

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 4

Friday 1 September 2006

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

ROADS

The Committee met at 9.00 a.m.

MEMBERS

The Hon. J. A. Gardiner (Chair)

The Hon. J. C. Burnswoods
The Hon. A. Catanzariti
The Hon. A. R. Fazio

The Hon. D. T. Harwin
The Hon. Dr A. Chesterfield-Evans
Ms Sylvia Hale

PRESENT

The Hon. Eric Roozendaal, *Minister for Roads*

Roads and Traffic Authority

Mr L. R. Wielinga, *Chief Executive*

Mr B. Skinner, *Director, Finance*

Mr P. Margison, *Acting Director, Traffic and Transport*

Mr M. B. Bushby, *Director, Road Safety, Licensing and Vehicle Management*

Mr D. I. Stuart-Watt, *Director, Operations and Service*

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

CHAIR: I declare this hearing of General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4 into the budget estimates 2006-07 open to the public. I welcome Minister Roozendaal and accompanying 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.

Today's hearing will proceed without microphones in view to the Public Service Association's work bans due to the budget cuts in New South Wales Parliament. I ask members and witnesses to speak in a clear voice, one at a time and for the audience to keep background noise to a minimum. In accordance with the Legislative Council's guidelines for broadcasting of proceedings, only Committee members and witnesses may be reported. People in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photos. In reporting the proceedings of this Committee you must take responsibility for what you publish or any interpretation you place on anything that is said before the Committee. Guidelines for the broadcasting of proceedings are available on the table by the door.

Any messages from attendees in the gallery should be delivered through the Chamber and support staff or the Committee clerks. Minister, you and the officers accompanying you are reminded that you are free to pass notes and to refer directly to advisers while at the table. I ask everyone to turn off their mobile phones. We will have a break after two hours, at 11 o'clock, for 10 minutes. Are you okay with that? The Committee has resolved to request that all answers to questions on notice be returned within 21 calendar days of the day they are sent to your office. Do you anticipate any problems with that?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: That should be fine.

CHAIR: All witnesses from departments, statutory bodies or corporations will be sworn in prior to giving evidence at these hearings. The Minister does not need to be sworn.

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

BRETT SKINNER, Director, Finance, Roads and Traffic Authority,

PHILLIP JOHN MARGISON, Acting Director, Traffic and Transport, Roads and Traffic Authority,
and

DAVID IAN STUART-WATT, Director, Operations and Services, Roads and Traffic Authority,
sworn and examined:

BRIAN JOHN WATTERS, Acting Director, Road Network Infrastructure, Roads and Traffic
Authority, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: I declare open the expenditure for the portfolio of Roads for examination. Minister,
do you have a brief opening statement?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: Yes, I do

CHAIR: You may give a brief opening statement.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: Thank you, chair. I welcome this opportunity to report to
the Committee on a year of progress and achievement. This year the Iemma Government has delivered
a record roads budget of \$3.3 billion, after having delivered a record \$2.9 billion budget in 2005-06.
The Iemma Government is making New South Wales roads safer. The Government has improved the
overall condition of the State roads, a point made by the Auditor-General. We are delivering the
schools safety package. We have implemented continual surveillance on the Sydney Harbour Bridge
and the Anzac Bridge with a \$4.2 million intelligent camera network. We are implementing random
drug testing as announced yesterday by the Premier and the Minister for Police.

We are continuing to support public transport, having increased the number of kilometres of
bus lanes and transit lanes by more than 250 per cent in the past decade. The Liverpool to Parramatta
bus transitway has carried more than five million passengers since commencing operations in 2003. It
now carries two million passengers a year. The north-west T-way will provide through interconnected
rapid bus transit links, one between Parramatta and Rouse Hill and the other between Blacktown and
Parklea.

New South Wales is in the middle of the largest program of road infrastructure improvement
since World War II. The M7 motorway and the Cross City Tunnel are completed. The \$7 billion, 110-
kilometre Sydney orbital network will be complete with the Lane Cove Tunnel and expanded Gore
Hill Freeway. The \$420 million Windsor Road is the largest urban arterial road project ever
undertaken by a State government. We are progressing duplication of the 677 kilometres of the Pacific
Highway; 233 kilometres is now a double-lane divided road; 380 kilometres are under construction,
approved for construction or have a preferred upgrade route identified. This leaves only 103
kilometres of existing highway with a preferred route to be identified.

I would like to outline some of the RTA's core responsibilities. The RTA is responsible for
promoting road safety, traffic management, driver licensing and vehicle registration. The RTA
manages more than 20,000 kilometres of State roads, including 4,300 kilometres of AusLink network
and almost a 3,000 kilometres of regional and local roads. There are more than 4,300 traffic signals.
There are more than 4,800 bridges or culverts on RTA and council-managed roads. The RTA employs
around 9,000 people and operates 180 offices, including 130 motor registries, across the State. In 2005
the RTA completed 19 million registration and licensing transactions. More than 94 per cent of
customers in motor registries rated the service good or very good in an independent survey of
customer satisfaction carried out in 2005.

New South Wales has 4.4 million drivers of 4.9 million registered vehicles. In the last 12
months the RTA has appeared before eight separate inquiries and responded to two Auditor-General's
reports. I welcome those reports. Within the past 12 months the RTA has actively participated in two
Pacific Highway inquiries, which were held over five days of public hearings between September

2005 and March 2006 and produced two reports; three separate sittings of the Cross City Tunnel inquiry, which convened 13 public hearing days between December 2005 and June 2006 and produced three reports; an inquiry into health impacts; this third budget estimates committee hearing into Roads; and the Auditor-General's review of the Cross City Tunnel and the RTA's maintenance program.

With the completion of the Sydney orbital network, the opening of the Lane Cove Tunnel and the expansion of the Gore Hill freeway, it is clear that we need to increase the use of E-tags. With the opening of the Lane Cove Tunnel project, the expansion of the Gore Hill freeway to three lanes each way, the construction of new ramps and the ability for motorists travelling from the harbour crossing to the M2 to bypass 26 sets of traffic lights that we need a modern infrastructure befitting a modern city. The traffic volume that Sydney experiences during peak periods will create inevitable teething problems. The opening of the Lane Cove Tunnel and the expanded Gore Hill freeway with the new Falcon Street ramps will be the next big test for the RTA. Part of that challenge will be to sell more E-tags.

Understandably, some people have resisted E-tags. With modern infrastructure we need to look at adopting modern habits. One of my goals as Minister is to increase the use of E-tags, to take steady steps towards a cashless Sydney Harbour Tunnel and, indeed, to take steady steps towards a cashless tolling network throughout the orbital system. I believe cashless tolling is inevitable because its benefits are clear, that is, improved traffic flow and convenience for those with E-tags. But this outcome has to be achieved steadily. My preferred approach is to offer incentives that will increase E-tag ownership, working in partnership with the community. I am aware of the concerns of motorists and the Lane Cove Tunnel operators about the need for improved E-tag access to the Sydney Harbour Tunnel.

Today I can announce further initiatives to increase the use of E-tags and move towards cashless tolling on the Sydney Harbour Tunnel. The New South Wales Government will introduce a \$30 toll bonus for new RTA E-tag accounts that are opened from this Sunday, an extra E-Only lane will be opened on the approach to the Sydney Harbour Tunnel and all other lanes will become E-tag useable. To improve traffic flows all four toll booths on the Sydney Harbour Tunnel plaza will have electronic tolling facilities from 10 September and a new infrequent user option will be available to new accounts seeking a tag from the RTA. A new online application, called myE-Toll, which enables motorists to manage tag accounts and order tags online, will be available on the www.rta.nsw.gov.au site. The new infrequent user tag, the \$30 toll bonus and myE-toll will be available from this Sunday, 3 September, as a Father's Day present. The extra E-only lane will be opened on Sunday, 10 September. These initiatives will make Sydney's motorways easier to use and are an important step towards going cashless on the Sydney Harbour Tunnel.

