

# GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 4

Monday 6 November 2006

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

## ROADS

The Committee met at 2.00 p.m.

### MEMBERS

The Hon. J. A. Gardiner (Chair)

The Hon. J. C. Burnswoods  
The Hon. Dr A. Chesterfield-Evans  
The Hon. D. Clarke

The Hon. G. J. Donnelly  
The Hon. K. F. Griffin

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### PRESENT

#### **Roads and Traffic Authority**

**Mr L. R. Wielinga**, *Chief Executive*

**Mr B. Skinner**, *Director, Finance and Commercial Development*

**Mr M. B. Bushby**, *Director, Network Planning, Road Maintenance and Traffic Management*

**Mr D. I. Stuart-Watt**, *Director, Licensing Registration and Freight*

**Mr B. J. Watters**, *Director, Road Network Infrastructure*

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**CHAIR:** I declare this hearing of General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4 into the budget estimates 2006-07 open to the public. I welcome officials to this hearing. At this hearing the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure of the portfolio of Roads. Before we commence I will make some comments about procedural matters. In accordance with the Legislative Council's guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings, only Committee members and witnesses may be filmed or recorded. People in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photographs. In reporting the proceedings of this Committee, members of the media must take responsibility for what they publish or what interpretation they place on anything that is said before the Committee.

Guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings are available at the table by the door. Messages will be delivered as usual and mobile phones must be turned off. I advise that the Committee has resolved to request that answers to questions on notice be provided by 5 o'clock on 22 November 2006. The short time frame is necessary due to the Committee's reporting deadline of 23 November. Given this short time frame I ask witnesses to answer as many questions as possible during the hearing rather than take them on notice. I remind witnesses that they are giving evidence on their former oath or affirmation. I declare the proposed expenditure for the Roads portfolio open for examination. All witnesses from departments, statutory bodies or corporations will be sworn in prior to giving evidence.

**LESLEY ROBERT WIELINGA**, Chief Executive Officer, Roads and Traffic Authority,

**BRETT SKINNER**, Director, Finance and Commercial Development, Roads and Traffic Authority,  
and

**DAVID IAN STUART-WATT**, Director, Licensing Registration and Freight, Roads and Traffic  
Authority, on former oath and examined.

**BRIAN JOHN WATTERS**, Interim Director, Major Infrastructure, Roads and Traffic Authority, and

**MICHAEL BRUCE BUSHBY**, Director, Network Planning, Road Maintenance and Traffic  
Maintenance, Roads and Traffic Authority, on former affirmation and examined:

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Mr Wielinga, schedule 6 of the Lane Cove Tunnel project  
reveals that a bonus is payable to the contractors for the completion of the tunnel. Are you aware of  
that?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I am aware of that.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Given that the tunnel will open in December 2006, five  
months ahead of schedule, how much compensation will be paid to the contractors?

**Mr WIELINGA:** The Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] has a contract with Connector  
Motorways. We do not deal with the contract between Connector Motorways and its contractor. It is  
entirely a matter for Connector Motorways. I cannot tell you what that number is.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Are you saying that you are not a party to the contract at all?

**Mr WIELINGA:** No. We have a concession contract with Connector Motorways for the  
motorway. They have engaged Thiess John Holland in a design and construction contract. The clause  
that you are talking about is in that design and construction contract, to which the RTA is not a party.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Just to make it clear, who are the two parties to that contract?

**Mr WIELINGA:** Connector Motorways, at that time called the Lane Cove Tunnel  
Company, and the Thiess John Holland joint venture.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Are you aware that compensation will be payable?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I believe there that will be, but I cannot confirm that and I cannot confirm  
the amount.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** That information is not in your possession at all?

**Mr WIELINGA:** It is not at this stage and I do not think the figure has been determined  
because they have not confirmed an opening date or what are the other arrangements for opening it.  
So we will have to wait and see.

**CHAIR:** Is it still on track for December?

**Mr WIELINGA:** Yes. Ian Hunt, Chief Executive from Connector Motorways, said that they  
were targeting the end of the year. To the best of our knowledge that is still the advice.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** They have been pretty accurate seeing as there are only a few  
weeks to go before the end of the year. So you would be assuming that that would be pretty much the  
case, would you not?

**Mr WIELINGA:** Yes. You need to appreciate that when you are opening a tunnel project it  
is not just civil works. Anybody can see what is happening on the surface. They are getting good

progress there at the moment. Opening tunnels involves sophisticated ventilation schemes, sophisticated tunnel management schemes, safety systems, deluge systems and a whole bunch of things that need to be commissioned. The main game on opening date is the progress with those commissioning works. We will see what happens in the immediate future on their progress.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Of the other works that you just detailed are you aware of any of them not being on time?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I am not aware and I do not know.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** When you said that you are not aware, are you not aware whether they will be on time, or what do you mean by that? You just do not know?

**Mr WIELINGA:** We just do not know the detail. We are at a particularly critical time. At this stage they are loading software into their systems. It depends on how that goes. They are testing their systems and it depends on how that goes. The reason I cannot give you a firm figure about it is that this testing and commissioning start with individual components. In the tunnel they test that. Then they might test a group of components and overall they get a total system. How it goes over the next few weeks is critical to determining the finish date.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** So you are saying that in all these other areas about which you are talking, such as ventilation, you do not have any idea as to whether or not they are on time?

**Mr WIELINGA:** No. You are using the words "no idea". We believe that everything is going okay at the moment. I am just making the point that I cannot put a firm date on it at this stage until we see how it goes. Connector Motorways has some obligations to give us notice. When that notice comes we will have a better idea.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** When you said, "We believe everything is going okay", that is pretty open-ended. Where did you get the idea that everything seems to be going okay?

**Mr WIELINGA:** There are regular meetings between RTA administration staff and Connector Motorways. In those meetings they are telling us that things are going okay.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** So things are going okay. Can you give us some specific detail on that? For instance, when was the last meeting with the contractors, with Connector Motorways?

**Mr WIELINGA:** Members of our field staff meet with them on several occasions every week and discuss things. There are meetings at a senior level every three months. One is due in the next couple of weeks and we will get another detailed update at that time.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** You mentioned ventilation as one of those areas. What were the other areas that you mentioned a few minutes ago?

**Mr WIELINGA:** The tunnel deluge system, the tunnel management system with closed-circuit televisions and signposting systems, the whole centre itself and all the computer screens. All those sorts of things have to be tested. It is really all the mechanical electrical facilities associated with a tunnel.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Would you like to take this question on notice? Will you provide us with specific detail as to where we are at with all the areas that you just outlined?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I can undertake to get an update from Connector Motorways about their progress. Subject to the detail that they provide me, I am happy to pass it on.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** When did you get your last update from Connector Motorways?

**Mr WIELINGA:** As I said, our project team gets regular updates. I meet with RTA staff and discuss progress from time to time. We have a regular three-monthly meeting with the board of Connector Motorways on progress on the job.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** And at that meeting all the items that you just mentioned—such as ventilation and so forth—would have been detailed. When was the last meeting at which they were all detailed to you?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I said that our next three-monthly meeting is in the next couple of weeks.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Yes. When was the last one?

**Mr WIELINGA:** About three months ago.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Could you provide us with the details? In fact, do any members of your staff who are present today have details of the areas referred to by you in your last meeting three months ago?

**Mr WIELINGA:** We need to get that detail for you and, as you said, take the question on notice.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** So you will take that question on notice. It is information that you have in your possession, so you should be able to get that to us quite promptly.

**Mr WIELINGA:** You need to appreciate that mechanical electrical work has been at the forefront in the last couple of months, so there may not be the detail that you are talking about. But I have already said to you that I will approach Connector Motorways to get what detail I can off them and try to deal with your question as comprehensively as I can.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Thank you. To go on the basis of, "We believe everything is going okay" is not very specific. I think you would agree with me on that. We would like to have a bit more detail.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** He never said that. The honourable member should not verbal him. He has taken the question on notice.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** I think the words that you used were, "We believe everything is going okay." Did you use those words?

**Mr WIELINGA:** To the best of my knowledge progress is okay on it. I did also say to you that I am not making a prediction about the completion date. That is a matter for Connector Motorways.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** What is the current status of compensation negotiations between the Government and Connector Motorways in relation to the delaying of surface works associated with the Lane Cove Tunnel?

**Mr WIELINGA:** Those commercial negotiations are currently in progress.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** They are in progress. That does not tell us very much. Can you be a bit more specific than that?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I cannot be any more specific than that until those commercial negotiations are complete and I make recommendations to government. It is not appropriate that I go any further than that at this stage.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** When did those negotiations commence?

**Mr WIELINGA:** The integration group was put together in June. There were initially some traffic work and other works, and that has been continuing on and the commercial negotiations and discussions about possible transition arrangements have been under way for a couple of months.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** When will you anticipate that those negotiations will be completed?

**Mr WIELINGA:** It is difficult to predict accurately, as you would be aware, when you have negotiations this complex and with this many commercial issues, knowing exactly when they might close. There could be some last-minute issues that come up. They will be complete when they are complete.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Can you be a bit more specific than that because that is certainly not very specific, is it?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I do not want to jeopardise RTA's negotiation position on this at a public meeting like this. I am not going to speculate about a completion time for those negotiations. It is not for me to speculate about financial outcomes or any of those things. It just would not be appropriate until that work is complete.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Would you be prepared to say that those negotiations would be completed within the next three months, or you would not like to bind yourself to that extent?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I am not going to give you a firm date but I would expect that to happen. But I am not going to give you a certain date. We would like it to be complete sooner rather than later, but I am not going to give you a firm time because you know how difficult these things can be.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Sure. So you cannot confirm that negotiations are going to be completed within the next three months?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I am not going to give a firm time on the negotiations.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** What is the current status of compensation negotiations between the Government and CrossCity Motorways in relation to the changing of surface works associated with the Cross City Tunnel?

**Mr WIELINGA:** CrossCity Motorways has put no proposal to the RTA about material adverse events on the Cross City Tunnel at this stage. There has been no formal submission to us.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** No discussions at all on that issue?

**Mr WIELINGA:** No.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Was the Roads Minister responsible for the decision to delay surface works associated with the Lane Cove Tunnel?

**Mr WIELINGA:** It is probably important that we put this in perspective. The Roads Minister announced an integration group to look at the possibility of improving the transition arrangements and that came out of the lessons from the Cross City Tunnel. Last August, when the joint select committee reported on the Lane Cove Tunnel, they said they were concerned about the possibility of congestion when the Lane Cove Tunnel opens and certain parts of Epping Road are narrowed to two lanes in each direction, with one 24-hour bus lane. The committee noted that a staged approach to the proposed Epping Road changes might reduce the potential for traffic congestion and allow RTA time to monitor the capacity of the Epping Road. They also recommended that for future tunnel projects the RTA should consider imposing a reasonable period between completion of the tunnel and any disruptive changes to surface traffic arrangements to allow time for the community to become accustomed to the impact of the project. That is what we are looking at.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** But getting back to my question; was the Roads Minister responsible for the decision to delay surface works?

**Mr WIELINGA:** No decision has been made. The integration group is looking at these issues. We are preparing a report for the purpose of government, for the Minister to report to Cabinet, and they will make a decision.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** In other words, are you saying that there has been no decision made to delay surface works?

**Mr WIELINGA:** No. I said earlier that we were still doing commercial negotiations and looking at the potential traffic impacts to make sure that we get the smoothest possible transition for this project and once we get to a point where we can make recommendations, the decision will be made, I imagine.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Just to get to that very, very clear because I might be talking about apples and you might be talking about oranges, are you saying that there has been no decision made on this question of the surface works?

**Mr WIELINGA:** That is correct.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Given that the Government and the RTA had known about the requirement for the two-year period of air quality monitoring since March 2004, why was the monitoring not carried out properly during this time to avoid cutting the air quality study by six months so that the tunnel could open earlier?

**Mr WIELINGA:** There are six monitoring stations to go in at Lane Cove Tunnel, four ground-level stations and two high-level ground stations. Most of those monitoring stations require only 12 months of monitoring. The community-based monitoring station requires a couple of years. The practical reality is that all of those six monitoring stations have been there for more than 18 months. A judgment was made at the time that it would be better to spend more time with the community to get the right location for the community-based monitoring station and that work was done at the time. There was an expectation at that time that the project would open in May 2007 and two years would have been achieved on that monitoring station.

We have got independent technical advice with all of those monitoring stations being there over 18 months that we have got a good handle on the background air quality as it stands now before the tunnel is open and that was the proposal that was put to the Department of Planning.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** We are still six months short, are we not? There was to be a two-year period, was there not?

**Mr WIELINGA:** The point I am making is that the key question here is having adequate material for background air quality. We believe that to be the case. That is being considered by Planning at the moment on its merits.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** So you do not believe that the two-year period is important at all?

**Mr WIELINGA:** What I am saying is that a combination of things are important: Getting the right location for that station is just as important as having the right background air quality. Because we put the others stations in a lot sooner than we needed to, it assisted us in getting better background air quality. We want good background air quality on this project but we also want to work with the community in getting the right outcomes.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** I am still at a loss to understand why we have lost this period of six months. Maybe I am a bit slow on the uptake here.

**Mr WIELINGA:** Locating monitoring stations can sometimes be a bit of a controversial issue. We are faced with a range of community views about where it should go and you need to work through those processes. Areas have got to be picked, they have to meet an Australian standard and different people want monitoring stations located near them and some people do not want them

anywhere near them. It was a matter of looking at all available sites and working with the community liaison group to come up with the best location that we could. In the end we brought forward other stations as well as continuing to work on this other one.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** You have come up with the best locations that you could within the time frame that was laid down to do it in?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I believe so, yes.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** But that has not happened.

