on the data you gathered from those machine learning cameras, or was that a decision made before?

ANTHONY HAYES: No, it was made before.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: How long have the machine learning cameras been there on Bengalla Road?

ANTHONY HAYES: Not too sure.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Are you gathering data on that daily, weekly or monthly? What's the process with those?

ANTHONY HAYES: We'd have to take that one on notice, I think.

SALLY WEBB: Mr Banasiak, I can advise on the Golden Highway heavy vehicle inspection station. The civil works for that project were completed in 2023, and there was \$7 million expended to deliver the enabling civil works. Then we've spent an additional \$4 million on the infrastructure and technology for the heavy vehicle compliance monitoring, and that work was completed in November 2024. The works that have been installed include a weighbridge, office and amenities, lighting for night work, electronic speed reduction down to 80 kilometres an hour, station open and closed signage, and underground pipes and conduits to allow for expansion from the current monitoring level up to a more sophisticated monitoring level. We've also got highway avoidance cameras.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Is that operational 24 hours a day, seven days a week? You mentioned open and closed.

SALLY WEBB: We've handed the site over to the NHVR, so I would ask them to advise on that. They're doing some test runs of the facility at the moment, and the idea is that it will go live in mid-April.

The CHAIR: Let's go to the Opposition. Mr Fang.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr Murray, help me out here. Say you're a regular bloke from regional New South Wales and you buy a brand-new caravan from interstate. You go and pick up said caravan, brand new from the manufacturer interstate, and you bring it back to New South Wales. If you were to purchase it in New South Wales, you could just get it registered and away you go. If you bring it back, even though it's brand new from the manufacturer, you have to get a blue slip for your brand-new caravan before you can register it. Is that the best use of time, not only for the person buying the caravan but also for the Service NSW staff that have to then process that?

JOSH MURRAY: Thank you for the question, Mr Fang. I'm going to ask Ms Webb to assist me on this one.

SALLY WEBB: I'm afraid I'll have to take the specifics of caravan registration on notice.

The Hon. WES FANG: It's not the typical question I would have thought to ask either, until I had to go through the process. I must say it is somewhat frustrating. In relation to the way that interstate transfers occur, obviously if you're buying a second-hand car or caravan, it would make sense that it has to be inspected when it returns or comes to New South Wales so that we can be certain that we're not allowing other States' junk into our beautiful New South Wales countryside. But when it's brand new, is there not a way that we can manage that process a bit better?

SALLY WEBB: We do have risk-based regulatory principles built into the way in which we undertake regulation, and we're always revisiting our settings. I will pass that request on to the team to have a look, and I might be able to come back to you with the rules that we've got in New South Wales for cross-jurisdictional purchases and also whether there are opportunities to refine the process.

The Hon. WES FANG: I'll phrase a statement as a question, but wouldn't it make more sense that, if the manufacturer or the importer certifies that it satisfies New South Wales requirements, that should be enough in order for somebody to take that vehicle to a Service NSW centre and just have it registered, without having to go through the whole rigmarole of bringing it back and then booking it in for a blue slip to literally just get it inspected and then wander back down to the thing? When you're trying to get to a by-election, that can be somewhat annoying.

The CHAIR: That was a comment.

The Hon. WES FANG: It was.

The CHAIR: Mr Carlin, I think Saving Lives on Country Roads is your program. Is that yours?

BERNARD CARLON: It's the safer country roads program.

The CHAIR: When you look at the initiative, there doesn't seem to be anything specific on the website about reducing speeds on dangerous curves in the road or black spots. There's the tactile line marking. You're very familiar with all of them, I'm sure, but there doesn't seem to be anything about speed. Is there a reason?

BERNARD CARLON: It is included in that program, and major projects like the Oxley Highway example that we have on our website demonstrate a combination of both speed zone reductions and infrastructure upgrades. A combination of those treatments actually do get assessed and implemented in the program. In terms of the broader speed zone reduction numbers and speed zone reviews, just in 2024-25 there was a total of 485 speed zone reviews conducted across the network. Over the last five years, that's around 2,750 speed zone reviews that were conducted.

The CHAIR: Do you have the breakdown for regional New South Wales compared to urban?

BERNARD CARLON: Yes. In the regions, that total for the five-year period was 2,085 speed zone reviews that were conducted. Of those, there were 87 where the speed zone was increased. There were 537 in the metro. The decrease was 1,422 in regional New South Wales. Out of all of those speed zone reviews, there was no change in 588 speed zone reviews. They are integrated both in the Towards Zero Safer Roads Program, but then there are a whole range of speed zone reviews that are done based on community requests, local government requests, and police and other agencies as well.

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 go to questions straightaway from the Opposition.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Could I ask just a couple of questions about the Captains Flat rail corridor remediation project?