In the time I have been the Minister for Roads I have followed key organising principles. I believe that taxpayers are becoming less tolerant of Federal and State politicians fighting over the development of important infrastructure. Taxpayers recognise the division between State and Federal Governments but find the delays caused by this division unacceptable. What politicians regard as political opportunism the public interprets as silly bureaucracy. The unfortunate consequence is that achievement and progress are tarnished by the white noise of political positioning. I am committed to a co-operative relationship with my Federal counterparts designed to do one thing above all else: build better infrastructure. That is why I welcome the Federal budget announcements in May of funding and partnerships with the New South Wales Government for the Pacific Highway, the Hume Highway, the continued widening of the F3 and the widening of the F5 south of the M7 and the M5.

I also register my belief in the strengths of the AusLink plan in assisting the development of an integrated land transport plan, making more effort to better link road and rail planning, developing integrated corridor strategies, and adopting a strategic approach to setting priorities and investing in the construction and maintenance of our land transport infrastructure. These are important goals the New South Wales Government will work towards achieving, despite the fact that AusLink caps funding and too often leaves the States taking all the risks, particularly on cost and time overruns. I urge the Commonwealth Government to look closely at the overlap and duplication between the different tiers of government.

The Iemma Government has delivered the State's biggest ever Roads budget, allocating a record \$3.3 billion for roads spending in the 2006-07 year. That increase of \$415 million, or 14.4 per cent, over last year's record budget for Roads will see work progress on major roads around the State, including Windsor Road, the Pacific Highway, the Princes Highway and the Great Western Highway. In the budget \$1.6 billion has been allocated for road construction and \$750 million for maintenance of the State's roads. Two-thirds of the Roads capital and maintenance program budget will be spent outside the Sydney metropolitan area—I emphasise "two-thirds"—with \$1.84 billion, or 65 per cent, committed for work on regional and rural roads around New South Wales.

In Sydney's growing north-west sector \$125 million has been allocated for the completion of the north-west transitway between Parramatta and Rouse Hill and continuing to Blacktown and Parklea. Further, \$113 million has been allocated to complete the Windsor Road upgrade, which, as I said earlier, is the largest urban arterial road project ever undertaken by any State government in Australia. Part of that upgrade includes \$38 million to complete the upgrade between Mile End Road and Boundary Road and \$55 million for the Windsor flood evacuation route over South Creek.

In relation to the Pacific Highway, \$360 million has been allocated for the new three-year, \$1.3 billion State-Federal Pacific Highway Program. That includes \$100 million to continue building the Brunswick Heads to Yelgun section of the highway, \$75 million to start the Bonville Bypass, \$50 million for upgrade work between Karuah and Bulahdelah and \$20 million for design and preconstruction earthworks on the Ballina Bypass. In the Illawarra and on the South Coast, \$8.2 million has been allocated to start the four-lane upgrade between Oak Flats and Dunmore as part of the \$380-million Princes Highway upgrade program, \$15 million has been allocated to extend the Wollongong Northern Distributor and \$5 million has been allocated to start construction of the Kiama ramps in the Illawarra region.

In the west of the State, \$32 million has been provided to continue the \$460-million upgrade of the Great Western Highway between Penrith and Orange. That includes \$9.5 million to continue work between Winbourne Road and Ferguson Avenue at Hazelbrook and \$6.5 million to start construction on stage 2 of the Leura to Katoomba upgrade. On the Central Coast, \$73.1 million has been allocated, which is an increase of 69 percent. That includes \$12 million to widen The Entrance Road between Ocean View Drive and Tumby Road and \$8 million to complete the widening of the road between Terrigal Drive and Carlton Road.

In the Hunter, \$247.2 million—an extra \$70 million—has been provided, including \$11.5 million for the continued upgrade of Nelson Bay Road, \$6 million for stage two of a dual carriageway between Bobs Farm and Anna Bay, \$5 million to start a new Tourle Street Bridge and \$9 million towards the completion of construction of the Five Islands Road duplication from Booragul to Speers Point. That is a complicated geographical area that presents some big challenges because of the soft soil. I have had the opportunity to see it and to note the interesting techniques being used. In Sydney's south, \$15 million has been allocated to construct the extension of Narellan Road to The Northern Road and \$9 million has been allocated to start the duplication of Alford's Point Bridge.

The Government recently announced an allocation of \$11 million for the widening of the Spit Bridge. That announcement was warmly greeted by the people of the northern beaches and Manly. With regard to road safety, the Government has committed more than \$114 million for initiatives to target speeding, drink driving, seatbelt usage, fatigue management, cyclist safety and school and youth programs, as well as specific road safety works and upgrades. In relation to local government, the RTA provides \$144 million under the REPAIR Program and the Block Grant Scheme to assist with regional roads.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I understand that my CEO also has an opening statement.

CHAIR: I do not think we have time for that. We would like to get on with questions.

Mr WIELINGA: Perhaps I can have an opportunity later. I think it is important that I recognise some of the good work of Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] staff during the year. I wanted to talk a little about—

CHAIR: You might be able to do that at the annual Christmas party, with the greatest respect. How much compensation will the Government have to pay to Connector Motorways Pty Ltd as a result of the delay in surface works associated with the Lane Cove Tunnel?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I welcome that question because the Lane Cove Tunnel is an interesting project. Of course, it will complete the missing link in the Sydney orbital network. It comprises more than \$1.1 billion worth of works. It is important when talking about the tunnel that we acknowledge that the other major part of the project is the expansion of the Gore Hill Freeway with an additional lane on each side, which will be a great benefit for the motorists of Sydney and public transport users. A number of additional ramps are also being installed at Falcon Street to improve traffic flows.

The tunnel project is well ahead of schedule. The latest advice from Connector Motorways is that the tunnel should be open by the end of this year, subject to normal qualifications. The Government welcomes its opening as soon as possible. Of course, some changes are anticipated for Epping Road. The history of those changes is interesting and it is worth being clear about them. Residents and action groups associated with Epping Road have mounted a strong grassroots campaign for the past 15 years.

That active campaign has focused on substantially reducing traffic congestion on Epping Road. The road was never designed as the main arterial route, but I will leave that topic for another day. That is the reason for the heavy residential development along both sides of the road and the resulting serious impact on local residents. That impact has generated the campaign for a reduction in traffic congestion and the construction of the Lane Cove Tunnel. It may interest Committee members that a number of strong proponents—

CHAIR: Are you going to get to the question I asked?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I am getting there, but it is important to give the Committee a full understanding of the issues.

CHAIR: It was a clear question: How much compensation will the Government have to pay to Connector Motorways in relation to the delay in surface works associated with the Lane Cove Tunnel?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: As I said, the supporters of the tunnel include people such as Kerry Chikarovski—

CHAIR: We can read *Hansard*. You have been raving on about that for the past couple of days in the House. Can you answer the question?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I am sorry; I missed that last bit. There are no microphones.

CHAIR: Can you answer the question: How much compensation will the Government have to pay to Connector Motorways in relation to the delay in surface works associated with the Lane Cove Tunnel?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: In June this year, the Government set up the Lane Cove Tunnel and Gore Hill Freeway transition group, which involves government agencies working with the operator, Connector Motorways. The group is facilitating the project's transition into the road network. It is dealing not only with the changes to the surface roads but also the interaction of the expanded Gore Hill Freeway with the road network and the substantial renovations of the roads around the connections to the network, including changes to line markings and signalling. It is important to integrate the project carefully.