**Mr WIELINGA:** I have already explained that we are very keen to get the best quality background air quality. We believe we have so. We have got independent technical advice to confirm that. We have submitted that technical advice to the Department of Planning. We have good background air quality information.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Six months out.

**CHAIR:** In relation to the F6, can you advise the Committee whether or not the RTA has begun the tender process for that next project?

**Mr WIELINGA:** The previous Minister for Roads said that the F6 corridor would be set aside as a transport corridor. We are not doing any detailed planning work on the F6 corridor.

**CHAIR:** None at all?

**Mr WIELINGA:** No.

**CHAIR:** So where does that leave that project?

**Mr WIELINGA:** Development of the road network is a matter for government policy. I refer you to the State infrastructure strategy and they are the projects we are working on.

**CHAIR:** So the latest Minister is not following up on the previous Minister's statement?

**Mr WIELINGA:** We are not doing any detailed planning. There are some development applications near the F6 corridor but other than that we are not doing any EISs or detailed planning or anything to build a road in the F6 corridor at this stage. As I said, it is set aside for a future transport corridor. When we start doing detailing planning, there will be appropriate community consultation.

**CHAIR:** So it is in limbo really?

**Mr WIELINGA:** The State infrastructure strategy describes the projects that we are working on. Believe me, I am not trying to be vague; I am just trying to tell you what we are working on. Please go to the State infrastructure strategy and have a look at it. That is what we are working on.

**CHAIR:** With respect to the roll out of flashing lights that the Minister for Roads has announced, can you tell the Committee the name of the company that has been awarded the contract for those flashing lights?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I am expecting a recommendation from the panel in the next couple of days and we will be announcing those companies at that time.

**CHAIR:** Can you explain why the detail of the program that is to be rolled out has been announced but you are a couple of days away from announcing the companies? How can you know exactly what is going to be rolled out if the tender has not been decided?

**Mr WIELINGA:** There are two separate decisions to be made, like many contracts. With a major roadworks project, a decision is made about what is going to be built and where it is going to be built. With this particular one the element we looked at was the location. You select the school



locations based on merit, safety issues, potential traffic, number of school kids. There are a whole bunch of criteria for selecting school locations. The second decision that needs to be made is the type of infrastructure that we are going to trial at those locations. Once you pick the tenderers, there is then a negotiation period to finalise the arrangements before confirming them as tenderers, and that is what we are doing at the moment.

**CHAIR:** So there could be some modification to what has been announced in light of the final determination?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I am not expecting any modifications to the locations of 100 schools, which is what I think you are concerned about. Those 100 school locations have been announced for the initial infrastructure to go into. What we are doing now is finalising the contract for the supply of that infrastructure.

**CHAIR:** You have two prospective companies and you will make an announcement in a couple of days?

**Mr WIELINGA:** The panel and the steering committee, I expect, will make a recommendation in the next couple of days. I am not going to speculate about how many companies are there at this stage. We have got a probity auditor working with this. I am not involved in the detail. I will consider the recommendation on its merits when it arrives.

**CHAIR:** What will be your timetabling as to the finalisation of that matter and the commencement of the roll out?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I would expect that it could happen fairly quickly. The RTA has been charged with the responsibility to get these 100 sites in by Christmas. That is what we will be endeavouring to do.

**CHAIR:** Your objective is to get these 100 sites up and running by Christmas?

**Mr WIELINGA:** Correct.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** You have previously stated that a proposal is in place to have the Planning Minister's conditions of approval for the M5 East Tunnel altered to allow for regular portal emissions, do you recall that?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I do, yes.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Has this proposal been approved as yet?

**Mr WIELINGA:** No, it has not. The RTA has submitted its proposal to the Department of Planning and it is going up on our web site pretty soon. [*Time expired.*]

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** When was the proposal submitted?

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** Your time has expired.

**CHAIR:** Dr Chesterfield-Evans?

**The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS:** Can you tell us why the RTA has retained the road reservation on Campbell Street, Tempe, given that the rest of the Johnson's Creek extension has been lifted?

**Mr WATTERS:** This question was asked at the last estimates committee hearing. To the best of my recollection the answer I gave at the time was that the most southerly part of that corridor will provide access from the F6 transport corridor that we heard about a few minutes ago to the Illawarra railway line and hence to St Peters station. It keeps open the options if there are bus or other forms of rail in that corridor known as the F6 corridor that could access St Peters station.

**The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS:** Following up on David Clarke's question, there are basically no plans currently to develop any part of the F6 corridor, is that correct, in the next five or six years? How long is it not being actioned for?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I do not know. The Government has made an announcement that a corridor has been set aside for a transport corridor. That is a matter for a future government decision.

**The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS:** In the absence of a government decision presumably between now and the election, you are not able to comment on any possible time frame, is that the situation?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I do not comment on politics. I have not done so and I do not intend to do so here.

**The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS:** Very wise, I am sure.

**Mr WATTERS:** This corridor has been in the planning scheme since at least the 1960s. There are many corridors shown on planning schemes where there is no active proposal to build anything. The corridor is set aside to keep options for the future. That is the current status of that corridor, and has been for many decades.

**The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS:** Could there be any reason why Labor councillors on Marrickville Council have implied that revenues from remediated land in the reservation might not be available?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I do not understand the issue, I am sorry.

**The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS:** It seemed there was an implication from some Labor council members that we should not count on revenue from that remediated land, which suggests that remediated land might not be able to be used for revenue-producing purposes, which suggests they might know it is being developed.

**Mr WIELINGA:** What I know is that the corridor has been set aside for a future transport corridor. If that means the land cannot be made available for other purposes at this stage, you are right, that is the position.

**The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS:** Can you inform the Committee of the date when the New South Wales Government will submit a response to the May 2006 report on the Pacific Highway upgrade of the General Purpose Standing Committee of the New South Wales Legislative Council?

**Mr WIELINGA:** It is due on 13 November, so I imagine it will be provided then.

**The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS:** Given that roads are suffering a lot of damage at the moment that relates to some multiple of the mass of the axle, is that correct?

**Mr WIELINGA:** It is true that trucks have a big influence on the damage that is on roads. Roads are designed at the moment to certain truck configurations that are allowed to travel on the road system as it stands today. There is a national agenda through the Austrian Transport Council [ATC] to look at higher mass limits on the road network, and to look at certain larger configurations of vehicles. But two things have to happen. One is that those vehicles are to be assessed to make sure that they are safe to drive on the network. The second thing is that you have to make sure that the infrastructure can actually carry the loads. It is probably likely that before these vehicles can start using the network, if they do, that some of that infrastructure, particularly bridges, will need to be upgraded so that it can carry the load.

**The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS:** A large amount of public subsidy for a private profit, presumably?

**Mr WIELINGA:** Part of the Federal Council of Australian Governments [COAG] agenda is to improve productivity, there is no doubt about that, and that is one of the advantages for the nation of having that improved productivity. There is also a connection between the use of resources and the cost of those resources, and what sort of pricing schemes ought to be involved with these vehicles if they come along. Those issues are being addressed at the national level at the moment.

**The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS:** Did the New South Wales Government agree at COAG to maintain its levies on road freight in real terms?

**Mr WIELINGA:** There was a third determination on truck pricing that did not proceed, and that is currently being considered at the moment by ATC when, and if, there is another determination on road pricing.

**The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS:** In 1989 the New South Wales annual permit and registration fees were \$6,590 for a six-axle semitrailer with a GBM of 42.5 tonnes, and \$12,650 for an eight-axle B-double. Indexed with CPI, the 1989 New South Wales charges would be respectively about \$10,680 and \$20,500 per annum. Currently, in 2006, NTC are lower than they were in 1989, standing at \$4,569 for a six-axle articulated truck and \$7,426 per annum for an eight-axle B-double. Can you explain the reasoning behind the enormous subsidy in the road freight industry, which has resulted in real terms in the decline of two-thirds in the actual registration charges?

**Mr WIELINGA:** To get consistency at a national level, New South Wales and the other States agreed on a pricing strategy for trucks. At that particular time New South Wales was charging by far the highest levels of registration for trucks. To be consistent at a national level, we adjusted our figures downwards so that there was that consistency. There was always the indication that the pricing strategies for heavy vehicles would be looked at at the national level, and that there be progressive determinations to make those vehicles pay a fair and equitable price for use of the road network. That process is still under way.

**The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS:** In other words, New South Wales has basically stood still to allow the others to catch up, as it were?

**Mr WIELINGA:** No, we got into a position where the Ministers at ATC decided that, in the interests of the country, everybody have a consistent approach to heavy vehicle charging on the condition that pricing would be looked at in detail going forward, and I think that is a reasonable position.

**The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS:** Although it means that trucks are immensely cheaper in New South Wales than they were in real terms.

**Mr WIELINGA:** The question for pricing of trucks is an interesting one. I refer you to the recent Productivity Commission report that has come out about pricing strategy, which is a complex issue. There are a number of different options for pricing vehicles. One of those is mass by distance. It might deal with the issues you are talking about. The other one deals with fixed annual fees. We have fixed annual fees on vehicles at the moment, but, as I said, this is a moving consideration and the States are working together to get the best outcomes.

**The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS:** Can you tell us the position of the Government on Federal public transport funding for major cities as a means of addressing congestion-related productivity losses?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I cannot give you all the details on that. Our focus on dealing with congestion is the development of infrastructure and traffic management arrangements, particularly within the urban environment. The issues of funding for public infrastructure, public transport or passenger infrastructure should be directed to the relevant agency.

**The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS:** Can you tell me about any measures being taken to increase the number of emission-negative or emission-neutral vehicles, such as bicycles, on New South Wales roads?

**Mr WIELINGA:** We spoke last time at estimates about the level of investment that is going into bicycles in New South Wales. Most of our major projects include bicycle facilities. There has been substantial investment over the years in this particular infrastructure, and it is always considered when we are developing new projects.

**The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS:** Can you tell the Committee what measures the RTA has taken to reduce the impact of private or industrial vehicle emissions of greenhouse gases?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I think I also mentioned last time that we were on a national committee that looked at fuel standards and vehicle standards. I think we are up to Euro 4, or we are about to go Euro 4 for those vehicle emission standards in New South Wales. The RTA has a fairly extensive clean fleet program where we have two depots in Sydney where we provide an opportunity for trucks to come in to be taught how to maintain their vehicles. We help them with that. We can monitor them and tell them what pollutants are coming out of their vehicles. At the moment we are putting into place the strategy in the M5 East project where we are identifying those vehicles, and we have had 88 of them coming to our depots. We have identified about 271 operators and 291 vehicles, and we have had 88 of them coming to get some maintenance assistance. We run a TAFE course for truckies to teach them how to maintain their vehicles. We are very interested in this issue.

**The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS:** Are there any plans to charge registration on how much pollution a vehicle produces?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I am not aware of any, no.

**The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN:** Could you inform the Committee about steps to reduce haze and improve air quality in the M5 East tunnel?

**Mr WIELINGA:** In June the M5 East air quality improvement plan was announced, and we have recently submitted an application for a modifications report to the Department of Planning. That application is currently going up on our web site. The actual plan for the M5 East consists of a number of elements. The first of those, which I briefly alluded to, is you need to do something about attacking the problem at its source. A large amount of the haze in the tunnel comes from large vehicles, particularly the western end climbing up the grade. We have had in place a video detection system for fining those vehicles. There has been a moratorium for six months. We have been sending out letters to those vehicles saying that we have found them putting out haze, particularly pollution, and we have been getting them to come into our depots and to be tested and so forth. That moratorium ends early next year, and we will start violating them under the Environment Planning and Assessment Act. We think that is a pretty good initiative.

As I said, we have already had vehicles come in to deal with that. In addition, as you are probably all we, in the last month we have put 12 large jet fans into the M5 East tunnel. They are being wired up at the moment, and we expect that they will operate by the end of this year. In addition, we have a trial of portal emissions proposed. We propose to put a filtration system in at the western end of the M5 East tunnel. We have had monitors outside the portals for almost two years. At the moment we do portal emissions during incidents and during maintenance periods, which is giving us an indication that there is no discernible impact. The work we have done as part of the modifications report, which you can have a look at, we believe there is a very small risk with health issues associated with the partial portal emissions we are proposing. The vast quantity of the material will still go up the ventilation stack, but we are proposing partial portal emissions.

Our strategic risk assessment says that there is about a one in 32 million risk of mortality for the most exposed individual, and a one in 4.7 million risk of a young person with asthma between five and 34 years being admitted to hospital. This compares with a one in 1.6 million chance of being killed by a lightning strike and a one in 1.6 million chance of dying from a venomous bite or sting. We have a proposal. We believe that it will significantly improve the air quality and haze inside the tunnel with a significant impact on ambient air quality. It is a very pragmatic approach. It will reduce carbon monoxide as well as haze in the tunnel. There will be fewer closures of the tunnel, and we believe that it is the right outcome to address the air quality issues in the M5 East. We have put our modification

proposal and our argument to the Department of Planning. There will be some community consultation associated with that and we will see where we stand.

**The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN:** Will the community consultation be through the RTA?

**Mr WIELINGA:** And the Department of Planning, as part of its consideration as well, yes. There are meetings with community groups and so forth in addressing this issue. Some of that has been going on with our air quality liaison group associated with the M5 East. RAPS has had some input into the proposal as well.

**The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN:** It would be virtually similar to the community groups that were operating at the time the M5 East was constructed?

**Mr WIELINGA:** That is right. We are looking at getting a more specific group this time that understands the technical issues a bit more. We are looking to address people around the portal areas. We are very keen to get very good quality impact and work with organisations, such as RAPS, to get the right outcome on this.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** Could you provide an update on the Pacific Highway upgrade milestones, specifically Possum Brush to Bundacree Creek?