JOHN HARDWICK: That would be me.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Terrific. Thanks, Mr Hardwick. Where is it at, at the moment?

JOHN HARDWICK: With the Captains Flat area—obviously with the whole Lake George mine as well—it's with Regional NSW, who are still doing the work. We were looking at the remediation, and they've got a cell that they need to install. With that cell, we're ready to go to move the contaminated material into that cell, but Regional NSW are still working on getting that cell ready. We don't expect that to be ready from them until later this calendar year.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: What about the corridor? I understand that there are also issues with that contamination potentially spreading along the corridor to Bungendore.

JOHN HARDWICK: The 34 kilometres of that obviously has varying levels of contamination along that corridor, from the movement of the coal from there. It has varying levels, and it has spread into a number of locations. We continue to do our environmental assessments of that corridor. As soon as we're able to move the material out of the corridor that's contaminated, we will be moving it to the cell.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: The area at Bungendore at the railway station itself that has been fenced off for at least the last two years, is that under Regional NSW or under Transport?

JOHN HARDWICK: That is ours right at the train station, and we're waiting for that cell to be able to remediate the land.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Before you can do that as well?

JOHN HARDWICK: There'll be a number of spots right along that corridor.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So where the men's shed is operating as well along that corridor is still impacted by that too?

JOHN HARDWICK: Yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Thank you for that. Again, really quickly about e-scooters, the NSW Centre for Road Safety recommended e-scooters be limited to a maximum speed of 10 kilometres per hour on shared pathways. Transport for NSW is currently considering 20 kilometres per hour, and Portfolio Committee No. 6, chaired by Ms Cate Faehrmann, recommended a 15-kilometre per hour speed limit. Which one is it going to be?

SALLY WEBB: We have a review—we gave evidence at that committee. We've received the committee report. We chair a whole-of-government e-micromobility working group, which is considering all of the recommendations, and we'll be giving advice to government in the response, and that will be considered by government and released in due course. The due date for that is in May.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So not a decision on that till May—thank you again. Another quick one on the Harrington-Coopernook overpass: In 2021 the NSW Nationals, in government, committed to an interchange with an overpass that connects over the Pacific Highway. Where is that project up to?

ANTHONY HAYES: That should be me. I swore I had that information. I'm sorry, I don't have any. Can I take that on notice and come back to you?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Yes, certainly. Thank you.

ANTHONY HAYES: My apologies.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Coming back to the freight policy reform that I raised with the Minister, who can take that?

JOSH MURRAY: Yes, I'll take that, initially.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Mr Murray, an interim directions paper has been released. Is that correct?

JOSH MURRAY: That's correct.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: The document talks about optimising the grain rail network. What does that mean in that context?

JOSH MURRAY: I will direct you to Mr Hardwick.

JOHN HARDWICK: A lot of that is, at the moment, from a policy reform. It's looking to see that we can deal with the grain industry and in a few locations. Now we're starting to put sidings in and working with industry to put sidings in, so no longer do filling on the main lines. There are a couple of those installs that are happening at the moment as part of that, trying to optimise the grain movements across the State.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That is about optimising and, clearly, making as efficient as possible. It won't mean closing grain lines down?

JOHN HARDWICK: There was nothing in the optimising, that I've just talked about, about closing lines down.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Okay. That's terrific. Thank you very much. Now one final quick one from me. You may or may not be familiar with Bobeyan Road, down past Adaminaby, stretching up to the ACT border. There's a \$20 million project to seal that. The \$5 million, which is supposed to be an additional commitment from the ACT Government, I think has been removed.

The Hon. WES FANG: Shame.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Shame—ACT Labor Government, I should say. I am wondering if we have any details on where Bobeyan Road is at and the work that still needs to be completed.

ANTHONY HAYES: I'm sorry, I'll have to take that one on notice as well.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That's fine. Thank you.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr Carlon, we were speaking earlier about how the sites were chosen for the average speed camera trials. I'll put that to one side for a moment, but in relation to the assessment that will occur for the trial, I made a comment about if there is a death in that Gundagai to Coolac area, where there hasn't been a recorded fatality for quite a number of years, whether that would mean that there has been a failure of the project. How are you going to assess the outcomes from this trial?

BERNARD CARLON: I'd first answer your question by saying no. We have a network of average speed cameras across New South Wales, where there continue to be fatal crashes where those cameras exist, but they have led to a 44 per cent reduction in fatal crashes involving heavy vehicles. One fatal crash doesn't necessarily mean that those average speed cameras have not saved significant numbers of lives, with that 44 per cent reduction. In terms of evaluation, there will be an independent contract for an independent evaluation of the road safety benefits associated with the trial.