One of the issues being canvassed by the group is the proposed surface road changes. It is working through those issues with the Connector Motorways and it has clear priorities. One is to ensure that we minimise inconvenience to the community. I can say categorically that the Government has learnt the lessons of the Cross City Tunnel. I took strong guidance from the Joint Select Committee on the Cross City Tunnel's inquiry into the Lane Cove Tunnel, which was chaired by Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile. The committee stated that it might be appropriate to allow a reasonable transition period for large road infrastructure projects into the network before implementing surface road changes.

That is a good suggestion. I understand it was a unanimous recommendation and the Government is looking at applying it in relation to Epping Road. It is appropriate to allow motorists on a heavily congested corridor the opportunity to become used to the Lane Cove Tunnel and the expanded Gore Hill Freeway and to get to know how it works. In doing that we will be able to resolve the initial teething problems that occur with all new road infrastructure projects before introducing surface changes. Discussions are occurring between the transition group and Connector Motorways about that issue.

CHAIR: I take it, Minister, that you cannot provide to the Committee any estimate of any compensation that the Government might have to pay to Connector Motorways in relation to the delay in surface works associated with the Lane Cove Tunnel?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: As I have said publicly, I do not think there is any value in speculating. I think we need to allow the negotiations to continue, and as soon as we have a definitive number—in the event that we do vary the contract and there is a need to look at the issue of compensation—I will certainly be informing the public.

CHAIR: When might that be?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I do not sit on the transition group as such. But I am advised that there are ongoing discussions, and as soon as that information is available I will certainly be informing the people of New South Wales.

CHAIR: With regard to any compensation that is payable, is that purely for the delaying of surface road works, not for changing works as they are set down in the contract? Is it correct that there is that distinction?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I am sorry, could you restate the question?

CHAIR: Is the compensation that would be payable purely for the delaying of surface road works, or is it a distinction in the contract for changing works?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: Madam Chair, I think you are jumping the gun there a bit. At this stage there are negotiations. There may have to be variations to the contract. I am not a contracts lawyer—I can say that quite proudly—and there are ongoing discussions as to the surface changes and what is the most appropriate mix of surface changes in the interests of the community.

CHAIR: Is it not correct that if surface road works do need to be reversed around the tunnel, that will trigger the material adverse effect provision in the contract, and that Connector Motorways might then be eligible to seek further compensation for those changes?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: Madam Chair, I have just told you, I am not a contracts lawyer, and that strikes me as a legal question.

CHAIR: Do you have any contracts lawyer here with you?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: Interestingly enough, I do not believe I do.

CHAIR: We may be able to follow that up later. Is it correct, though, that if you decide to change road changes in addition to delaying surface road works, the taxpayers of New South Wales could potentially be subject to two lots of compensation?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: You are jumping the gun there a bit, Madam Chair. We do not even have one lot of compensation, and you are now talking about two. I think it is important to restate that our relationship with Connector Motorways is excellent. I think they have made a very strong effort at all levels to work closely with the RTA and the Government—and, incidentally, the operators of the M2 as well because there is an interaction with the M2 and Lane Cove—to try to ensure that the project is as seamless and as successful as possible, both from a commercial perspective for themselves and also from a community perspective.

I believe they have a very genuine interest in having a long-term relationship with the people of New South Wales and the community, and they are keen to do that. I note they are offering a one-month toll-free period, to encourage the community to get to know their piece of infrastructure. It is far too premature to be talking about specifics in relation to compensation; I think that is really the work of the transition group. I have strong confidence that with the goodwill that exists between the stakeholders in this project, we will come up with a resolution.

CHAIR: Minister, is there a public policy reason for delaying the surface road works?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: The New South Wales Government has learned from the lessons of the Cross City Tunnel. One of the major lessons of the Cross City Tunnel is that when you introduce a large piece of road infrastructure and at the same time accompany that with major road construction around that piece of infrastructure, it can cause substantial inconvenience and anger within the community. I think good, responsible government should listen to the community, take note of when we do not do things as well as we could, and improve on that. I think it makes a lot of commonsense for us to get the project right and allow the community, first of all, to become acquainted with the Lane Cove Tunnel, the expanded Gore Hill Freeway and the additional ramps, and then to look at phasing in the surface roads in a reasonable time—which is one of the recommendations of the parliamentary inquiry—to ensure that we minimise inconvenience to the community.

I think something that has been lost in the debate about any surface road changes is that they do involve major construction works and that does mean that for occupational health and safety reasons substantial areas around those works need to be quarantined from vehicles. There is major inconvenience to motorists when these construction works are in progress, and it makes sense to look at transitioning those works in a sensible time frame and doing that in a way that minimises inconvenience to motorists.

CHAIR: If the problem is lack of community awareness about the changes, why did you not start a more thorough community consultation process earlier?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I think you are jumping the gun there with your question. I do not think the issue is one of lack of awareness. I think the Government is astutely aware of the impact that road construction can have, and I think it is commonsense to transition in those surface changes over a period of time after the community has become acquainted with a major, \$1.1 billion piece of road infrastructure.

There has been substantial consultation with the community over many, many years. In fact, it was the Lane Cove council—I believe the mayor at the time was a Mr Anthony Roberts, who I believe is now a Liberal member of Parliament, incidentally—who insisted, I believe, that there be surface road changes as part of the Lane Cove tunnel project or Lane Cove council would not support the project. So the community in the area, particularly around Epping Road, are quite aware of what are the potential surface road changes and are looking forward to getting some relief from a very, very busy traffic corridor.

CHAIR: Mr Wielinga, were you the officer who signed off on the Lane Cove Tunnel contract?

Mr WIELINGA: I was the project manager and worked on the project team for the Lane Cove Tunnel, that is correct.

CHAIR: Can you help me in relation to the questions I asked about potential compensation claims regarding the contract?

Mr WIELINGA: No, I would have to take appropriate legal advice on that. That is not where we are at with this contract at the moment. As the Minister said, we are in discussions with Connector Motorways. It is about the practicalities of having a smooth transition for the project. When we sort out what is going to be done, that is when we can take appropriate advice.

CHAIR: So you cannot tell us about the basic provisions of the contract in relation to the delaying of surface road works compared with changing road works, for example?

Mr WIELINGA: This is not about the basic provisions of the contract itself; they are fairly clear for everyone to read and there are many lawyers in this room who can read that contract that has been tabled in Parliament. What this is about is applying a set of circumstances against those contract clauses, and until that set of circumstances is clear, that is when judgments can be made about how it is applied.

CHAIR: Do you sit on the transition committee?

Mr WIELINGA: I do.

CHAIR: When do you think the Minister might be able to be in a position to provide the public with the information that he mentioned he would provide?

Mr WIELINGA: It is difficult for me to put an accurate timetable. These things go through stages and sequences. The first thing is simply about the practicalities of what should happen. There needs to be a recognition that there is a ramp-up associated with the major infrastructure that the Minister has been alluding to. We are focusing now on the practicalities and what is the right thing to do from a traffic point of view. We are working co-operatively with Connector Motorways to work out those arrangements. If there are commercial negotiations that should occur as a result of that, we will address that at the time.