**Mr WATTERS:** As you know, the New South Wales Government has invested millions of dollars in upgrading the Pacific Highway. Projects have made an enormous difference on the Far North Coast. A great deal of progress has been made on the Pacific Highway. A total of 46 projects have now been opened to traffic since 1996, with motorists now benefiting from 243 kilometres of four-lane dual carriageway. Some significant milestones have just been reached on the Pacific Highway projects. The community at Nahiab celebrated the completion of the \$150 million Bundacree Creek to Possum Brush upgrade over this weekend. On Saturday 4 November I attended a community day to celebrate the completion of the project. The response from those who attended was overwhelming. Construction work on the upgrade from Bundacree Creek to Possum Brush by Baulderstone Hornibrook began in September 2004. A new high standard dual carriageway will improve safety and travelling conditions for motorists.

The upgrade, which is between a Bundacree Creek and Failford Road at Possum Brush has provided almost 10 kilometres of new dual carriageway. This important project also included the construction of new twin bridges over the Wallamba River. The new bridges over the Wallamba River will improve road safety, as they are wider allow more room between cars and heavy vehicles. In the past of the narrow width of the old Wallamba River bridge caused many problems for heavy vehicles passing in opposite directions, and there was a height restriction on the bridge. Also, following recommendations made by council I am honoured to announce the name of the bridge over the Wallamba River will be known as the Leslie Weller bridge. Leslie, also known as Mick, Weller contributed a great deal to the community of Nahiab in his various roles as carpenter, councillor, and mechanic. Mr Weller actually worked on the original Wallamba River bridge when it was built in the middle of last century.

It is an amazing story. Mr Weller ran the local electricity plant that supplied Nahiab with most of its power in the 1930s and during World War II. At the opening last Saturday a presentation was made to Mr Weller's three sons in commemoration of the naming of the new bridge over the Wallamba River. Another part of this project is the new overpass at Nahiab, which was opened to traffic a few months ago. The overpass has improved local traffic flow and access in and out of the Pacific Highway from Nahiab and the hinterland area west of the village. The new overpass allows safer access. An exit ramp will allow southbound motorists to directly enter the village from the highway and use local facilities to stop, revive and survive. Northbound motorists are now able to access Nahiab via the overbridge. These access arrangements were important outcomes arising from the community consultation process that was undertaken during development of the project to upgrade this section of the highway.

There are a number of other key features of the project, including two underpasses beneath the highway providing safe crossing points for pedestrians, a shared pedestrian cycleway on the Wallamba River bridge linking the southern end of Clarkson Street to Glenora Road, improved

landscaping along the new highway, 10 new major drainage structures, over 20 kilometres of rural fencing including wildlife exclusion fencing, fauna underpasses and provision for fish passage under the highway. To ensure the best outcome was achieved, the Bundacree Creek to Possum Brush project was developed following extensive community consultation and preliminary field investigations to identify the preferred route and concept design. The completion of this project illustrates the Government's ongoing commitment to developing and upgrading the Pacific Highway.

Further major progress has been made with the start of work on the Bonville upgrade. I understand that only today the first sods were turned on the project. It will provide 9.6 kilometres of dual carriageway along the Pacific Highway between Perrys Road and Lyons Road. This will link the Raleigh deviation in the south with the completed Lyons Road to Englands Road section in the north. The upgrade will be done by Abigroup contractors who won the contract for the design and construction and 10-year maintenance of the Bonville project. A major feature of this project is that 19 new bridges will be built, including the construction of twin bridges across Bonville, Reedys and Pine creeks and two new grade separated interchanges at Mailmans Track and Archville Station Road. This important project will bring significant benefits to road users, including improved safety and reduced travel time.

The project also involves upgrades to local roads, including overpasses at East Bonville Road, Bonville Station Road and Williams Rd. The Bonville upgrade includes 9.6 kilometres of four-lane dual carriageway with a speed limit of 100 kilometres per hour, new interchanges as I mentioned previously, a full length local access road linking the new interchanges at Mailmans Track and Archville Station Road and the existing interchange at the northern end of Lyons Road, upgrades to local roads, and a new heavy vehicle inspection bay for northbound traffic. The upgrade also implements extensive environmental management measures including a 60-metre wide fauna overpass within the Bongil Bongil National Park, three designated fauna underpasses, provision for fauna to pass under the highway at Pine Creek, Reedys Creek, Bonville Creek and other locations, fauna exclusion fencing and mitigation measures for the management of road traffic noise. When finished the Bonville upgrade will complete 17.5 kilometres of continuous dual carriageway between Urunga and Coffs Harbour. To ensure that the community is involved in the Bonville project, a Bonville upgrade interest group has been formed. It is one of the many ways the community can get involved in the project. Nominations for membership of the interest group were sought from local residents, community organisations and business representatives. The group will discuss matters associated with the two-year detailed design and construction of the Bonville project.

As further good news, work has now started on preconstruction work of the Ballina bypass. The Ballina bypass is a very important part of the Pacific Highway upgrade. It will deliver a further 12.4 kilometres of dual carriageway. The bypass will be shorter than the current route, which goes through the urban areas of Ballina, and will reduce travel times for Pacific Highway traffic. Initial funding will pay for construction on sections of the bypass where extensive settlement is anticipated. Initial works were necessary to start stabilising the underlying soft soils in a number of critical sections in preparation for the construction of the Ballina bypass. In an Australian engineering first the specialist technique known as vacuum consolidation will be used to remove air and water from the soil. Vacuum consolidation works by removing air and water from a vacuum-sealed drainage blanket constructed over the soft soils. The drainage blanket rests on top of the soil and collects water as it is removed from the underlying soil. This process will be used in conjunction with conventional preloading. Work will start later this year and by using this new technique construction time will be significantly shorter.

Finally, work continues on the Brunswick Heads to Yelgun upgrade with the 26 bridges in the project starting to take shape. All of the bridges are now under construction and some are nearing completion, with the focus on the 180-metre long balanced cantilever bridges across the Brunswick River. Bridge decks are being constructed progressively in two halves by the balanced cantilever method. This means both sides of the bridge are being built at the same time as the formwork progressively moves along the deck of the bridge towards the centre. Significant planning achievements have been reached with every part of the Pacific Highway upgrade now having a designated route. This follows the announcement of the preferred route of the final two sections of the Pacific Highway between Hexham and the Queensland border. The major planning milestones show real progress in upgrading the Pacific Highway to motorway standard and signals a new direction for one of the biggest infrastructure projects ever undertaken in Australia.

The preferred routes of the two major Pacific Highway upgrade projects are now on public display. The two on display are the Tintenbar to Ewingsdale upgrade and the Wells Crossing to Iluka Road upgrade. The preferred routes are on display for the community to comment on. The preferred routes have been selected after considerable community consultation and field investigations. They provide the best balance between community needs, environmental protection and boosting the States economy. The community's input and comments on the preferred routes will help shape and refine the concept design for these preferred routes. The job of upgrading the Pacific Highway is one of the greatest infrastructure projects in the history of New South Wales. The New South Wales Government is working with the Federal Government to make sure that the job gets done and that New South Wales has a four-lane highway from Sydney to Queensland as soon as possible.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Could the Committee be informed of the progress of the rolling out of the ongoing program for bus lane cameras in Sydney?

**Mr BUSHBY:** Strategic bus corridors are designed to integrate high-frequency bus services to and from regional centres with local bus services that connect neighbourhoods and villages. However, one of the ongoing issues is the illegal use of the bus lanes, which limits the potential efficiency offered by bus lanes and corridors, impacts on bus travel times and adds to operating costs. Now motorists face a significant risk of a \$231 fine and three demerit points for illegal use. Nine new bus lane cameras have recently been activated in the Sydney CBD, adding to the 13 that were installed at key locations around Sydney last year. The aim of these cameras is to discourage drivers from thinking that they can get away with using a bus lane illegally. One car can easily hold up a bus carrying 50 or more people. Not only does this affect the reliability of bus services, it is unfair on the majority of drivers who do the right thing. These cameras are helping to improve bus travel times at a time when bus patronage is growing.

The first 13 cameras that were put into operation last October have achieved a significant and sustained reduction in the illegal use of bus lanes and transit way lanes. The illegal use at these locations is less than 20 per cent of what it was before the introduction of the cameras. Images from the cameras on both the bus lanes and the transit way lanes include a close-up view of the vehicle number plate together with a wider-angle context view to identify the environment in which the vehicle was being operated. The system automatically excludes images of legal bus lane users and only stores both images if a potential violation has been detected. The nine new cameras are on Oxford Street, George Street, Elizabeth Street and Broadway and will deter motorists from illegally using the city's bus lanes and improve bus travel time reliability. The new cameras will bring the total number of bus lane cameras at key locations in Sydney to 22. Further sites are planned for subsequent use across the Sydney metropolitan area, including the northwest transit way.

Strategic bus corridors, which were identified as part of the review of bus services in New South Wales, are about improving the efficiency of bus travel and the transport network. This means providing better connections between major centres, transport interchanges, employment areas, education precincts and hospitals. The introduction of strategic bus corridors means that bus resources can be concentrated in critical corridors. This has a number of benefits. Firstly, this approach means that bus priority measures can be focused on corridors where the best economic benefit can be obtained. Secondly, it results in more efficient running costs, which means that operators can potentially provide more frequent and reliable bus services. By deterring people from illegally using bus lanes the Government will boost the efficiency of the strategic bus corridors.

**The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN:** What efforts is the RTA making to encourage the use of electronic tolling?

**Mr WIELINGA:** The RTA has recently introduced a range of new electronic tolling initiatives. The new initiatives were introduced with the aim of increasing the use of electronic tags on Sydney's motorway network. They were launched by the Minister in early September and have progressively been implemented since that time. The new initiatives have been well received by motorists and the marketing campaign to promote them has been a very successful one. In particular, the RTA received a massive response to its \$30 toll bonus offer, with nearly 80,000 RTA E-Toll tags purchased in an eight-week period. In addition to the \$30 toll bonus for all new RTA accounts opened before Saturday 28 October, a package of new initiatives included a new infrequent user tag option

which was introduced on 3 September for motorists who spend \$70 or less a month on tolls; a new online application called myE-Toll, which enables motorists to manage their tag accounts daily and order their RTA tags online; an extra E-lane on the approach to the Sydney Harbour Tunnel which was introduced on 10 September; fitting all four toll booths on the Sydney Harbour Tunnel plaza with electronic tolling facilities.

The changes to the lanes on the Sydney Harbour Tunnel involve: making the left side of the booth an E-only lane; keeping the second booth an E-plus auto, which accepts tags and exact money for the toll; the third booth an E-plus change, which accepts tags as well as giving change for cash payments; and keeping the right-most lane as E-only. The campaign achieved what it set out to achieve: an increase in electronic tag used during peak periods and improved traffic flow through the toll booths in the Sydney Harbour Tunnel. Figures from last week show 82 per cent of motorists are now using electronic tags during peak periods and, as such, traffic conditions are improving at the toll booths. This is up from 75 per cent before the toll bonus offer. These new initiatives are about making Sydney's motorways easier to use and an important step towards fully cashless tolling on the Sydney Harbour Tunnel. I am pleased to advise that the RTA had more than 130,000 visits on its new online application myE-Toll, which was set up specifically to provide motorists access to their E-Toll account. MyE-Toll makes managing an E-Toll account easy and simple for motorists, as they can use it to update personal information, check tag usage and even report a stolen or lost tag.

Finally, a new infrequent user tag was introduced as part of the package for anyone who spends less than \$70 a month on tolls, such as regional motorists. This new infrequent user pricing plan has also proved a success with 86 per cent of the new tags sold being for the infrequent user tag. The difference between an E-Toll frequent user and an infrequent user account is the difference between the start-up and top-up amounts. The start-up cost for an infrequent user would include \$40 for a security deposit and an opening balance of \$40, equating to a total of \$80.

In addition, the automatic top-up amount can be set by the user at \$20 and at a maximum of \$70. This compares with a start-up for a frequent user, which includes \$40 for a tag security deposit and an opening balance of \$60, equating to a total of \$100. The top-up amount for frequent user is set at a minimum of \$80. Those who select an infrequent user account but who spend an average of more than \$70 a month over three months will be automatically updated to frequent user accounts. We are committed to improving traffic conditions across Sydney and in the Sydney Harbour Tunnel.

**CHAIR:** One of the many Ministers for Roads we have had lately in New South Wales, Mr Tripodi, earlier this year claimed in advice to the Wakool council that the Timber Bridges Replacement Program cannot be funded as a result of Australian Government's AusLink program. The RTA would normally advise the Minister in writing about letters to local government bodies, would it not?

**Mr WIELINGA:** We put budget proposals to the Government and the Government make a decision about the composition of budgets.

**CHAIR:** For some time the Government has been saying that the Timber Bridges Replacement Program could not be funded due to the Federal Government's AusLink program. Now, five months before an election, it has made an announcement about funding the program. Where is that money coming from?

**Mr WIELINGA:** The announcement made by the Minister last week said the money was coming from consolidated revenue, from Treasury, and it is additional to RTA's budget. That is the sum of my knowledge about it.

**CHAIR:** So AusLink really had nothing to do with it.

**Mr WIELINGA:** I said I do not comment on politics, and I am not proposing to start now.

**CHAIR:** It looks like AusLink had nothing to do with it. The Wakool council has also expressed concern about funding for road maintenance. Given that regional road block grants have not increased in real terms for many years, is there any plan to commit funding to that area?



**Mr BUSHBY:** Regional road block grants have been in existence since the mid-1990s. For the period since then they have risen in accordance with the consumer price index. They have been indexed for that period. There is an increase each year in line with that index.