Naturally, one of the key elements of assessing whether or not a trial to manage the average speed of vehicles travelling over the network would be to assess whether there's a significant reduction in people speeding, on average, over that part of the network and then a whole range of other individual vehicle types, vehicle speeds, time of day, other associated risks, which will be taken into account as part of that overall evaluation. That will commence, essentially, immediately. We'll be appointing an independent evaluator to evaluate that, with the right sort of experience. We've seen in other jurisdictions, like Norway, where there has been a 49 per cent reduction in fatalities of all vehicles across their network of average speed, and I think it's a 36 per cent reduction in the UK. We would expect that safety will improve.

The Hon. WES FANG: When these projects are looked to be pushed out, we always get those outlier results that are identified by the proponents. For example, in relation to this proposal, you've identified Norway and the UK. Could I ask if you have done any work in looking at jurisdictions where they haven't had that level of reduction?

BERNARD CARLON: They are the two jurisdictions which had done comprehensive evaluations of their network. Obviously we rely on those sorts of comprehensive independent evaluations from those jurisdictions. There are some not as comprehensive, but some evaluations that had been done on trials in Western Australia also demonstrated a safety benefit. Certainly from our own camera programs, which have been operating for many years in this jurisdiction, there's very clear trauma reduction benefits that have been published on an annual basis in New South Wales.

The Hon. WES FANG: How many jurisdictions across the world that you're aware of operate average speed cameras for light vehicles?

BERNARD CARLON: I'd have to take that on notice for the total number, but there are more than those jurisdictions that I've just mentioned. Across Australia, I think there are only two jurisdictions that don't operate. But, again, I'll take that on notice and I'll be able to provide back to the Committee the total numbers. Of all those jurisdictions, New South Wales is the only jurisdiction in the world that doesn't use our average speed camera network for the enforcement of light vehicles.

The Hon. WES FANG: You've got those detailed studies about Norway and the UK. Surely you must have done some—even base level—analysis about other jurisdictions. What's the average reduction that you see from an average speed camera program?

BERNARD CARLON: Again, I can take that on notice. Those two jurisdictions really are the most comprehensive evaluations that have been done. As I mentioned, there have been other studies in smaller scale; Western Australia is one example that I'm aware of. I'll be happy to provide the Committee that additional information.

The Hon. WES FANG: I would be fascinated to read it. The reason I ask that is because there's an expectation now that those numbers have been put on the table, between a 30 to 40 per cent reduction in fatality numbers if we're looking at the UK or Norway. What would happen if during this trial or even if we were to implement it across our whole average speed camera network, and we didn't see anywhere near that number of reduction in fatalities? Say we were at 5 or 10 per cent or—heaven forbid—that the number of fatalities actually increases year on year, what would that mean then?

BERNARD CARLON: I mean that's a hypothetical, clearly.

The Hon. WES FANG: It is a hypothetical but I'm just—

BERNARD CARLON: The position that we're in at the moment is that we are conducting a trial. It will start on 1 May. There will be a two-month warning letter period, and then a 12-month enforcement period for all vehicles. Based on the independent evaluation of that trial, that information will be provided to government.

Then, no doubt, there'll be a consideration about options as to whether it would be an effective way to continue to use average speed cameras for all vehicles. I also note that 79 per cent of all fatalities and serious injuries across the existing 31 average speed camera enforcement lengths don't involve heavy vehicles, so there's a significant burden of trauma that's already there across that network. We're clearly hoping that this trial gives sufficient evidence that it's effective in reducing the risk.

The Hon. WES FANG: I guess I'm seeking to foreshadow what I expect will be the responses from the Government if we were to implement this across the whole system and not see the reduction in fatality numbers like those you've identified in the two major studies, being the UK and Norway. If there were, say, only a 5 per cent or 10 per cent reduction—and you've got two major studies indicating that you'll get somewhere between 30 and 40 per cent—I expect the Government would say to us, "What we didn't do is look at all the speed cameras across all jurisdictions. The average is sitting at about 10 per cent. We're sort of there, so this is successful." I'm only giving that background. I've asked these questions now and I'm asking for the numbers. I note you've taken it on notice. We've sought to interrogate the numbers as a whole, not just cherrypick one or two jurisdictions. Otherwise how are we going to judge the effectiveness if we haven't done the work and we're only looking at those two jurisdictions? Do you see where I'm seeking to—

BERNARD CARLON: For clarity, they are the only two jurisdictions that have actually published comprehensive evaluations of their average speed camera network.

The Hon. WES FANG: I imagine the very purpose of the Centre for Road Safety is that you look at data from across the world and in any number of ways. I'm sure that jurisdictions would have pre- and post-fatality figures from before they've implemented the system and after they've implemented the system. And with that data, even if it's not a peer-reviewed, fully scientific study, you would have some idea as to the average across the jurisdictions that have implemented this—where it sits.