CHAIR: Minister, if you are concerned about the traffic chaos, can you tell the Committee why it would not be a better option to wait until the tunnel is open before making a significant decision about the potential impacts of the traffic?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I have not used the expression "traffic chaos" at all; that is an expression you have used. We are not dealing here with a Lego set; we are actually dealing with a \$1.1 billion project that will have a major impact on completing the Sydney orbital network. It needs to be treated with some sort of seriousness and proper attention. There are contractual arrangements in place that require Connector Motorways to implement surface road changes on Epping Road as part of its contract. Having a fresh look at post the Cross City Tunnel and learning from the lessons of the Cross City Tunnel, it makes a lot of sense to transition in those surface road changes once the tunnel has been opened. I believe that is in the best interests of motorists. It is certainly in the best interests of public transport users and cyclists, and the local community, who are all stakeholders and have a strong interest in a successful project, both on Epping Road and through the tunnel.

CHAIR: It would be a fair comment, would it not, to say that by delaying surface road changes before the opening of the tunnel you, the Government, are admitting that there are substantial problems with the project already?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: No, we do not think that would be fair, if that is the question. The question is that either you have governments that listen to the community and learn and take on a new direction—like the Iemma Labor Government—or you have governments that do not. I think it is eminently sensible that after the Cross City Tunnel the Premier has had a fresh look at other road projects, such as the Lane Cove Tunnel. We have learnt the lesson of the Cross City Tunnel, and the clearest thing about the Lane Cove Tunnel is that it is the last major road infrastructure project to be built the old way. We have had the Richmond report, which has brought down a number of recommendations about future road infrastructure projects—that, of course, is on the public record—

and I think it is eminently sensible that the Government takes active steps to ensure that we minimise inconvenience to motorists.

CHAIR: What is the current estimated opening date for the Lane Cove Tunnel?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: As I stated earlier, the latest advice we have from Connector Motorways—which are required under the contract to advise us 90 days before completion and they have not at this point done that—anecdotally, I believe it should open before the end of the year.

CHAIR: And what is the current estimated starting date for stage 2 works associated with that tunnel?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: They are under discussion at the moment.

CHAIR: You cannot have a guesstimate at that? If you have got anecdotal evidence about the actual opening date would you not have some anecdotal evidence about stage 2?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I suspect that my voice is not carrying well to the Chair because you have clearly not understood my previous answers. There are substantial discussions and negotiations going on in relation to the surface road changes on Epping Road. Those are ongoing negotiations and the view there is to transitioning those changes in. Clearly, there is a lot to be taken into account in relation to that and I am relying on the transition group to work those issues through.

CHAIR: As the roads Minister why did you not turn up to the parliamentary inquiry into the Lane Cove Tunnel?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I am advised that I am accountable to the Parliament, as are all Ministers, and I believe that is most appropriate.

CHAIR: Has the Government given any debt recovery guarantee to Connector Motorways?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: The contract has been tabled in the Parliament and there is nothing of that nature in the contract.

CHAIR: The Opposition has previously obtained RTA documents that show that the Lane Cove Tunnel project was regarded as only financially viable up to a construction cost of \$650 million. The cost of the project has now blown out to \$1.1 billion, I believe—that is double the \$550 million original estimate—is that correct? If it is, how is that so?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I might ask Les Wielinga to respond to that.

Mr WIELINGA: What needs to be taken into account is the actual timing of those particular estimates. The \$600 million estimate was for an entirely different project four or five years earlier. Depending on the scope of projects built determines the amount of traffic it can take into it. That was a two-lane tunnel back in those times. We now have something that is substantially different, with mainly three lanes outbound, two-thirds of the tunnel three lanes inbound—a different traffic arrangement. Traffic modelling gets updated over time; there has been rapid growth in Sydney and differences in land use strategies. That impacts the traffic projection on the project. The actual circumstances and scope of the project is determined by its cost at the time. The price that was on the project was determined in a competitive tendering process. It reflected the circumstances at the time.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Minister, you have referred on a number of occasions to having learnt the lessons of the Cross City Tunnel. Would you care to spell out what those lessons actually are?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I think there are a number of lessons in relation to the Cross City Tunnel. A number of those have been spelt out in the Richmond report, which, of course, are on the public record, so I do not intend to rehash those. I think in relation to future infrastructure projects it has been recognised, say in the last parliamentary inquiry, that it is important to transition in surface road changes in a reasonable time after a project opens, and I think that is a good piece of

advice. Clearly, with all road infrastructure projects we need the public to understand what it is about. It is important to ensure that there is good value for the public and that the project is going to work successfully. I think those are the sorts of lessons.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: So you have not learnt any lessons about the need for ongoing consultation with the public so that if there are major alterations to the route or aspects of the tunnel there should be a revised EIS undertaken?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I draw your attention to the Richmond report, which deals with a number of those issues. I think it is always important to keep the public informed and have ongoing consultation. I think part of the problem is that there is certainly a long time between when a project begins and when it is completed. Often people forget about a lot of consultation that occurs.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: But Mr Wielinga has told us that the project that is being built is very, very different from the proposal that was originally put out for public submission. I think there needs to be a lesson drawn, and I am sure you would agree, about the need to consistently consult the public about major changes to any tunnel or other infrastructure.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I think Lane Cove is the last project to be built in that sort of process. I think lessons have been learnt and future processes—certainly after the recommendations of the parliamentary inquiry and the Richmond report, the Government has learnt lessons and we will look to doing future projects in a way that is more beneficial to the community.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Have any lessons been learnt about the filtration of tunnels and of pollution being emitted from tunnels?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: Indeed, there has been in relation to filtration. I think we need to talk about two issues: one is filtration; one is ventilation. There is a lot of misunderstanding, I think, between the two, and the fact that basically no tunnel has the same ventilation system; they have very different ventilation systems. Certainly, if you look at the M5 East there are major issues with the ventilation system. That has a unique design not seen anywhere else in the world: one stack with a major recirculation of air through that system, which has caused some haze issues. As I have said, that design has not been seen anywhere else in the world. People may go back and wonder how that came to be through a very extensive process involving the courts. Certainly lessons were learnt from that and the ventilation system used in the Cross City Tunnel, or the one to be used in the Lane Cove Tunnel, are very different systems and will provide a far better circulation of air.

In relation to the issue of filtration, the Government, of course, has announced a pilot filtration program for the M5 East, which will be the first testing of filtration in Australia. Clearly, the M5 East has some major issues: one is that it has extremely high heavy vehicle usage—much higher than any of the other tunnels in the New South Wales network—and, as part of that process the pilot filtration system will be examining the technology to see how it actually works. It is a major \$50 million commitment from the Government to see how the filtration technology actually works in that environment and will give us some strong evidence as to how successful or not it is.

There is a lot of debate about filtration around the world and a lot of myths about whether it works, whether it does not work and how well it works. Indeed, 98 per cent of the road tunnels around the world are not filtered. I think there is this misunderstanding that somehow tunnels create more air pollution than allowing traffic to stop-start on the surface roads, which is of course nonsense. If you take, for instance, the Lane Cove Tunnel, there is an anticipation of improved air quality on the surface roads once the Lane Cove Tunnel opens because if traffic is not stop-starting, then you get better flows and you get less car traffic pollution being produced.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Minister, you accept that this will represent the missing link in the Sydney orbital, but you have also said that now, as we come to the end of these projects, we are beginning to realise there are problems with the impacts on the surface roads with induced traffic, we have traffic estimates forecasts never being actually what they were initially and we have seen significant cost increases. Is it that the RTA is a particularly slow learning organisation or is it that the

RTA really knew that these were problems that were likely to occur but chose to ignore them in the interest of pushing through with more tunnels?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: You have asked about nine questions. Perhaps if you divvied them are up into something a bit more bite size, I am happy to respond. In relation to, say, induced traffic, for the benefit of the Committee, induced traffic is when you open a new road, it does tend to attract traffic from other routes to it as people try it out to see whether it is a more preferred route to the route they may use. That is a phenomenon around the world and certainly the RTA is very conscious of that.