**CHAIR:** I refer to the Sandy Creek Bridge on the Guyra Road in the Northern Tablelands. Plans had been drawn up and the upgrade was about to be commenced but the funds provided under a previous Minister suddenly disappeared. Is that bridge on a priority list? More generally, is there a priority list with a timetable attached for each bridge to be funded under the Minister's recent announcement?

**Mr BUSHBY:** Last week's announcement had as an attachment a list of bridges that were part of the initial round of bridges to be funded. There is a commitment to investigate further bridges that will be part of the program. The bridge you are referring to is on a regional road and would be eligible for consideration under this program.

**CHAIR:** So, is it up to the local council to make an application to get the project restarted?

**Mr BUSHBY:** The RTA will be talking to local government about priorities in formulating further candidates for the program.

**Mr WIELINGA:** Now that this has been announced we are looking at the Government's structures in determining priorities for the bridges. In the past we have worked closely with groups such as the Local Government and Shires Associations in determining priority. That is normally the approach. We are looking at the mechanism for that now that this program has been announced.

**CHAIR:** Again, Local Government and Shires Associations—

**Mr WIELINGA:** That is the normal process. We have not yet worked out the Government's structure for this one, but we are looking at that at the moment. However, it seems to me to be a sensible way to do that; that is, to work with local government in determining these priorities.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** I refer again to the proposal to have the Minister for Planning's conditions of approval for the M5 East tunnel altered to allow for regular portal emissions. I think you indicated that the proposal had not been approved as yet. Is that correct?

**Mr WIELINGA:** That is correct.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** What is the current state of the proposal?

**Mr WIELINGA:** We have submitted an application to the Minister for Planning. The department does an independent consideration of that. That has just happened in the past week or so. The details are going on the web site. I imagine they are already there, but I will have to confirm that.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** You submitted the application a week ago, did you?

**Mr WIELINGA:** Yes, but I cannot confirm the exact date. I cannot recall, but it was during the past week or so.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** When would you expect the proposal to be approved?

**Mr WIELINGA:** We need an opportunity to talk to the director general of the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources [DIPNR] about the process the department intends to follow. I am not sure how it will go about that—whether it uses an independent panel or whatever it intends to do. I have yet to have that discussion in detail with Mr Haddad. We will be doing that in the near future.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Are you hopeful that it will be by the end of the year, perhaps?

**Mr WIELINGA:** If you are asking me whether we would like to get on with the job, the answer is yes. However, we do not intend to do that at the expense of good process. It is a matter for the Minister for Planning to decide that process.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** The RTA web site states that 90 per cent of air passing through the tunnel is released through the ventilation stack. This would mean that—

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** I do not know whether Mr Clarke was here when Ms Griffin asked these questions and we got the answers earlier today. It seems inappropriate to go over this material again. We did it.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Getting back to my question—

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** I was asking a question of the Chair, not you.

**CHAIR:** I think Mr Clarke probably has a slightly different question.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** If Mr Wielinga feels the question was dealt with before in answer to Ms Griffin—

**CHAIR:** He can say so.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** We could move on and get more done. However, I think Mr Clarke was out of the room when we dealt with this.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** I do not think I have been out of the room at all.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** Perhaps down the back talking to the minders.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** This would mean that 10 per cent of the air in the tunnel has already been dispelled through the portal before the proposal has been approved; is that correct?

**Mr WIELINGA:** At the moment air goes out the portal in incidents and during maintenance. There have been extensive maintenance periods during the past 12 months when we have been dealing with some dampers in the ventilation stack. It is a little bit higher than normal. However, I must emphasise that under the current conditions of approval, portal emissions are intended only during maintenance and incidents.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Even so, it has amounted to 10 per cent of the total air in the tunnel being dispelled through the portals.

**Mr WIELINGA:** I need to check those numbers. However, if you are saying that is on the web site, okay.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** You will confirm that and take that on notice?

**Mr WIELINGA:** Yes.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Assuming it is 10 per cent, that is a very unsatisfactory situation, is it not?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I mentioned a while ago that we have had monitoring stations outside of exit portals on this tunnel for two years. It is well within required Department of Planning standards, even during portal emissions. The report that is part of our proposal to the Department of Planning indicates that there is no discernible impact on background air quality as a result of portal emissions. I mentioned earlier figures about the strategic risk assessment undertaken and the probability of it causing a health issue. We have put up a case on its merits and it is now a matter for the Department of Planning to consider that independently.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Are you saying that a 10 per cent emission is quite acceptable?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I was trying to say that it relates to the level of maintenance activity and incidents in the tunnel. If there are many incidents there could be more in one week and none the next week.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** I am not talking about the reasons for it, but the end result, which is that a total of 10 per cent of the air passing through is being dispelled through the portals. I am putting it to you that that is a very unsatisfactory situation.

**Mr WIELINGA:** We allow portal emissions in circumstances where they are allowed under the conditions of planning. For example, at night when there is not much traffic on the road there could be a lot of air coming out of the portals. That quantity of air has no impact on background air quality. Instead of going up the ventilation stack, there is a lot of air moving around the tunnel because there are maintenance workers there. However, that is having no impact on background air quality.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Are you saying that 10 per cent is acceptable or not acceptable, or do you prefer not to answer?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I am simply saying that it may or may not be, depending on the circumstances. However, we do it only when we are allowed to do it under the conditions of approval. If we are complying with the conditions of approval, it is appropriate.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** In which situations would it not be appropriate?

**Mr WIELINGA:** It is difficult for me to answer those questions. If we were to let all the air go out of the tunnel without the ventilation system operating the way it is now, that would probably contravene the conditions of approval. You are asking me to speculate. Our drive and intention is to comply with the conditions of approval. We have put up a case for changing those conditions, and that will be considered on its merits.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** When you say that we are speculating, we are speculating about the effect of something that is already occurring, are we not?

**Mr WIELINGA:** It is occurring in accordance with the conditions of approval. That is what I am saying.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** How much money will the RTA pay as the major sponsor of the Speed Blitz Blues in 2007, and how much funding in total has been paid since the sponsorship arrangements began?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I do not know; it has not come across my desk since I have been chief executive. I will take the question on notice and come back to you.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Do none of your advisers have that information?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I do not believe so.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** The RTA web site states that a total of 60 schools have been visited by Speed Blitz Blues since 2003. That equates to about 15 schools a year. That does not seem many schools that have been visited, does it? How does the RTA measure the effectiveness of money expended on that program?

**Mr WIELINGA:** The previous answer applies; it has not come across my desk since I have been chief executive. I will look into this and provide a comprehensive answer.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Do you have any knowledge of the program, or is it completely new to you?

**Mr WIELINGA:** It is new to me. I am obviously aware that we have advertising for Speed Blitz Blues, but I would like the opportunity to look at it in detail before I answer those questions.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Does anyone else have any knowledge of this program?

**Mr WIELINGA:** Of course, the other directors would know that it exists, but you are asking for a detailed knowledge and we need to go away and get that.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** The detailed information—

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** It is either on notice or it is not. Stop badgering them! How many more times do you want to ask the same question? Mr Wielinga has said that he will get the information.

**CHAIR:** Order! Mr Clarke has the call.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** If you do not have any decent questions to ask, give up and we will finish early.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** I indicate to the Hon. Jan Burnswoods that I am here to ask questions, not to answer hers.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** But why do you ask the same questions 10 times?

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Getting back to my question—

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** Why do you not listen to the answer rather than reading your script?

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Would you agree that there appears to be a problem with a program where only 15 schools a year are being—

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** Point of order: Mr Clarke is badgering the witnesses. He has already asked that and referred to 15 schools. He got an answer; Mr Wielinga said he would take it on notice. Madam Chair, I ask you to ask Mr Clarke to move on rather than bore everyone silly and/or badger the witnesses.

**CHAIR:** It is not boring me. You can leave if you want to.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** I took a point of order.

**CHAIR:** I am ruling there is no point of order.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** I suggest that you be very careful about this.

**CHAIR:** Do not make threats to me.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** I am not making a threat; I am just suggesting that we are not here to do the same thing over and again.

**CHAIR:** We just sat through your asking the same question about the Bundacree Creek to Possum Brush issue at this hearing that you asked at the last hearing.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** That is a lie.

**CHAIR:** It is not a lie.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** The Possum Brush to Bundacree Creek section of the Pacific Highway upgrade was opened on Saturday morning. I could not possibly have asked a question about that at a previous estimates committee hearing.

**CHAIR:** You did.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** Stop making it up!

**CHAIR:** You did. Mr Clarke has the call.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** In any event I think your period for questions will be coming to an end in March next year. Mr Weilinga, when you are looking into this issue of this program, will you confirm whether or not there are only 15 schools a year being visited and whether this appears to be a program that is not working as effectively as it could? Would you take that on board?

**Mr WIELINGA:** Yes.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** What is the RTA's policy on the construction of heavy vehicle rest areas where a rest area is taken away as a result of the construction of a bypass?

**Mr WIELINGA:** Under normal circumstances we would try to provide rest areas in accordance with the rest area strategy for a particular corridor. Generally that would mean putting another one in where the bypass is or, if not, it would be consistent with the overall strategy for the particular corridor. So, we would need to look at each set of circumstances on its merits, I guess is the short answer.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Are you aware that a rest area has been lost on the Princes Highway at Minnamurra?

**Mr WATTERS:** There is a rest area at Minnumurra that has now been bypassed by the North Kiama bypass and there are rest areas on the North Kiama bypass.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** So you say effectively that has been replaced by another rest area?

**Mr WATTERS:** I believe so.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** When you say you believe so, are you sure of that or is that just a guess?

**Mr WATTERS:** I mean I believe so.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Would you take that notice and come back to us as to whether it has been replaced by another rest area?

**Mr WATTERS:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** With respect to the random roadside drug-testing program, is it correct that the program will be conducted using a single, unmarked Winnebago vehicle?

**Mr WIELINGA:** Yes. The drug-testing program is being undertaken by the New South Wales police. You will probably appreciate when the random breath testing program started it commenced with a single vehicle and was built up over a period of time. I imagine a similar strategy will be utilised by the New South Wales police for the drug-testing program.

**CHAIR:** Does the RTA advise the police on the locations to which such a program might be directed or do the police make their own assessment of that?

**Mr BUSHBY:** Where they do the testing is an enforcement issue for police. We may well make suggestions to them in terms of the overall program but the decisions on enforcement are police matters.

**CHAIR:** Have you made recommendations to the police overall?

**Mr BUSHBY:** There have been discussions as to the types of locations where it might be used but not in specific instances, et cetera.

**CHAIR:** In general terms has the RTA made any assessment and advice to the police as to whether such vehicles should be concentrating in metropolitan areas or non-metropolitan areas, for example?

**Mr BUSHBY:** I think that is becoming a fairly detailed question about the interaction between the RTA and the police, and I would need to take that on notice.

**CHAIR:** That would be appreciated, and if you could perhaps confirm what sort of advice the RTA in general terms gives the police as the program is rolled out or is being rolled out. With respect to the older drivers issue, it was announced in May this year that a road safety task force would conduct a review of testing for older drivers. Can the Committee be advised of the status of that review?

**Mr WIELINGA:** Yes. The road safety task force has been completed and it has been provided to Cabinet for consideration.

**CHAIR:** It is under consideration by Cabinet and in the normal course of events you would expect some announcement fairly soon, would you?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I have no idea when the announcement will be made. We have provided the report to Cabinet for consideration.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** Can you tell the Committee—I am not sure who is the appropriate person for this—what work is being done to improve safety for schoolchildren, pedestrians and motorists at the intersection of the Pacific Highway and Dog Trap Road at Ourimbah?

**Mr WATTERS:** I can answer that. There is a major upgrade at the intersection of the Pacific Highway and Dog Trap Road at Ourimbah on the Central Coast. The State Government allocated \$9 million in this year's State budget for the project. These works will improve safety to schoolchildren, pedestrians and motorists. As well, it will reduce vehicle delays and improve travel times. The project is a major upgrade of the intersection of the Pacific Highway and Dog Trap Road and includes widening to the highway on the Central Coast to four lanes to the Chittaway Road roundabout. The upgrade at the Dog Trap Road intersection was identified as a priority to improve safety for all road users and pedestrians and ease congestion along the section of the Pacific Highway near Ourimbah primary school. The bus bay outside Ourimbah primary school will be relocated from the Pacific Highway into Dog Trap Road to provide a safer environment for schoolchildren and also eliminate interruptions to travel times on the Pacific Highway currently experienced due to bus movements for set down and pick up. A new pedestrian entry to the school will be provided and a safety fence installed to manage children crossing the Pacific Highway.

A new roundabout will be built in Dog Trap Road to provide safe access to the Ourimbah Public School car park and the Ourimbah-Lisarow RSL car park. This arrangement will also allow U-turns by school buses and other vehicles. The Pacific Highway will also be widened to two lanes in each direction between the existing Chittaway Road roundabout and approximately 200 metres north of Dog Trap Road. A shared pedestrian and cycle path will be included in the project to improve safe route for pedestrians and cyclists. The project is progressing well. In early August traffic was switched on to the eastern side of the Pacific Highway to allow pavement and drainage construction to take place on the western side. Earthworks and retaining wall construction are well advanced with drainage modifications, power and communication utility adjustment also under way. A review of the environmental factors for the next stage of the highway upgrade at Ourimbah will be displayed before the end of the year.

Roads funding on the Central Coast increased by 69 per cent as part of the roads budget handed down in June. A total of \$73.1 million will be spent on upgrading and maintaining roads on the Central Coast this financial year. The budget is about improving local roads and traffic facilities on the Central Coast and keeping the region moving. The State Government is moving forward with

major road projects on the Central Coast, including another \$20 million upgrade to The Entrance Road to four lanes at Erina and Wamberal. This includes \$12 million to commence widening of The Entrance Road between Ocean View Drive and Tumbi Road and \$8 million to complete widening between Terrigal Drive and Carlton Road.