BERNARD CARLON: Again, I'm happy to provide the Committee with additional information. In many instances, the average speed camera networks are relatively new compared to the fixed cameras, which started in the late '70s to '80s in other jurisdictions. I'm happy to look to those other jurisdictions for published data that they may have. Again, I'll just reiterate that the only two significant studies that we're aware of, internationally, that are comprehensive evaluations are those two in Norway and the UK.

The Hon. WES FANG: I might actually take the Minister up on her offer of coming in. I might come out to the Centre for Road Safety one day if the invitation is there.

BERNARD CARLON: I'm more than happy to.

The Hon. WES FANG: I do have quite an interest in this, aside of some of the questions that we can ask in budget estimates. In relation to that and some of the studies that the Centre for Road Safety does, you indicated that you would have an independent reviewer to look at the program once the trial is completed. I'm trying to reconcile here. The Parliament just had an inquiry in relation to outside experts. We keep hearing from Ministers in both Houses how they want to try to bring in more expertise into the public service and within our departments. Surely the Centre for Road Safety must have enough expertise and ability to conduct these assessments without independent assessment? How much would it cost to have that independent assessment done, instead of the Centre for Road Safety providing the data?

BERNARD CARLON: Again, I'm happy to take that on notice in terms of costs. Many of our program evaluations based on best practice are done independently by independently qualified research agencies—either in academia or commercial—that provide that arms-length evaluation skill. They are qualified to do that at that level. Many of the studies that have been done over the years in relation to road safety have actually been done independently. Certainly the academic rigour behind those in order to provide quality evidence for decision-making within government is the rationale for outsourcing to those independently qualified academic institutions and others that actually do that work.

The Hon. WES FANG: Is the Minister aware that that's the plan in relation to the way that it will be assessed? Has the Minister asked at all to minimise the spending on external agencies or external experts, given that that seems to be the Government position at the moment?

BERNARD CARLON: That question hasn't been raised with me. We have a practice, which is to get the highest quality independent evaluation processes done. They're available in the marketplace. We don't necessarily have that independent capacity within the Centre for Road Safety itself.

JOSH MURRAY: Transport has a significant program to reduce the amount of external consultancy in the organisation. We've been very successful over the last two financial years in driving that number down. As

Mr Carlon said, in areas like independent analysis of road safety numbers, we would always want to ensure we use the appropriate scientific skill set to supplement Transport's skills.

The Hon. WES FANG: Do you have an expected cost of what is going to be lumbered on the taxpayer?

JOSH MURRAY: Again, we wouldn't see it as being lumbered because it's part of—

The Hon. WES FANG: No, those are my words.

JOSH MURRAY: —the trial and we would want to assess it properly. We haven't gone to market for that work yet.

The Hon. WES FANG: Will that be funded from the road safety fund where all speed and traffic offence funding goes into?

BERNARD CARLON: All of our research and evaluation programs and our data programs are funded by the Community Road Safety Fund, yes.

The CHAIR: I am out of questions. Let us see if there are any additional questions from the Opposition members.

ANTHONY HAYES: I have a little bit of information on Puddledock Road, if I can.

The CHAIR: Yes.

ANTHONY HAYES: We are targeting a completion date for that work by March or April 2026. It's a \$9.6 million project, a 50/50 arrangement with the Australian Government, both putting in 4.8. The intersection in question will be upgraded to allow a separate right turn into Puddledock Road, which will improve the safety of the intersection. It will be strengthening and repairing, road sealing, new line markings, road safety barriers, raised road markers, improving and extending the drainage, and looking at roadside signage as well.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Users of Puddledock Road no doubt thank you.

ANTHONY HAYES: Indeed.

The Hon. WES FANG: What happened to 80/20?

The CHAIR: Order! Is there anything further?

BERNARD CARLON: There was a question you asked earlier on in the proceedings regarding the increase in registration and licensing for motorcycles. Since 2005 we've seen a 60 per cent to 61 per cent increase in both the registrations of motorcycles on the network and licence holders.

JOSH MURRAY: Mr Fang, I just wanted to confirm that, under section 8 of the Snowy Hydro Legacy Fund Act, that governs how the expenditure can be reallocated, which sits with the Treasurer, we have confirmation from Transport that we received confirmation at Transport from Treasury that the projects were included in that fund and we could proceed on that basis.

The Hon. WES FANG: When you say "the projects", are we talking about the fund as was given to the Parliamentary Budget Office for assessment? Or are we talking about the 28 individual projects that are being rolled out and funded at the moment?

JOSH MURRAY: Those elements were in the fund to be costed up at the current level that they're going out. My advice is that they were all approved to proceed under that funding basis.

The CHAIR: Any questions from Government members? No? All right. On that note we all have an early mark. Thank you so much for appearing. As usual, the secretariat will be in touch in relation to the questions you took on notice and whether there will be any supplementary questions, which no doubt there will be as well. That's the end of our session today.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.