In relation to the costs of projects, you have raised a good point because the point that has been lost, both about the Cross City Tunnel and the Lane Cove Tunnel, is that the private sector has assumed all of the risk in both those projects. I think that is a point worth underlining. The risk has been accepted by the private sector. In the case of the Cross City Tunnel that is a substantial risk and it appears that the operators of the Cross City Tunnel are certainly feeling that risk. That is an important point to make about both those projects. All the risk has not been with the taxpayers of New South Wales but with the private operators of those projects. What were the other questions that you asked?

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Could we get onto my questions because I have 10 minutes?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I do not regulate the timekeeping. That is done by the Chair.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Minister, would you keep your answers short otherwise not many questions will be asked.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: Ask good questions.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You said you had good relations with Connector Motorways. Do you have good relations with Thiess John Holland as well?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I do not have any relationship with Thiess John Holland.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Are they not building the tunnel?

Mr WIELINGA: We do not have a direct contractual relationship with Thiess John Holland. We have a concession contract with Connector Motorways. Connector Motorways have contracted Thiess John Holland to design and build the works.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Minister, I do appreciate you getting a better offer for the folk at 3 Charles Street, Redfern, since my question on Wednesday because they have been waiting eight years. The offer was raised from \$630,000 to \$740,000 is my understanding—I am not sure of the exact amount but it has been raised significantly, but they actually did not want to move; they actually wanted their house underpinned. Are you willing to underpin their house, as suggested in the Simpson report, which looked at the engineering feasibility of doing that because they did not actually want to move in any case?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I will take the question of underpinning on notice if I can?

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: That is fine. Can we just deal then with the philosophic position? If it is possible to underpin a house rather than simply giving someone some money after the house has been damaged, is it not up to the Government to restore why the situation that the tunnel has created? In other words, if the houses damaged by the tunnel should be Government not repair the house?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I am here to talk about budget estimates, not philosophy.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I am talking about policy—policy of restoring damage caused by public works. This is not some airy-fairy subject as you might like to paint it.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I understand the question and I will take it on notice and come back with a very specific response to the very specific question you have asked me.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: But can you take the general position: Will the RTA make repairs to things they damage or will they only give compensation?

Mr WIELINGA: Perhaps I can assist. When property is affected by a road works project and has a direct impact on that, the just terms legislation that sets the rules of the game has a number of heads of compensation that the RTA works with, but at the end of the day we go through a negotiation process with property owners and try to come to an amicable solution with them. In the vast majority of cases that is what happens. We always endeavour to do that. There are occasions where we have some difficulties, but we provide support with independent valuation and independent legal support for people who are purchasing parts of property or properties and we endeavour to come up with co-operative solutions but we do have difficulties from time to time. We endeavour to work through those.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: But if you have a consulting engineer's report, which says that it is fixable and how you fix it, and the people wish to stay there, why would you not repair the house according to that independent report, which does exist in this case?

Mr WIELINGA: Usually both sides have engineering reports that they work through. They try to come to an agreement about that. We get those experts together to tie those circumstances in. In the absence of the details of the specific circumstances it is difficult to me to make an objective comment.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Let us assume that you purchase this house for \$740,000. Are you then going to on-sell a damaged house that has not been underpinned and needs it? How much will you lose and what happens to the person who buys it?

Mr WIELINGA: Again it depends on the circumstances. The Real Estate Act requires the publicity of information or problems associated with the house. Those professionals deal with those circumstances.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: So you would buy the house and then sell it, presumably at a huge loss because of the fact that you would have to disclose the fact that not only has it got cracks, it needs underpinning and no-one has underpinned it?

Mr WIELINGA: The RTA behaves honourably in these circumstances, but you are asking me a hypothetical question.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: No, I am asking you are a very practical question.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: It is still a hypothetical one.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: If you buy it, you will not on-sell it or turn it into a national park perhaps. It will not be sold as a house, is that the conclusion if it is unstable?

Mr WIELINGA: I could not envisage a circumstance where we would sell a dangerous house. If you think there is some set of circumstances, tell me the details and I will have a look into it.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: This is a house that is currently under offer, and I asked a question about it last Wednesday. Collectively, one would think that recently

someone might have looked at this information, because if an offer was received last night—and I recognise you would not have done that personally—

Mr WIELINGA: I am endeavouring to be as co-operative as I can, and I am very keen to give you an answer to your question, but the offer I am making is: tell me the circumstances in detail and I will take it away and get it investigated.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: But there has been a general principle that if a house is crumbling because of the tunnel works and the RTA buys it, which is obviously a possible outcome—indeed, that is the current offer—what does the RTA then do with the house? Does it sell it faulty with a big notice "Here is a crumbling house. Buy it cheap and take your chances or underpin it." What does the RTA do?

Mr WIELINGA: Again, I am not trying to be awkward, but I need to know the specific circumstances.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: But let us take the hypothetical case, which in this case is a practical example. Do you actually sell faulty houses that are damaged by tunnels?

Mr WIELINGA: When those circumstances occur, as long as the buyer is aware of the circumstances—but again, it is a hypothetical question. Give me the specific details and I will try to address it.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Let us try again. In the case of the Lane Cove Tunnel, there are two adjacent residents at 15 Longueville Road. One of them wants to sell and has been offered \$610,000, after a valuation of a property that is obviously a valuation that is massively affected by the fact that the one next-door fell in a hole. She estimates that it will cost \$800,000 in legal costs and to get a comparable property in the area. The other people next-door, the Retamals, want payment for the lawyers for the hassle they have had so far and a guarantee for future damage. Are you able to give a guarantee that the property next-door to the one that fell down the hole will be repaired should it be damaged by subsidence around the hole?

Mr WIELINGA: The properties that were affected by the Lane Cove Tunnel are a matter for the contractor to deal with. I understand that that is happening. We can provide you with an update. Again, the specific circumstances that you are talking about, I am not aware. If those people can approach the RTA we would be happy to look into their circumstances.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Surely the RTA and the Government must be able to give some sort of guarantee. The people of Charles Street, Redfern, are still trying to get a solution after eight years, although the offer has been upped. The people in Longueville Road have had the trauma since the place next door fell in a hole. Many of those people have sold out at what was below market price in that they have not been able to buy in the same area at the same quality.

Mr WIELINGA: I have already said that we endeavour to achieve an amicable outcome in these property acquisitions. In most cases we do.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Have you kept records of the people who had to sell their houses and where they have gone to see how happy they all were?

Mr WIELINGA: I am not aware of any such records. We generally have records of our interaction with individual property owners as part of that transaction.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Are they picked off one by one in effect?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: What are you talking about?