The Government has also committed \$22.5 million towards improvements on the Pacific Highway on the Central Coast including \$10 million to start stage one of the upgrade from Tuggerah to Wyong to dual carriageway between Anzac and Mildon roads. Of the \$73.1 million allocated to the Central Coast this financial year, \$48.6 million has been committed for road development, \$8 million to traffic management, \$1 million to specific road safety initiatives and \$15.5 million towards maintenance.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Could the Committee be provided with the latest information on the mobility parking scheme in New South Wales?

**Mr STUART-WATT:** I can answer that question. I know the Minister has kept the members of the Legislative Council abreast of recent developments in relation to the mobility parking scheme [MPS], but I will take this opportunity to inform the Committee of a number of recent drives by the RTA particularly in relation to the abuse of the mobility parking scheme. For those members who are not familiar with the scheme, it is designed to make life easier for people with disabilities by providing them with parking concessions. It goes without saying, therefore, that in order to be eligible for a MPS card the person must have a disability. Under the relevant legislation, this means someone who is unable to walk due to be permanent or temporary loss or use of one or both of their legs or other permanent medical or physical condition; whose physical condition is detrimentally affected as a result of walking 100 metres; or who requires the use of crutches, a walking frame or other similar mobility aid. So, all renewals or applications for a new MPS card must be signed by a doctor, as you can imagine.

The RTA issues successful applicants with a licence-style card featuring the cardholder's photograph and, similar to RTA-issued driving licences, it features security features such as a hologram on the card and a ghost photo image just like a driver's licence. The MPS is for these people and not for parking cheats—and a number of them have been in the paper recently—who have no conscience. People who cheat or misuse the MPS cards are making life much harder for people living with disabilities. That is why, at the direction of the Minister, the RTA co-ordinated a number of enforcement blitzes in the city of Sydney and in the North Sydney council areas in relation to the MPS—if you like, like a high-profile sting operation—to drive home to these people in a public manner that abusing the scheme will not be tolerated by the community.

The first of these blitzes occurred on known troublespots within the Sydney central business district [CBD], at locations anecdotally known to be prone to abuse of the system, and some of them have been reported to the organisation. Up to six plainclothes city of Sydney rangers and two uniformed police officers patrolled the areas across five days over a two-week period. They interviewed a total of 129 people and confiscated 31 permits in that time. After this successful operation in the Sydney CBD the RTA launched a new joint operation in October in the North Sydney area in co-operation with the North Sydney council. It is worth noting at this point the high level of co-operation from the council rangers of both councils involved and their work in enforcing the scheme. They have been a real partner to the RTA and the Government. Without their continued support on the ground these enforcement drives would not have been possible.

During the latest MPS enforcement operation 155 MPS permits were checked and 19 people again were caught abusing the system. As you can imagine, we were very disappointed at the RTA but not surprised when we found that 19 permits were being confiscated because of misuse. To find out that four of those permits belonged to deceased people we found pretty disgusting. So, after uncovering that appalling fact the RTA sought legal advice and while the \$461 infringement notice that applies for deliberate abuse of an MPS is appropriate in most cases, it does not reflect what we believe the community would have thought to be appropriate as a penalty in those extreme cases.

So, as a result the RTA is asking the New South Wales police to investigate whether some level of criminality is involved and that the charges under the Crimes Act should be initiated as a result of dishonestly obtaining a financial advantage by deception. In the meantime, local council

crackdowns will continue and people will continue to be subjected to tougher penalties for offences that involve deliberately abusing the scheme to reflect the community anger we have seen as a result of the abuse of the scheme.

The fine for those offences that involve a conscious abuse of the system increased earlier this year from \$384 to \$461 at the direction of the State Government. Through these blitzes and through these increased penalties we believe a strong message is being sent to able-bodied people who obtain MPS cards fraudulently or who borrow ones legitimately issued. Cheats are making life harder for people with disabilities. The cheats will get caught and will face the consequences. The RTA will continue to drive enforcement of MPS abuse and will continue to work with local councils to improve their ability to make on the ground enforcement more streamlined and more effective.

**The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN:** Mr Wielinga, I understand there was an auction of rare numberplates recently. Can you advise the Committee of the outcome of the auction and also what will happen with the proceeds of that auction?

**Mr WIELINGA:** Could I ask Mr Skinner to deal with that?

**Mr SKINNER:** Could I just submit a brochure that was representative of the auction that you might be interested in looking at?

#### **Document tabled.**

The limited release rare numberplate auction was the first numberplate auction in New South Wales in 15 years and delivered results well above expectations. The sum of \$4.1 million was raised as part of the auction with all proceeds going back into important road safety programs and maintaining the road network in New South Wales. One hundred numberplates, most had never previously been issued, were auctioned on behalf of the RTA by Shannon's auctioneers. All plates were popular with none being passed in on the day. The highest price reached was \$120,000 for the Ferrari theme 288 plate, also considered a lucky number by many. The four-digit numeral-only plates also sold well, the highest paid being \$77,000 for the dot-1118 plate.

Going into the auction the unknown plates were the new style black Euro plates, which proved a huge success and very popular. The average amount spent on a black Euro plate was just over \$19,000, and many sold for upwards of \$30,000. The tone of the option was set with the very first plate, N888, which sold for \$51,000, a huge \$41,000 above what was expected. The popular big block numbers 426, 428 and 429 each sold for \$80,000 and above. Of the 100 plates on auction, 50 numberplates were three- and four-digit vitreous enamel number only plates. The other 50 were a limited edition series of the soon to be released black Euro plates.

The rare number plate auction presented an opportunity for collectors and the motor car enthusiasts to bid for plates never before released at one of the most prestigious plate auctions in New South Wales history. The auction was held on Saturday at Darling Harbour Convention and Exhibition Centre as part of the motor show. Eight hundred people registered for the auction, which was one of the Australian International Motor Show's feature events. Plates auctioned included a range of prestige number and letter combinations for Porsche, BMW, Mercedes, Lexus and Jaguar as well as the highly collectible James Bond N007 plate.

The vitreous enamel plates ranged from number 174 upwards and include the aspirational Ferrari numbers 599, 355 and 288 and the classic big block plates 426, 427, 428, 429 loved by muscle car enthusiasts. Porsche owners were particularly well catered for with the numbers 993 and 997 representing iconic models of the 911 sports car range, while 9110 was among the four-digit enamel plates on offer.

Highly desirable lucky plates in the auction included 9889, 688 and on the black Euro plate N888. The link between numbers and good luck plays a significant role in the lives of many people, which is why number plates are widely linked to good fortune for their owners. For example, Chinese beliefs endow the number 688 with longevity and prosperity. That plate sold for \$80,000. The distinctive black Euro plate features an N for New South Wales on the left hand side, the same as existing white Euro plates, as well as the New South Wales coat of arms and the St George Cross.



They will be released into the market from late November for general public purchase and will cost \$130—a \$100 annual fee and \$30 order fee.

Like fine arts, stamps and coins, numberplates have developed a special collectible value of their own, divorced from cars they adorned since they were first issued in New South Wales in 1910 as a means of keeping track of cars. Fast forward nearly 100 years, the original New South Wales plate 2 sold at auction in September 2003 for \$683,000. Two years earlier the New South Wales number 8 sold for \$100,000, in November 2001, while the New South Wales plate 9 went for \$360,000 at the same auction.

The vehicle numberplates have been big business since the dawn of motoring, but the interest in them has intensified in New South Wales when personalised plates were introduced in 1969 and again in 1981, when custom plates became available. Now vehicle owners could truly express themselves through their plateware. This interest led to the first numeral only plate auction in New South Wales in 1983. At the Sydney Entertainment Centre in 1983 the great plate auction attracted a crowd of 5,000 people, an Australian record for an auction, and 110 plates were sold, with the highest price paid being \$50,500 for the plate 6. The auction's popularity led to six more successful plate auctions between 1984 and 1991. Today's soaring values, combined with pent up market demand, have made these prices look cheap, and this is what made the RTA's first number plate auction in 15 years such a fascinating event.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** The funds went to a good cause, we hope.

**Mr SKINNER:** To road safety and maintenance of the network.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** Turning to a perhaps more serious matter: Can you tell us the latest information on the upgrade of Windsor Road?

**Mr WATTERS:** I can answer that. Many people are aware that the RTA is upgrading Windsor Road, but I suggest few would realise that the project is the largest urban arterial road program undertaken in any of the Australian States. Not only is it the largest scale project to upgrade nearly 30 kilometres of both Windsor Road and Old Windsor Road to four lanes of dual carriageway, but to do so under live traffic conditions, with vehicles on the road 24 hours a day, seven days a week is very complex. But the story of Windsor Road upgrade is only one of the greatest successes—an example of the tireless and often unrecognized work that the RTA does.

The Windsor Road corridor is one of the oldest in Australia. It is an important part of the Sydney Road network, connecting Sydney's north-west to the Western Sydney hub of Parramatta, also to Sydney's motorway network and to the Blue Mountains and the central west via Bells Line of Road and to the Hunter Valley via Putty Road.

The Windsor Road upgrade has been managed to provide immediate benefits to road users, with the most urgent upgrades taking priority and being opened up to traffic as they were completed. In the second half of this year alone three major sections have been completed and opened to traffic. The three-kilometre section between Roxburgh Park Road and Norwest Boulevard at Baulkham Hills, which opened in July, in conjunction with the 2.6 kilometres section between Aikens Road and Old Windsor road at Kellyville, as well as the 3.2 kilometres section between Boundary Road and Box Hill and level crossing road at Vineyard that opened in late September.

Only one section of the four-lane widening, plus the Windsor Road evacuation route, remains to be completed. As distinct from other parts of Windsor Road, which are being upgraded, the flood evacuation route actually involves the construction of a completely new piece of road infrastructure rather than the upgrading of an existing one. And, as such, it needs to be managed as an independent project from the rest of the Windsor Road upgrade. Anyone who has travelled on Windsor Road at McGraths Hill in recent weeks and months would have seen the very impressive bridge that is taking shape to the west of the road, a high-level 1.5 kilometre bridge over the South Creek flood plain. The evacuation route will provide residents with additional time to evacuate during floods, as well as improve traffic flow and alleviate peak hour congestion in the nearby McGraths Hill and Windsor town centre. It is scheduled to open to traffic in the second half of 2007.

The final project to be completed on the upgrade of the existing Windsor Road is the section between Mile End Road at Rouse Hill and Boundary Road at Box Hill. Work is progressing well, and when this project opens to traffic motorists will benefit from at least four continuous lanes of road between Parramatta and McGraths Hill, reducing congestion and improving travel times to the city.

The discovery of heritage sandstone block roadway in September slowed work on this final stage, but as at today the project remains likely to open to traffic by the end of the year, subject to continuing good weather—continuing in the main, despite some wet weather at the moment. The heritage find last month is one example of the many challenges that we have faced on the Windsor Road project. Working on a road that was originally built in the 1790s, managing heritage finds has been an integral part of the project. Recognising the historic importance of this road project, the RTA has been committed to preserving its heritage value.

This find—a 1 kilometre section of heritage sandstone block road pavement—was unearthed between Mile End at Rouse Hill and Boundary Road at Box Hill. As soon as the sandstone roadway was discovered, work was stopped and an archaeologist called in, spending an intense two-week period excavating sections of the site and reviewing and documenting the find. As a result, a section of the road was subsequently redesigned to rise above the heritage road pavement, to ensure it is protected in line with all heritage requirements.

The discovery of this road, possibly built as a Depression era public works project, followed on from earlier wet weather delays and changes that were made to the project scope. These issues all impacted on the construction schedule, and although these setbacks left considerable work to be completed in a compressed time frame, we still anticipate opening the road to traffic by the end of December. Unfortunately, however, circumstances beyond the control of either the RTA or the contractor—wet weather being the most obvious of those—could force the opening of the road beyond December and into the start of the new year.

The early project changes I referred to that have already impacted on the time still available to complete the project by December include the need to build an additional bridge at First Ponds Creek to overcome flooding issues and a number of additional retaining walls to reduce impacts on adjacent properties. Complex long-term infrastructure projects such as Windsor Road are always subject to uncertainties such as these, which can only impact not only on the duration of the project but also on costs.

Other cost factors beyond the control of the RTA include industry specific inflation, resource shortages, community pressures and changing technical standards. For example, civil construction costs in Australia continue to escalate at much higher rates than inflation. The cost of bitumen, a key product in road construction, increased by around 20 per cent during 2005 in parallel with fuel price increases. Similarly, the cost of steel and other major component new road infrastructure increased by 20 per cent last year alone.

Another significant pressure on current projects is the number of infrastructure projects Australia-wide which is stretching the capacity of the engineering and construction industry. That pressure is not expected to ease in the short term with major projects planned and under way in Victoria and Queensland as well as in this State. As a result of the combination of all these factors, the total project cost of the Windsor Road upgrade has increased to \$500 million since work began in 2001. This is comparable with the cost of other similar large-scale projects around New South Wales and Australia.

It should be noted that this cost includes \$40 million for widening of Old Windsor Road and \$120 million for Windsor Flood Evacuation Bridge, far greater scope than originally anticipated for the Windsor Road program. The RTA is committed to completing Windsor Road for the benefit of residents, commuters, businesses and freight operators in Sydney's growing northwest region, and I look forward to the RTA opening the final piece of the Windsor Road project.