Mr WIELINGA: I do not accept the premise that we are picking off property owners to buy property. It is generally done in a batch. It is associated with the project.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I was talking about the ones that are affected by collapses of tunnels that you are digging. Do you simply leave it to the contractor, and if the contractor gives them a bad deal that is not your problem? Is that what happens? Perhaps the Minister should answer that question.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: My advice in relation to Lane Cove Tunnel is that the contractor has a clear responsibility to look after residents and to ensure that no resident is worse off as a result of subsidence. I am advised that the contractor, Thiess John Holland, has completed or reached agreement on the purchase of 25 units. The contractor is waiting on a response from one owner and another owner is being resolved through the insurers. Three owners have chosen not to sell their units. I am advised that the company has agreed to pay stamp duty costs on the purchase of a replacement property, legal fees and the cost of independent valuations.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Have you done any surveys of the level of satisfaction of the people who will be involved in those transactions in order to protect your constituents?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: The responsibility for these things is with the contractor in the case of the Lane Cove Tunnel. We certainly respect—

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: These are very vulnerable people. Have you actually gone out of your way to protect this particularly vulnerable group?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: We expect the contractors to do it in an open, honest and equitable manner.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I am sure we do—

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Let him answer the question.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: If you have complaints or people who are unhappy with that process, I am more than happy to take particular complaints on notice and have the RTA liaise directly with the contractor to see if they can be resolved.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Certainly, but in a sense a particular complaint is from a group. If you were to look at that group and keep tabs on that group you would be able to get a good deal for that group, would you not?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: With respect, you are making some assertions that may or may not reflect the situation. As I have said previously, if there are people or residents who feel that they are not being dealt with in an appropriate and fair manner by the contractors, they can contact the RTA or my office, but I will not accept your assertions today as necessarily being accurate.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Will you guarantee that if they contact you the force of the Government will be put to make sure the contractor does the right thing by these people?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I can assure you that if anybody contacts my office or Les Wielinga's office with issues in relation to the way they have been treated by the contractors, we will certainly participate in resolving those issues.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: There was a lane coming off the harbour bridge where motorcyclists have all been fined for travelling in a bus lane. Are motorcyclists allowed to go in a bus lane?

Mr MARGISON: In order to reinforce with motorists that the bus lane coming off the bridge is for correct bus lane users, a sign was put up to remind motorists exactly who those users are.

As you would be aware, usage of bus lanes is by buses, taxis, hire cars, motorcyclists and bicycles, but not on the harbour bridge because bicycles have their own lane on the harbour bridge. The sign was inadvertently put up without motorbikes on it; within a number of days that was rectified. If any motorcycles were breached for that offence by the police, we have liaised directly with the police to ensure that they take that into consideration.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: This is in the last few days.

Mr MARGISON: The sign has been rectified, yes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: This happened in 2004. A bunch of motorcyclists were fined, and we got a letter from Mr Stewart, the Parliamentary Secretary for Roads, saying that the motorcyclists would all be refunded. Now they have all been fined again, with the same signs in the same place. Are you aware of that?

Mr MARGISON: I am not aware of the 2004 issue that you mentioned. What I am referring to is that the sign was rectified in the last few weeks. I am not aware that it was altered in 2004. I will have to take that on notice.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: Can you give the budget estimates Committee details of this year's budget in relation to maintenance?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: In June this year the State Government announced the biggest ever roads budget for New South Wales—a record \$3.3 billion. This budget strikes a balance between road construction and maintenance while still delivering road safety improvements. Maintaining this balance is a constant tension, and the Auditor-General's report recognised this issue of tension when looking at the condition of the State's roads. The Auditor-General acknowledged that the RTA has improved the overall surface condition of State roads despite facing significant challenges in maintaining the 20,738 kilometres of road under its care.

The Auditor-General found that the quality of RTA-managed roads has improved over the past decade. This was despite significant increases in traffic levels and heavier vehicle loads. The New South Wales Government has made a massive investment in road infrastructure. This year's record \$3.3 billion budget is an increase of \$415 million or 14.4 per cent on the 2005-06 budget. A total of \$1.6 billion has been allocated towards road construction and \$750 million towards maintenance of the State's roads in 2006-07. This year the RTA will spend \$750 million on maintenance—an increase of 13 per cent over the \$661 million allocated in 2005-06.

This is dedicated maintenance funding. Funding has rebuilt more than 250 kilometres of roads each year over the past decade. Last year alone the equivalent of 1,800 kilometres of rural two-lane State roads were resurfaced. Our roads provide an essential link to many rural and regional communities across New South Wales. That is why we must continue to make improvements to the network. Roads located outside the Sydney metropolitan area benefit particularly from this year's budget. Unlike members of the ever-shrinking national party, the Iemma Labor Government is committed to improving infrastructure in our regions. Some \$1.84 billion, or 6 per cent of the total roads budget, will be spent on regional and rural roads.

The budget is about more than construction and maintenance. Road safety and reducing the road toll are a key RTA priority, and the budget directs \$114 million towards road safety initiatives. Residents across New South Wales will benefit from road safety projects in 2006-07, including programs targeting speeding, drink driving, seatbelt usage, fatigue management, cycle safety, school and youth programs, and driving under the influence of drugs. Local councils across New South Wales are also winners, with a share of \$144 million under the repair program and the block grant scheme. Numerous projects will move forward this year under the State Government's road budget. As you can imagine, with a record \$3.3 billion—the twelfth consecutive record roads budget—the list is extensive. I ask Brett Skinner to add to that.

Mr SKINNER: I would just like to comment in more detail on the budget statements that have been released, particularly the variance analysis between the 2005-06 and the 2006-07 budgets and make a few comments about the maintenance of road funding going forward. I would like to take

the Committee to the budget statements and the major variances in the operating statement, the statement of financial position and cash flow statement between the original and the revised 2005-06 budgets and between the revised 2005-06 budget and the original 2006-07 budget.

Turning first to the operating statement, the net cost of services decreased between the original and the revised 2005-06 budgets by \$48 million to \$1.876 billion, representing a 2 per cent movement. This was largely due to a \$65 million reduction in grants and subsidies, reclassified from recurrent to capital expenditure. This reduction is partially offset by a \$13 million increase in depreciation expense as a result of the revaluation of roads and bridges during the year. The net cost of services increased between the revised 2005-06 budget and the original 2006-07 budget by \$85 million to \$1.961 billion, representing a 5 per cent movement.

This was largely due to a \$22 million increase in employee-related expenses due to a 4 per cent pay increase, \$62 million increase in general road maintenance, \$24 million increase in depreciation expense, again as a result of the revaluation of roads and bridges. These increases were partially offset by a \$9 million reduction in interest payable due to reduction in loan balances, a \$12 million increase in emerging right to receive private sector provided infrastructure, largely due to the Cross City Tunnel and the Western Sydney orbital having a full impact in the 2006-07 year.

Turning to the statement of financial position, the total asset base of the RTA has increased by \$3.5 billion from the original 2005-06 budget. This is a direct result of the revaluation of property, plant and equipment, including infrastructure systems. The total liabilities of the RTA increased by only \$15 million from the original to the revised 2005-06 budget. The total asset base of the RTA has increased by \$880 million between the revised 2005-06 budget and the initial 2006-07 budget. This is due to the capital expenditure for 2006-07 of \$1.7 billion forecast, less the expected depreciation of infrastructure systems of some of \$755 million. The total liabilities have decreased by \$97 million between the 2005-06 revised budget and the 2006-07 initial budget, due to continuing repayment of RTA loans with the Treasury Corporation.

Turning to the cash flow statement, closing cash and cash equivalents reduced by \$68 million between the 2005-06 original and revised budgets. This was due to \$17 million decrease in operating activity payments, \$148 million additional capital expenditure on payments, less \$29 million increase in receipts from the sale of properties, grants and contributions, less a further \$69 million, delayed in the repayment of RTA borrowings. Closing cash and cash equivalents reduced by a further \$31 million between the revised 2005-06 budget and the original 2006-07 budget. This was largely due to a \$70 million increase in operating activity payments as a result of the 4 per cent pay rise for employees and an increase in the maintenance program expenditure for 2006-07.