**(Short adjournment)**

**CHAIR:** I wish to ask you a question about forklift and wide load regulations. I understand that some small business owners are concerned as they have been informed that they cannot reregister

their forklifts for conditional registration and that forklifts have to be floated, as on another vehicle, from site to site unless they are travelling on a street that is adjacent to the vehicle's work site area or in a specific designated area. Are any of you aware of that concern?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I would need to take that question on notice. I have not heard anything about this issue in recent times, but if I can get more specific information I can run down what the issue is and come back to you.

**CHAIR:** That would be appreciated. Could you check it out and advise the Committee? On what basis was such a decision made not to allow the reregistration of such forklifts for conditional registration?

**Mr WIELINGA:** Can I ask whether this came from a specific complaint, or is it a general issue?

**CHAIR:** I know of a specific complaint.

**Mr WIELINGA:** If that is the case, the issue must be investigated to ensure that we get a comprehensive response back to you.

**CHAIR:** It is from the RTA's web site. A constituent has been in touch with us, but that constituent forwarded an extract from the RTA's web site, which states:

LO99 Vehicle is to be floated from site to site (except that it can operate in areas designated in LO3)

**Mr WIELINGA:** Are they referring to the prime mover that moves it, or the vehicle that is carrying it?

**CHAIR:** I think the constituent is referring to the forklift itself.

**Mr WIELINGA:** All right. If we could get that information it would assist us.

**CHAIR:** There is a related matter. There are reports of RTA workers who are fining hay carters in towns like Bethungra in the Riverina for breaching vehicle width. We have a letter from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Roads indicating that an exemption to allow overwidth trailers to transport cotton modules in New South Wales has been granted. Given the drought and exceptional circumstances currently faced by many parts of the agricultural sector, notwithstanding the rain over the last few days in some parts of the State, will the RTA consider taking similar action to allow overwidth freight, within reason, for the carting of hay and stock?

**Mr BUSHBY:** Some exemptions were certainly made in relation to the cartage of hay because of the drought a couple of years ago. I think those exemptions still apply where the drought is declared. I would have to check the detail to see whether the location you are referring to was covered by those arrangements. Again, if we could have the detail of that we could investigate it and provide you with a more detailed response.

**CHAIR:** Okay. I have a specific case in the Bethungra area. I would appreciate it if you looked at that in relation to the drought-declared areas. I refer to the report on the potential option for diverting some of the load off the Pacific Highway. Is anyone here able to explain the rationale behind the conclusion that such an inland route would have to be wholly completed before traffic could start to be diverted to it?

**Mr WATTERS:** The conclusion of the report was that the inland route, when completed, would not divert much traffic off the Pacific Highway. So the traffic growth would continue on the Pacific Highway and there would be a need to upgrade both the Pacific Highway and the inland route. The combined effect was a substantially greater cost to the community to upgrade two routes. As I understood you, there was a conclusion that a partially completed inland route would not attract traffic. I think that would be self-evident because part of the inland route that was proposed by Mr Page and investigated is in fact a new east-west link to connect back across to the vicinity of Byron Bay from Summerland Way. In the absence of such a new link, the traffic would not be able to

use Summerland Way. The northernmost part of Summerland Way to enter Queensland is a mountain pass that is unsuitable for heavy vehicles.

**CHAIR:** So you see it as a fairly black and white issue that you would have to have a substantially upgraded Summerland Way before it would attract traffic off the highway?

**Mr WATTERS:** The specific proposal from Mr Page and others was that the inland route would depart from the Pacific Highway at Grafton, where it does today, and then halfway north, if I could describe it as that, there would be a new east-west link to connect back across to the Pacific Highway in the vicinity of Ewingsdale near Byron Bay. So upgrading part of that route, for example, north of Grafton, would not allow the traffic to get back across the Pacific Highway to make use of the dual carriageway that has already been built on the Pacific Highway north of Ewingsdale. It would require the traffic to stay on Summerland Way, which ends up at a mountain pass to enter south-east Queensland, which would probably require a tunnel or some substantial engineering works to make it suitable for heavy vehicles.

The objective of that inland route as proposed, which is to attract particularly heavy vehicles away from the Pacific Highway between Grafton and Ewingsdale would not be achieved by partially building or partially upgrading the inland route.

**CHAIR:** Was there any consideration during the research for that report of constructing, say, a dual carriageway between Tyagarah and Casino as a first stage of that link and then having the upgrade of the existing Summerland Way as stage two of providing such an alternative route?

**Mr WATTERS:** That would be possible. The primary conclusion of the report was that investment in an upgraded inland route, including the Casino to Tyagarah link that you are talking about, and the upgrade of the southern half of the Summerland Way would not be economically justified by the traffic that would actually divert to that route. That route would be no shorter than the Pacific Highway. It would be relatively mountainous compared to the Pacific Highway.

The feasibility report concluded that only a relatively small proportion of the traffic would divert to that route. We are talking about longer distance traffic. A lot of the traffic on the Pacific Highway is relatively local traffic. Therefore, with the growth of traffic into the future, there would still be a need to upgrade the Pacific Highway, particularly for safety reasons. So the Government would be faced with the need to invest equal amounts in two routes rather than in one only.

**CHAIR:** You say it could be done but it would be uneconomic, in your view?

**Mr WATTERS:** It would be uneconomic.

**CHAIR:** In terms of the estimation of heavy transport that might go on such an alternative route, is it not correct that the study used daily traffic volume figures from 2004, which some say is outdated given the growth of traffic on the Pacific Highway? Would that be a fair comment?

**Mr WATTERS:** I am not sure of the date of the traffic data used, but assuming it was 2004—I am not disputing what you say—yes, there has been growth in traffic since then and growth in heavy vehicles, but that would not change the conclusion about which route that traffic would choose to use.

**CHAIR:** Did the report take into account the oft quoted prediction that road freight is expected to double in the next 15 years?

**Mr WATTERS:** I think my previous comment applies to that too. Even if you doubled the amount of traffic that would use the Pacific Highway, if you doubled the number of trucks in the calculations, the proportion that would divert to the inland route would not be sufficient to make it economically worthwhile and would still leave the need to upgrade the Pacific Highway.

**CHAIR:** Did the research take into account the possible option of it being mandated that all heavy vehicles that were not actually doing deliveries on the Pacific Highway, say, between Grafton and Tyagarah had to divert to such alternative route?

**Mr WATTERS:** No, it did not.

**Mr WIELINGA:** That would be quite a difficult thing to do. How do you identify those vehicles and what are the practical means of managing such a process? It would be quite a difficult thing to do. Sometimes trucks would travel on the highway with a portion of their load for delivery at a location along the Pacific Highway. Our figures show that about 50 per cent of trucks on the highway are for local locations rather than through routes. When you also take into account that the dual carriageway on the Pacific Highway is needed just to handle the growth in cars, without even taking trucks into account—

**CHAIR:** Sure. Is that figure of 50 per cent—we have heard that before—a fairly recent estimate?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I need to check the source of it, but I believe it is.

**CHAIR:** It would be interesting to know the latest calculation as to the proportion of local deliveries and the like compared to through traffic.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** Do you have any research on how the local people on the other roads would feel if they had the trucks diverted off the highway through their communities?

**Mr WIELINGA:** Well, I think once you got to the point where you are looking seriously at options you would soon find out what their views were.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** I am sure you would. They would probably love to hear about this line of questioning. We went through this in the same committee's Pacific Highway reports.

**CHAIR:** Yes, it is just obviously not as densely a populated area.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** So it is fine for them to suffer, like you want the people on the New England Highway to suffer just the same because there are fewer of them. That is The Nationals view of life, is it?

**CHAIR:** Do not put words into my mouth. I have never ever made any such statement. In fact the report that I chaired says exactly the opposite.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** Only when you started to realise the political consequences of the line that you and the Greens were running in the inquiry.

**CHAIR:** That is not true. Having lived on the New England Highway at Bendemeer I know exactly what I was talking about. In relation to the costs of the upgrade of the Pacific Highway from Wells Crossing to Tyagarah, are you in a position to advise the Committee on what the cost of contingencies might be that have been factored into that project, for example, in relation to projects development, investigation and design, property acquisitions, public utility adjustments, construction and handover? Have you any estimates on that project?

**Mr WATTERS:** We have recently reviewed all the estimates of the projects on the Pacific Highway but I do not have the data with me. We would be able to provide a break up of the cost components as you have just read out.

**CHAIR:** That would be appreciated, if you could take that on notice.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Mr Watters, I think you indicated earlier that the Windsor Road project had blown out to about \$500 million. Do you recall saying that or words to that effect?

**Mr WATTERS:** I certainly did not say it had blown out.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** No, that is my word. What word did you use?

**Mr WATTERS:** I will read it to you.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** Perhaps he could take it on notice. You are asking the same questions over again.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Would it be fair to say that you said it increased to \$500 million?

**Mr WATTERS:** What I said was as a result of a combination of these factors—those were factors to do with industry costs, cost of steel and so forth, you may recall—the total project cost of the Windsor Road upgrade has increased to \$500 million since work began in 2001. It should be noted that this cost includes \$40 million for widening of Old Windsor Road and \$120 million for the Windsor Road flood evacuation bridge, a far greater scope than originally anticipated for the Windsor Road program.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** What was the original budget back in 2001?

**Mr WATTERS:** The original announced budget for a different scope of works was \$323 million.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** To what effect has the scope of the work been changed with the additions that you have just factored in?

**Mr WATTERS:** At least \$120 million.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** That is \$120 million of how much of the increase?

**Mr WATTERS:** Of the \$500 million.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** And you have got to details on that blow-out, have you?

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** It is not a blow-out. He is trying to explain to you. Do not verbal him.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** That increase?

**Mr WATTERS:** I have just given you detail.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** You say that there has been a \$120 million increase because of specific additions to the work on Windsor Road?

**Mr WATTERS:** Correct.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Are you aware that the surface of Pennant Hills Road between North Rocks Road and Marsden Road was stripped off nearly 12 months ago and has not been reconstituted?

**Mr WATTERS:** I am not, but perhaps one of my colleagues is.

**Mr WIELINGA:** What is the location again, please?

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Between North Rocks Road and Marsden Road.

**Mr WIELINGA:** On Pennant Hills Road?

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** On Pennant Hills Road.

**Mr WIELINGA:** I am not aware of that. You are saying 12 months ago?

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Yes, that is right.

**Mr WIELINGA:** We will need to come back to you on that.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** If that were the case, you would understand that a great deal of difficulty would have been caused to motorists during that period of time?

**Mr WIELINGA:** The circumstances you are talking about are very unusual. When we rotor mill sections of road, if they are not under reconstruction we generally replace them fairly quickly. That is normally the case. If this set of circumstances exists, we will look into it.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** You will take that on notice. Are you aware of reports on the weekend of reduction in the speed limit on the Princes Highway at Heathcote because of pedestrian facilities?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I have a brief overview of what it was. The speed limit was reduced to 60 kilometres an hour.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Has the speed limit been reduced to 60 kilometres per hour on the Princes Highway at Heathcote?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I believe it has, but if you are asking me are the signs up, et cetera, I would need to check on that and come back to you.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** You will come back to confirm that it has been reduced?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I will find out what the situation is, and confirm what it is to you.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** When will the RTA complete its study into reducing the speed limit to 50 kilometres an hour on the Princes Highway at Heathcote?

**Mr WIELINGA:** Once again, it is part of the question already asked. I will check the circumstances.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** You will take it on notice?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I would rather give you an accurate, comprehensive answer.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** When will the RTA make a decision on the rephrasing of traffic lights on the Princes Highway at Heathcote to improve pedestrian safety?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I think it is wrapped up in this package of issues that we have just been talking about.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** You are aware that there was a problem with pedestrian safety at this area?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I said I had a brief overview of the circumstances down there. I have also said that I will find out the details for you and come back to you.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** And can you also come back to us on when the RTA was made aware of this problem to pedestrian safety at that specific location?

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** He has already said he will take the context of questions on notice. Again, you just keep asking the same question over and over again.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** If the Hon. Jan Burnswoods had listened properly, she would have understood that was a specific question. You have taken that specific question on notice.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** I was listening very carefully, and you just keep doing it because you hope that he will say one word slightly differently.

**CHAIR:** Order!

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Will the RTA build a pedestrian overpass on the Princes Highway at Heathcote?

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** It is perfectly obvious what you are trying to do.

**CHAIR:** Order!

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** You keep getting the answer, and you just keep trying again and again.

**CHAIR:** Order!

**Mr WIELINGA:** I will have to come back to you on that.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** You will come back to us on that?

**Mr WIELINGA:** Pedestrian bridges are part of a works program determination. We reconsider our priorities year by year. Exactly when it is proposed, if it is proposed, at this location I cannot tell you now, but we will come back to you on this issue.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** My question deals with the Public Transport Information and Priority System [PTIPS]. Will you inform the Committee what is the latest information on PTIPS, which links buses to traffic lights to improve on-time running?

**Mr BUSHBY:** It is appropriate that I respond to that. The linking of buses to traffic lights is via the computerised system known as PTIPS, which stands for the Public Transport Information and Priority System. It is being introduced as part of the package of initiatives to improve the efficiency of buses or strategic bus corridors, and in keeping with the Unsworth review of bus services in New South Wales. In the coming three years more than 4,000 buses in Sydney, Wollongong, the Central Coast and Newcastle will be fitted with on-board computer devices. Linking buses to the traffic light control system improves service reliability and on-time running. In May this year the first of Sydney's 43 new strategic bus corridors between Miranda and Hurstville was implemented. As part of the supporting bus priority measures, a prototype-computerised system was piloted to improve reliability for commuter bus services on that corridor. The RTA is currently seeking registrations of interest from companies capable of providing the on-bus devices that are a key component of PTIPS, and which will be linked to the new integrated ticketing system. The PTIPS on-bus devices are linked to a global positioning system [GPS] satellite receiver to track the location of a bus against the service timetable.

Buses fitted with these devices are linked via PTIPS to the RTA's traffic control system—the Sydney Co-Ordinated Adaptive Traffic System [SCATS]. These buses automatically receive priority at traffic lights if needed. This means that late-running buses can be provided with a green light, which is co-ordinated with the needs of other road users. Buses are tracked via satellite. Their performance is measured against a timetable and displayed in real time. GPS and a radio data network provide bus locations that can be displayed on a screen in either real time or historical playback. The information required by all users is available to those users. Bus operators will see the contract region, while the RTA and the Ministry of Transport can track all buses on the network. The location of each bus is matched against the timetable for that trip and the display shows when a bus has not run to the timetable. Into the future the system will also provide real-time running information displays both on the bus and at major bus stops. The PTIPS devices are due to be progressively fitted to 3,100 buses in the Sydney metropolitan area, and a further 1,000 buses in Newcastle, the Central Coast and Wollongong by 2009. It is believed to be the largest and most progressive roll out of this technology in the world. The technology has been developed and designed by the RTA for New South Wales and may, in future, be sold worldwide.

**The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN:** Would you advise the Committee how the RTA encourages and develops professional development for young members of staff?



**Mr WIELINGA:** The RTA is proactive in recruiting and developing young professionals. To help young professionals establish networks and develop their careers, the RTA has recently launched an exciting new initiative, the Young Professionals Network. It is aimed at staff 35 years and younger. In August I officially launched the network at a conference centre in Surry Hills, which was attended by more than 140 young professionals. This network will provide young professional staff members with an opportunity to be proactive about their professional development. The network will enable staff to develop cross-directorate connections, share knowledge and meet other young professionals. The Young Professionals Network will be involved in discussions about the issues affecting the organisation, and those affecting young professionals. It will be a valuable resource for the RTA executive, as well as an exciting opportunity for young professionals to implement initiatives nominated and supported by the executive team. After attending this week's annual CEO and Young Professionals breakfast hosted by the Institute of Public Administration of New South Wales, a number of RTA staff was keen to see a similar networking opportunity established at the RTA. A series of discussions was held to refine the idea, with the end result being the Young Professionals Network.

To take RTA into the future it is important that our young professionals have an understanding of the issues facing all areas of the RTA, and networking is a fabulous opportunity for our inspiring leaders to do just that. The Young Professionals Network is designed to bring young staff together. The network will host a range of activities, including roundtable forums with guest speakers, informal discussions about big issues facing the organisation, and social events. An intranet webpage has been established to inform staff about upcoming events, and facilitate communication between staff. Becoming a member of the Young Professionals Network is voluntary. So far more than 175 staff members have joined the network. An initial committee of five young professionals has been appointed and set up to co-ordinate the network's activities until February 2007. Committee members come from all areas of our business. The current committee is made up of three women and two men from all different offices. Registered members of the Young Professionals Network will be able to vote early next year for the 2007 committee representatives. Like all organisations, the RTA is facing challenges in the future with finding good quality technical staff. This is one of the very large numbers of initiatives we have in addressing this issue.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** I am interested in the record of the RTA in engineering in particular. I am curious whether it has won any awards in engineering lately.

**Mr WATTERS:** I can answer in regard to the 2006 Institute of Engineers Sydney division Engineering Excellence awards. Two of the RTA's largest infrastructure projects recently received two of the nations highest engineering accolades when they were named winners of the 2006 Sydney division Engineering Excellence awards, which reward and promote local engineering achievements to the local community and the world. Winners are selected based on uniqueness and originality, technical achievement, and economic and social value. The West Link M7 and Lawrence Hargrave Drive Link Alliance were ranked alongside some of the world's leading technologies at an illustrious awards ceremony in Sydney. The entries cover projects that were completed or co-ordinated over the two years prior. The \$1.5 billion western M7 won the project management and the infrastructure categories, and also took out the prestigious Bradfield award. The J. J. C. Bradfield award was named after John Bradfield, the chief engineer responsible for the design and construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. The award is presented to the overall winner selected from the winners of all categories. From the RTA's perspective, this project will now set a new benchmark for motorways, particularly in the state-of-the-art urban design.

The motorway was the largest operating urban road project in Australia when it was built. Considering the amount and scale of works, it was remarkable that the project was completed under budget and eight months ahead of schedule. To build 144 bridges in 18 months meant the construction of two bridges every week, or 280 square meters of deck area every day. The impact of the West Link M7 on the western Sydney community has been outstanding, providing motorists with safe and fast travel into the city and surrounding areas. The design itself incorporated a number of firsts, including the new seamless pavement technology. The Lawrence Hargrave Drive Link Alliance won in the category of engineering for regional communities. This award is for projects that have provided benefits to the economy, environment and resource development for the benefit of a particular community. When Lawrence Hargrave Drive was closed between the suburbs of Clifton and Coalcliff in August 2003 due to the threat of rock falls, the coastal villages between Stanwell Park and Thirroul

suffered social and economic ramifications. The RTA recognised the need for a speedy solution, and engaged the private sector through an alliance contract.

The road was reopened to traffic in December 2005, just 24 months after an engineering solution was identified and a review of environmental factors prepared. Both projects will progress to the National Engineering Awards held in Canberra later this month. The RTA has also had another recent award win at the New South Wales Awards for Excellence in Surveying and Spatial Information. An RTA staff member has been awarded a top surveying award for developing a specification that would improve the delivery of surveying requirements on RTA construction projects. Jim Ollis, Quality and Statistical Control Officer, recently won the Extra Dimension category of the awards. The award recognises outstanding achievements of survey and spatial information professionals by highlighting innovation, accountability and high standards of work in the industry. Jim's submission, Construction Survey Specification G71, consolidated a range of surveying requirements into one specification. Surveying requirements were previously covered in the contract documents, and did not have their own specification. Construction Survey Specification G 71 establishes standards of accuracy for surveying different road or bridge components. It also provides RTA contractors with more direction, and will make it easier for the RTA to write a survey work on construction projects.

The specification was developed in response to a request from the RTA's Infrastructure Contracts Branch to strengthen surveying requirements on construction projects and to provide more direction on accuracies. According to the judges, Jim's specification provides a groundbreaking solution that will return substantial financial benefits to the community. By developing a specification for the survey of roads and bridges under construction, New South Wales leads the way in better survey management. The specification could have far-reaching effects in the future. Jim's specification has been put forward to the Roads Working Group of the Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping for adoption as the roads national standard for construction surveys in Australia and New Zealand. The committee comprises senior representatives from New Zealand and Australian Commonwealth, State, Territory and defence agencies responsible for surveying and mapping. The specification is the first document of its kind in Australia. This is the seventh win for the RTA since the awards commenced in 1998.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Could you provide to the Committee an overview of significant RTA infrastructure projects over 2005-06?

**Mr SKINNER:** As part of the 2005-06 budget significant infrastructure achievements were made during the course of that year. I might just run through them. The RTA is responsible, as you are aware, for delivering a safe, sustainable and efficient road transport system. This responsibility extends to managing over 20,000 kilometres of roads and over 4.4 million licensed drivers. This is an ever-increasing commitment, as demonstrated by an additional one million vehicles and an extra 600,000 drivers being registered over the last decade. During 2005-06 the RTA completed and significantly advanced a number of important projects. These include Karuah to Bulahdelah Section One. Construction is well advanced on this \$114 million 11-kilometre upgrade. Work began in November 2004 to provide dual carriageways on a new highway over much of the length of the project, leading to significant improvement in safety.

The community of Nabiac celebrated the completion over the weekend on the 20-kilometre \$115 million Bundacree Creek to Possum Brush project. Work included new bridges over the Wallamba River and Pipe Clay Creek and a major interchange at Nabiac to provide safer access across the highway for local traffic. The \$59 million Taree to Coopersnook upgrade between the northern end of the Taree bypass and the southern end of the Coopersnook bypass opened in August 2005. The Coopersnook bypass project, costing \$69 million, was opened to traffic on 22 March 2006. The bypass removes heavy vehicles and highway traffic from Coopersnook, as well as improving pedestrian safety and traffic flows within the town. The new overpass on the Lakes Way interchange, which opened to traffic in July 2005, improves the safety of motorists and vehicular access into and out of the northern entrance of the Lakes Way. Work continues on the Windsor Road program to upgrade Windsor Road and Old Windsor Road to a minimum of four lanes. Substantial construction has been progressing on a number of sections, which have been opening progressively from July 2006. This upgrade is improving accessibility, safety and reliability of travel in the northwest sector of Sydney and significantly contributing to the economic development of Western Sydney.

The Bangor bypass is a four-lane divided road consisting of two sections: the east-west link between Woronora Bridge and the planned north-south link between New Illawarra Road and Alford's Point Road. This project was completed in 2005. In another project Hoxton Park Road is being progressively upgraded to provide a divided road at least four lanes wide and an off-road cycleway. It carries the Liverpool to Parramatta bus transit way onto separate central lanes between Banks Road and Brickmaker Creek. The Cowpasture Road upgrade was a 12.8 kilometre two-lane undivided arterial road from the roundabout at Horsley Drive, Wetherill Park, to Camden Valley Way, Leppington, and is now being progressively upgraded to a four-lane divided road. The \$21 million widening of Camden Valley Way opened in December 2005. Construction of the northwest transit way network commenced in June 2005 and this \$524 million project is about 40 per cent complete. Overall completion is scheduled for the end of 2007. Parramatta and north-west suburbs will be provided with better connections to educational, recreational, employment and health facilities and the CityRail train network.

The \$110 million Parramatta transport interchange project, delivered as a partnership between Transport Infrastructure Development Corporation, the RTA and the Ministry of Transport, was commissioned in February 2006. The \$30 million Patrick Street bus tunnel and station at Blacktown, which was commissioned in April 2006, provides much improved facilities for bus travellers in the Blacktown area. Some major infrastructure in 2005-06 saw the opening of two major pieces of infrastructure in Sydney and one on the South Coast. The West Link M7 completed motorway was opened to traffic on 16 December 2005. The construction cost was \$1.45 billion. The Federal Government contributed \$356 million towards the cost of the project with the remainder of the cost being met by the private sector. This motorway runs between the M5 motorway at Prestons and the M2 motorway at West Baulkham Hills and forms part of the national highway through Sydney. A key link in the Sydney orbital network connecting the M5, M4 and M2, it comprises approximately 40 kilometres of dual carriageway. The M7 will support the industrial and commercial development of Western Sydney, taking heavy vehicles off local streets.

The Cross City Tunnel was completed and opened to traffic on 28 August 2005, two months ahead of schedule. Currently the tunnel is used by around 30,000 vehicles per day. The removal of this volume of traffic from the city's surface streets will ease city congestion and improve air quality and pedestrian amenity. Construction was undertaken with the Cross City Motorway Consortium in line with a project agreement with the RTA and planning approval conditions issued by the Minister for Planning. The project was funded, designed and built by the consortium at an estimated cost of \$680 million. Construction of the Sea Cliff Bridge on Lawrence Hargraves Drive was completed ahead of schedule in December 2005. This project has received an award from the International Productivity and Quality Centre of Excellence for major capital alliances. In addition, the project won the State Case Earth Awards for excellence in construction for projects over \$15 million. It is now being considered for nomination in the National Case Earth Awards by judges from the Civil Contractors Federation.

**The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN:** Would you advise the Committee about the measures being taken to prevent identity fraud and improve drivers licence security?

**Mr STUART-WATT:** Within the RTA we have set up a specialist unit that is cracking down on identity fraud and attempts by criminals to fraudulently obtain drivers licences. Earlier this year the RTA established a Proof of Identity Unit to provide support for front-line staff in detecting fraudulent applications for drivers licences. This very important use of fake IDs has been linked to serious crimes, including further fraud offences, money laundering, drug trafficking, illegal immigration and even terrorism. Identity fraud is one of the fastest-growing crimes in Australia and, unfortunately, throughout the world. The cost to the Australian community has been estimated at more than \$3.5 billion a year, according to the New South Wales Crime Commission. The new unit within the RTA works with staff of the New South Wales Police as well as Federal agencies.

New South Wales drivers licences can be used as photo identity to obtain a passport, open a bank account or obtain a bank loan. The new Proof of Identity Unit has helped motor registries detect, assess and monitor fraudulent applications for drivers licences. All registry staff around the State have been trained to detect fraudulent applications within our motor registries. If a registry office has doubts about the authenticity of a document presented to obtain a licence—whether it is a passport,

birth certificate, interstate or overseas drivers license or a Medicare card—the RTA Proof of Identity Unit can investigate and help with that assessment. In 2003 736 cases of substantial identity fraud against the RTA were detected. Using better detection methods this number has now increased to nearly 1,200 cases per year. The RTA is continually investigating suspect fraudsters in close liaison with the New South Wales Police. The RTA recently uncovered a scam involving fraudulent French and Irish licences that suspected fraudsters were using to avoid New South Wales drivers licence testing requirements.

When a fraudulent licence is detected, the RTA alerts motor registries after receiving advice from Police or the RTA External Fraud Unit that fraudsters are operating particular scams. We send our intelligence basically throughout our motor registry network. The RTA has introduced a number of enhanced security features on RTA photocards, such as an encrypted magnetic strip, a hologram, ultraviolet watermarks and microtext to make it harder for manufactured counterfeit licences. The RTA is also reviewing security features to further improve New South Wales drivers licences and make it even harder for fraudulent licences to be reproduced. The RTA retains photo images and signatures of customers to confirm a customer's identity when subsequent transactions are attempted against that customer record. There are also a number of national initiatives the RTA is associated with to crack down on fraud. The RTA officials are playing a key role in the development of national strategies, including participating in the implementation of strategies in the Commonwealth's national identity securities strategy endorsed by COAG, the Council of Australian Governments. That occurred in September last year.