There is also a \$11 million reduction in the total receipts from grants, a \$70 million increase in loan repayments as some repayments were not paid in 2005-06. and a \$257 million increase in capital payments due to increased construction activity in the 2006-07 year, less a \$423 million increase in government appropriations. There will also be an impact in 2006-07 from the Australian international harmonisation rules. The main impact on the RTA is likely to be in our valuation of superannuation liabilities, write-off of certain research and development works, the valuation of the non-current assets held for sale and the method by which we value our private-sector-provided infrastructure.

In regard to maintenance expenditure on our roads, it is probably best to address the recent Auditor-General's performance audit report called, "The Condition of Our Roads." It is important to note that the challenges faced by the RTA in maintaining the State road network or major arterial roads are recognised in the auditors report, as are some of the reforms being implemented to address these challenges. In addition, the RTA also has responsibility for maintaining and developing the State network as well as registration, licensing, traffic management and road safety. The report acknowledged our good practice in many areas, for example, risk management, automated data collection, cost-effective design guidelines and locally flexible management structures, as well as recognising the RTA's success in keeping State roads open and available to road users.

The RTA manages its roads on a risk basis in accordance with its maintenance plan and is now in the process of reviewing and updating its current plan. To date, planning has had to rely on trends in surface conditions data, condition interventions standards and age and renewal

considerations. However, effective asset management leading to the setting of appropriate condition standards needs reliable forecasts of the structural condition of road pavements. This has not been available in the absence of technology to assess the structural condition across a large road network. In this respect, the report notes that the RTA has done well to recognise the importance of measuring structural condition and progressively improve its method of doing so. That is on page 4 of the report.

The report notes that the RTA, in conjunction with the CSIRO developed and patented new mobile technology called RoadCrack to assess pavement cracking. That is on page 17 of the report. Also, to plan maintenance and identify where a visual inspection by RTA staff is needed to determine the appropriate maintenance treatment. That is on page 16. It also noted that the RTA integrates road building with maintenance, measuring and reporting its rate of rebuilding against its long-term target. That is contained on page 14. It also noted it is already improving its modelling capabilities by leading research into the latest models to improve asset management and maintenance planning. That is on page 12.

The report recognises the need for a long-term perspective when examining maintenance of road infrastructure. Many road pavements last longer than 50 years, and bridges even longer. The report acknowledges that the level of rebuilding may fluctuate around the long-term target. Short-term variations in the rate of rebuilding can be accommodated provided all State roads are kept open without constraints on road users due to their condition and provided that the rate of rebuilding increases in the longer term. Variations may occur from time to time during other priorities such as the reopening of Lawrence Hargrave Drive following its closure from rock falls, infrastructure security upgrades and other natural disasters.

The report notes that the RTA receives \$2 billion per annum for maintaining and developing major arterial work, however a significant part of funding is tied to specific development projects influenced by the Commonwealth. To make matters worse, the State must contribute funds many Commonwealth projects the overall effect of which is that the untied discretionary part of the State development programs is only about \$420 million per annum. Despite these limitations, the State has increased its funding on maintenance in real terms by one-third since 1995-96. That is noted on pages 4, 26, 30 and 31.

The report acknowledges the RTA's ranking of its State roads by function and use is good practice, with the aim of keeping the higher-ranked roads in better condition. For best use of public funds it is important that those roads classified as State roads continue to fulfil arterial road functions and a panel of local government and RTA representatives is currently finalising a review to ensure the roads are properly classified. Overall, the RTA supports the recommendations of the report and will continue to fund the maintenance of the network in line with the risk management approach acknowledged in the report.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Minister, you spoke earlier about the new rules in relation to occupational health and safety that affect the RTA. Would you or one of the RTA officers tell us about the initiatives of the RTA in relation to safety?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I think David Stuart-Watt is probably the best person to answer that question. It is a very important area.

Mr STUART-WATT: Health and safety are given the highest priority within the RTA. We are committed to ensuring the safety of our employees, contractors and visitors to our work sites that they go home to their families at the end of each day as healthy as if not better than when they arrived. Leadership by senior management is a critical factor in driving occupational health and safety improvement. The RTA executive has ensured that occupational health and safety has a high profile in our strategic planning and policy development processes.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: Other Committee members may not be interested in this answer, but we are.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Point of order: It is offensive that the Hon. Don Harwin and Ms Sylvia Hale make jokes about the occupational health and safety of RTA workers.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: And the Chair.

CHAIR: Do not reflect on me, Mr Catanzariti.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: You were interrupting as well.

CHAIR: Proceed, Mr Stuart-Watt.

Mr STUART-WATT: The RTA has a five-year occupational health and safety strategic plan, annual business plans and an occupational health and safety policy framework that set out requirements for managing specific occupational health and safety processes. More importantly, the RTA has an executive occupational health and safety committee, which is chaired by our Chief Executive. We meet every two months at depots, project sites and work sites across New South Wales to review occupational health and safety performance and progress on specific initiatives. We also take the opportunity at these meetings to be briefed on project-specific risks and the control strategies that have been put in place to address them.

Our occupational health and safety risk management strategies are constantly renewed through a range of initiatives which are designed to ensure that occupational health and safety is a top-of-mind issue for all of our managers and staff. We have a number of key initiatives, including the Safety Awareness For Everyone [SAFE] campaign, in which senior managers are required to make regular field visits specifically to raise occupational health and safety awareness and to demonstrate to their staff that occupational health and safety is a core value of the RTA. To ensure that occupational health and safety risks are identified before work commences, we conduct risk workshops to draw on the experience of our employees in identifying potential problems from occupational health and safety, environment and production perspectives and to develop solutions so that we have a safe and effective project plan from the outset, even before commencement of work. We are currently extending this process to the concept and design phases of all of our projects so, wherever possible, we can design out hazards before we even contract them.

Our road services group holds an annual occupational health and safety summit where managers and key support staff set the improvement agenda for the year. This year, for example, we have renewed our focus on traffic control at work sites, which is a very important area, to improve the safety of not only our road workers but also motorists travelling through our work sites. We have also introduced an integrated workplace health and fitness program that identifies the physical demands on our work force, coupled with health checks and information to motivate them to make behavioural and lifestyle choices to ensure they are fit for work—for example, reduce smoking. Injury management gets the same high priority as prevention. We actively encourage reporting and have established a 1300 hotline number to support this program.

We have set our managers a goal of five minutes plus travel time to get to the scene of workplace incidents to ensure that injured staff receive immediate attention and incident causes are identified and addressed, wherever possible. We have engaged a network of preferred medical providers who are committed to working with us to ensure prompt medical treatment for our work force, reduce the extent of injury and minimise lost time and impacts on productivity. We also monitor our occupational health and safety performance closely by monthly reports to the executive and all line managers throughout the RTA. We recognise good performance. I am currently in the process of travelling throughout New South Wales to award certificates and plaques to teams who have achieved 600, 1,000 and even 1,500 days without lost-time injury. That is a remarkable achievement for our crews, given the high-risk, heavy manual work in which they are involved. Those figures match the private sector, and in many cases are better. We also recognise occupational health and safety innovation through our annual RTA staff awards.

The RTA has adopted the Government's occupational health and safety and injury management targets and has set stretch targets within the RTA to exceed those goals. We have already achieved a 24 per cent reduction in workplace injuries a year ahead of the Government's 2006-07 target. The Treasury Managed Fund has awarded the RTA its annual occupational health and safety risk management award four times in the last seven years and our last WorkCover audit ranked the RTA as best practice on all 12 elements of our occupational health and safety management system. These achievements have not come without significant effort in time and resources and senior

management commitment, but the returns are worth it. In the past seven years we have achieved over \$20 million in rebates on workers compensation premiums. That has gone straight back into the roads program and occupational health and safety improvements. We continue to see benefits not just through reduced injuries and costs but also from better engagement of our employees.