Also the RTA works with Austroads—Association of Australian and New Zealand Road Transport and Traffic Authorities—to improve proof of identity processes. This includes managing a national project to identify best practice, customer enrolment and proof of identity for roads and traffic authorities. The RTA is also involved in managing a facial recognition trial, which aims to identify the most appropriate facial recognition software for use as a national biometric tool to reduce opportunities for identity fraud. In conclusion, the New South Wales Government is committed to reducing fraud with the establishment of a proof of identity unit within the RTA to detect fraudulent applications for drivers licences. The RTA is continually investigating suspect fraudsters, in close liaison with the New South Wales Police and in co-operation with the New South Wales Crime Commission. The RTA is also reviewing security features on drivers licences to further improve security features on the drivers licence itself to make it even harder for fraudulent licences to be reproduced. The RTA is continually working with national agencies to reduce fraud and help catch those suspected of using and obtaining New South Wales licences illegally.

**CHAIR:** You referred earlier to the auction of rare number plates. The Queensland Department of Transport produces personalised registration plates in conjunction with private enterprise input. Does the RTA involve private enterprise in the production of registration plates? If not, would such involvement by private enterprise be envisaged or entertained by the RTA?

**Mr WIELINGA:** We currently do not do it. Whether we would in the future or not is a matter for future consideration. We are interested in providing an appropriate service to the community out there. Anyone who can provide good ideas about what the community wants in respect to plates and whether there is a viable or feasible outcome is something we would be happy to look at.

**CHAIR:** In relation to the Pacific Highway upgrade, the Federal Government under AusLink transferred in the 2005-06 financial year the sum of \$296.5 million to the New South Wales Government and this financial year \$1,043.9 million for the upgrade of the highway. Can you tell the Committee how much of that money in both financial years has actually been expended by the RTA on the Pacific Highway upgrade?

**Mr WATTERS:** We will have to get you the exact numbers. I think your question has an error in it in terms of what you are saying the Federal Government has given us this year. The \$1,000 million-plus dollars, over \$1 billion—they certainly have not allocated that much money in one year.

**CHAIR:** Can you get us the correct figure on how much has been expended out of any allocation from the Federal Government?

**Mr WATTERS:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** With respect to the Pacific Highway upgrade at Banora Point, the RTA has announced its preferred option. As you know, some community groups prefer Option C. At first the RTA suggested there was a cost differential of about \$120 million between Option C and the preferred viaduct option. Can you tell the Committee how the cost differential between the two options seems to have been halved after examination by Flagstaff Consulting? What is the main reason for the cost coming down?

**Mr WATTERS:** There are probably two reasons. In response to the community group, we undertook to review both the concept itself and the estimate. The announced preferred scheme is a modified option B, which took on board a number of the recommendations of community option C. It incorporates some scope changes to take account of some part of the community's preferred option C. I would not say it is the whole community; some part of the community advocated option C. That is part of the answer. In fact, the scope of preferred modified option B changed from the original option B. Secondly, in reviewing the cost estimates in more detail, the consultants found that the cost differential between option C as promoted by a particular group in the community and the announced modified option B was \$60 million as opposed to the original \$120 million.

**CHAIR:** What do you say to suggestions that modified option B will have greater impact from a noise point of view on more residents in that area and the suggestion that it could cause problems in the water catchment in that area and may lead to some inundation that would not otherwise occur?

**Mr WATTERS:** Taking the latter point first, I am not aware of any problems with inundation that could be caused by modified option B. I would look into that, but that is the first I have heard of such a suggestion. In terms of noise, the State has noise guidelines and a noise policy in terms of the mitigation of noise impacts on properties adjacent to new roadworks. With proposed modified option B, we will be undertaking noise readings of all adjacent properties before and after construction. We will be undertaking noise mitigation works either through noise walls or architectural treatments of individual houses to ensure the noise level complies with those standards. That will be the same whether it is option C or modified option B.

**CHAIR:** Is it fair to say that on current estimates there will not be any road improvements at Sexton Hill until 2012 at the earliest?

**Mr WATTERS:** The current program of works announced by the Federal and State governments jointly cover the period from now until 2009. This project is most unlikely to be funded in that time because of the other priority projects that have been already announced for that funding program. Therefore, unless additional funding is announced in budgets between now and 2009, one can assume it will not be built until after 2009. There is no program developed yet or announced for the period beyond 2009. It will depend on the level of funding both governments decide to allocate to the Pacific Highway and decisions at that time about the relative priorities of different projects.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** It has been suggested by the honourable member for Tamworth that a \$5-levy be put on registration fees to fund the replacement of timber bridges on regional roads. Was that plan ever considered by the RTA as a way to fund the program, and does the RTA believe it is a sensible way to approach funding of replacement of timber bridges?

**Mr WIELINGA:** Those sorts of initiatives are a matter for the Government. We can provide scenarios, but those things are a matter for the Government to decide.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Do you have that as a scenario?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I cannot confirm 100 per cent what scenarios have been considered. Obviously we look at options to find revenue for particular initiatives. We have just had a bridge program announced involving \$60 million over three years coming from consolidated revenue. That is where we are at now.

**CHAIR:** Could you check whether you have examined that option?

**Mr WIELINGA:** We can look. However, I emphasise that this is a matter for the Government.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** I turn to Donstable Road, Blacktown. What community consultation was undertaken for the realignment and re-opening of the road directly opposite Bessemer Road as part of the Blacktown-Parklea section of the north-west T-way project? Are you aware that the local community supports the permanent closure of Donstable Road as the preferred option?

**Mr WIELINGA:** I am not aware of the details. We will have to get back to you on that.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** A petition has been sent to us by the Mid-Western Regional Council calling for the upgrade of the Bylong Valley Way near Mudgee. What is the current status of the upgrade of the road and when can we expect to see it fully upgraded?

**Mr WIELINGA:** We will have to come back to you on that one.

**CHAIR:** I refer to the recent concern about P-platers and the announcement at the weekend that compulsory driver education for year 11 students will be introduced. When will such a program commence?

**Mr WIELINGA:** Are you talking about the recent announcement by the Minister?

**CHAIR:** Yes, the very recent announcement.

**Mr WIELINGA:** Rotary created a program involving young people talking to people who have had bad experiences with road accidents. I think they are gearing up to do that now. Whether that will be at the end of the year or early next year, I am not sure. I will need to check that and come back to you on that.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** I refer to the Gore Hill Freeway. Can you provide some detail about the night works being carried out at the moment? How long they will take and what are they designed to achieve?

**Mr BUSHBY:** I am pleased to advise that resurfacing work on the Gore Hill Freeway has been progressing well during the first three nights of night-time closures. However, rain on Thursday and Friday nights delayed and stopped the asphalt works. The forecast of ongoing rain periods for the first half of this week could result in further delays, creating a potential need to bring in a fourth week of closures. Details of additional closures will be advertised once the extent of the rain delays is known. Traffic was slightly busier than usual on the Pacific Highway during the closures last week, but it was flowing well. We advise motorists to plan ahead to minimise delays. I am pleased to say that many people appear to have taken that advice. We also advise people to slow down, be patient and read the signs. I take this opportunity to thank drivers for listening to the RTA's advice on that.

I understand that from tonight night-time closures will take place on the eastbound carriageway of the Gore Hill Freeway. We will be keeping a close eye on how the work is progressing. Honourable members might know that this is the first time since its opening 14 years ago that there has been a closure of the freeway. The entire 3.1 kilometre freeway is being given a new surface in advance of the opening of the Lane Cove Tunnel. The challenge is to lay 8,000 tonnes of high-grade asphalt on one of Sydney's busiest arteries. The end result will be a higher quality road surface, improving travel conditions and reducing noise for local residents. There is no easy way to do it. That is why we are carrying out the closures at night to minimise any delays for motorists. There is a strong commitment to finishing the work before peak hour in the morning. The contractor carrying out the work—Thiess John Holland—have kept to that commitment during the work done on the westbound carriageways so far. We are carrying out the closures at night because the work can be done safely for drivers and for workers, and traffic delays are minimised. In short, this is the only way the work can be done.

The RTA has a goal to provide as much information about this type of project to the public as possible. That is why information on the closures was delivered to the letterboxes of more than 55,000

households and businesses. Information was provided to all key stakeholder groups, including heavy vehicle operators, emergency services, bus and coach operators and taxi and hire car companies. This has been especially important for emergency services, police and ambulances. The Ambulance Service of New South Wales is perhaps the most important stakeholder given the roadworks' proximity to the Royal North Shore Hospital. In addition, 25 variable message signs have been carrying information on alternative routes. We have also advertised the changes on radio and in the newspapers, and media organisations have helpfully passed on our advice to motorists.

The Transport Management Centre [TMC] has been operating around the clock to monitor the traffic and to provide updates to the public. The TMC has set up a team of experienced traffic operators to work during these closures and they have been closely monitoring the detour arrangements. The operators have the option of manually operating the Sydney Co-ordinated Adaptive Traffic System, if necessary, to manage traffic light conditions. In the period prior to midnight, traffic volumes can be as high as those that would be normally be experienced between 2.00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. on a week day. There have been no major delays so far because people have planned ahead and taken an alternative route. The message to the public is: Please continue to plan trips carefully. Those travelling at night, especially shift workers, should ensure they are aware of the alternative routes. We ask them to be patient because there is more work to be done.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** What are the RTA's international financial reporting standards?

**Mr SKINNER:** Australia has adopted international accounting standards for reporting periods commencing on or after 1 January 2005. Consequently, most New South Wales Government entities, including the RTA, have commenced applying Australian equivalents of the international accounting standards. In a practical sense, the RTA's 2005-06 financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Australian equivalents of the international accounting standards, including restatement of comparatives for 2004-05. The key areas where changes in accounting policy have impacted are disclosed later. Some of these impacts arise because international accounting standards requirements are different from previous Australian Accounting Standards Board requirements. Other impacts arise from options in the international accounting standards that were not available or not applied under previous requirements.

The RTA has adopted the options mandated by New South Wales Treasury for all New South Wales public sector agencies. The changes impact total equity and operating surplus, with no material impacts on the RTA's cashflows. The impacts are: AASB138, intangible assets. It requires all research costs to be expensed and restricts the capitalisation of development costs. Previous requirements permitted some research and development costs to be capitalised when certain criteria are met. As a result of this, some currently recognised intangible assets have been derecognised. AASB119, employee benefits, requires that defined benefits superannuation obligations to be discounted using the government bond rate as at each reporting date rather than the long-term expected rate of return on planned assets. The RTA superannuation obligation is not assumed by the Crown. Accordingly, this has increased the defined benefit superannuation liability and changed the quantum of the superannuation expense in the RTA.

New South Wales Treasury has mandated the adoption of TPP0608, policy accounting for privately funded infrastructure, the principles of which have been endorsed by the Heads of Treasury Advisory and Reporting Committee. TPP0608 requires that upfront payments received in respect of private sector provided infrastructure projects should be recognised over the concession period.

AASB5, non-current assets held for sale and discontinued operations, requires non-current assets classified as held on for sale to be reclassified as current and recognised as the lower of the carrying amount and the fair value less cost to sell.

The financial impact of the above was a decrease in total equity of \$597 million down to \$67.6 billion and a decrease in the 2004-05 surplus of \$21 million down to \$507 million. The transition to the Australian equivalent of the international accounting standard was a complex process that involves many sections of the RTA. The process was controlled through the RTA's finance directorate and initially involved the formation of a working party to review existing accounting standards and the proposed international accounting standards for potential impacts on the RTA's

financial reporting requirements. New South Wales Treasury simultaneously undertook the same review process and its conclusions and recommendations compared to those prepared by the RTA insured completeness of approach.

The process identified the impacts I described previously and financial statements under the Australian equivalent of the international accounting standard were prepared for the 2005 financial year to reflect their effect. A revised balance sheet as at 1 July 2004 was also prepared. Revised statements under the Australian equivalent of the international accounting standard were submitted to Treasury in December 2005 with those same statements audited by the Audit Office of New South Wales. For comparison purposes the audit of 2005 financial statements under the Australian equivalent of the international accounting standard were performed in parallel to the audit of the year 2005 financial statements. Throughout 2005-06 any pronouncements with respect to the Australian equivalent of the international accounting standard were monitored for potential impacts on the financial statements. As a further compliance safeguard Deloitte also reviewed the revised 2005 financial statements as well as the actual 2006 financial statements. The results of all reviews undertaken were subsequently presented to the audit and risk committee of the RTA.

One significant part of the harmonisation project having significant potential reporting impacts for the RTA was the issue of embedded derivatives. A sub project facilitated by Deloitte was developed and implemented. The process essentially involved identifying specific arrangements to which the RTA was a contractual party that may have included embedded derivatives. Workshops were organised across all RTA directorates for the purpose of both training and value methodology. All directorates were required to subsequently certify that the agreed identification process had been completed and to prescribe all potential embedded derivatives uncovered. Potential embedded derivatives were reviewed by Deloitte to determine whether they met the identification criteria. As a result of this process five potential embedded derivatives were identified. Deloitte subsequently advised that those particular contracts were not embedded derivatives and were not required to be disclosed in the 2006 financial statements. It is important to note that all work undertaken with respect to the Australian equivalent of the international accounting standard transition was completed successfully and within all deadlines set by the regulatory reporting frameworks of New South Wales Treasury and the Audit Office of New South Wales.

**(The witnesses withdrew)**

**The Committee proceeded to deliberate.**

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