Occupational health and safety is an issue that will never be finished or accomplished at the RTA. We still have too many injuries, with about 600 new claims each year. We promote a culture of better safety awareness through greater levels of communication, consultation and education throughout the organisation. Further, we promote a culture of constant vigilance or chronic unease so that staff members are always on the lookout for problems before they arise. In summary, our priorities are to continually reinvigorate our risk management processes, to support our line managers in meeting the occupational health and safety accountability and to engage our employees in developing a strong and sustainable safety culture.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Minister, would you tell the Committee what the effect would be from the Opposition's policy to axe the RTA?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I welcome the opportunity to talk about the RTA, in particular, the attitude of certain members of this place to the RTA. I have always been intrigued by Peter Debnam's plan. His plan, as reported in *Hansard* on 25 May this year, is "to axe the RTA on day one". I use the word "plan" very loosely. In fact, it is an inappropriate word to use because the member for Vaucluse has no plan.

CHAIR: Minister, you are meant to be answering questions about the budget estimates of the Government.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: What a joke! What about the question you asked earlier? When I took a point of order at that time you ignored me. You have one rule for yourself and another rule for us.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: I asked the Minister a question and I would like to have an answer. Of course this matter impacts on the budget estimates. How will road maintenance and the building of new roads continue in New South Wales if we do not have a Roads and Traffic Authority to deliver the services? I would like the Minister to finish his reply.

CHAIR: The Government time for questions has expired.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: The Minister was answering the question. That is outrageous!

CHAIR: You can return to it later.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: You cannot cut off answers because the time for questions has run out. That is ridiculous!

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: We will remember that at the end.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: Madam Chair, I was in the middle of an answer. I have not had an opportunity to complete my answer.

CHAIR: Finish your sentence and we will move on to Opposition questions.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Madam Chair, you have never ruled that way before. The time limit applies to the asking of questions. The Minister has the right to complete an answer.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: To the point of order: If the Minister completes his answer, perhaps it could be understood that time will be deducted from the time for Government questions later, rather than using up the 20 minutes that is due to commence now for Opposition questions.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Perhaps the clerk could advise on this rule which the very sensitive Opposition is now trying to invent. Never in an estimates committee has the allocated period of time been applied to an answer already begun by a Minister.

CHAIR: Minister, have you almost completed your answer?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: Madam Chair, I was just commencing my answer.

CHAIR: We will hear from you later.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: No, Madam Chair. I want advice from the clerk on this issue. This rule has never been applied before. You did not apply it this morning when the Opposition and the Hon. Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans asked their questions. At that time the Minister was able to complete his answer after the bell. That situation has occurred in every estimates committee since these estimates committees started in, I think, 1992. I ask that you consult with the clerk. Having done so, we may have to consider whether we will have to clear the room and discuss the matter. We will not be put off by your usual tendency to apply Rafferty's rules and invent rules on the spot because you and the Opposition are embarrassed.

CHAIR: The Hon. Jan Burnswoods knows perfectly well that if Ministers are about to finish their reply I have always given them the courtesy of doing so. I will do so now. However, if the Minister for Roads is going to rave on, which will cut into the Opposition's time for questions, I will move on to the Hon. Don Harwin.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: The Chair knows perfectly well that the Opposition time will start when the Minister's answer is completed. She is making things up again.

CHAIR: Minister, will you proceed to complete your answer?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: Madam Chair, I am not sure that you have the power under the rules of committees to instruct me to cut off my answer halfway through.

CHAIR: I have asked you to finish your answer.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I have only just begun my answer. I am more than happy to respond to questions from all members. I have been open and frank in my responses to all members. However, if you direct me to finish an answer when I have uttered literally only two sentences in response, I ask that you indicate under which standing order you apply that instruction.

CHAIR: It is just plain commonsense. I extended the same courtesy to the Minister for Local Government during the budget estimates inquiry into his portfolio. If he was in the middle of a response I allowed him to finish his answer, as is usual.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: Will I be allowed to finish my response?

CHAIR: Yes. However, do not take up the Committee's time and cut into the time allocated to the Opposition with a long answer.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: Madam Chair, your biased and unfair chairing—

CHAIR: Are you going to proceed or not?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I am responding to your comment. Your biased and unfair chairing is legendary in this Parliament. I am endeavouring to answer all questions from all parties as fairly and honestly as possible. However, I will not accept that you have the authority under the standing orders to instruct me to conclude a sentence. I have the right to answer questions appropriately. I know that you are the worst chair of all the chairs on these committees. However, I suggest that you listen to the Hon. Don Harwin's advice—he is a little more reasonable about these matters—or to the Clerk. They both have strong and fine reputations. You should allow me to finish

my answer. The Committee will sit for four hours and I am confident that I can deal with all the questions in that time. I will not tolerate or accept bias or incompetent chairing from you.

CHAIR: Order! Get on with the answer and finish it fast.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: That is outrageous. Who do you think you are speaking to the Minister like that?

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: I think she has made the point about her competence as well as her grace.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: Yes, I think she has underlined her competence succinctly. I thank the honourable member for the question. As I was saying, of course, the honourable member for Vacluse has a plan; that is, to axe the RTA on day one. That is empty, populist rhetoric with no base, outcome or benefits for the public. The New South Wales Government has spent \$29 billion on roads since 1995. That is an average of \$2.6 billion a year being spent on maintaining our road network and building new roads. They are all roads managed by the RTA.

One must question how the honourable member for Vacluse plans to deal with this challenging task. What other agency would manage and maintain 20,000 kilometres of roads, 4,800 bridges and culverts in New South Wales for which the RTA is responsible? Who would manage, monitor and ensure compliance of thousands of road signs, roundabouts and line markings on the 180,000-plus kilometres of road across the State? Perhaps the honourable member for Vacluse will take the advice of the Hon. Jenny Gardiner, who seems to be an expert on everything. How would he replace the requisite engineering knowledge that he would be casting aside when he disbanded the RTA? How would he find engineers with the right experience and background to build and maintain the State's road infrastructure? How would projects like the ground-breaking and unique \$49-million Seacliff Bridge be completed? I urge honourable members to visit the site because the bridge is an outstanding piece of engineering.

Who would the honourable member for Vacluse have manage the \$420-million Windsor Road upgrade, which is one of Australia's largest urban arterial road projects. No-one knows, and he certainly does not know because he has no plan for the RTA's future. What is the honourable member's plan for completing the 24 million registration and licensing transactions that the RTA performs each year? The RTA provides essential services for families across the State in rural, regional and metropolitan New South Wales. Vacancies in motor registries would not be filled under the honourable member's plan. There are six positions in Tenterfield he would not be filling. Perhaps the Hon. Don Harwin can explain to people in towns on the South Coast such as Bomaderry and Nowra who would get the seven local jobs. What about the 20 jobs in Cooma and the 23 jobs in Narrandera? Perhaps the Chair would defend Liberal Party policy not to fill the 12 vacant positions in Port Macquarie and explain that the reduced services on the North Coast were a result of an irresponsible policy. Perhaps Mr Stoner and Mr Fraser are happy to stop the Pacific Highway upgrade because there are vacancies at Port Macquarie and Grafton that would not be filled by engineers and road workers.

If there were not enough RTA staff to deliver these important services, who would deliver them? I suspect that the Coalition has a plan to privatise licence testing. How would the fairness and equity of testing across the State be achieved under those circumstances? Who would set the benchmark? Who would monitor standards and ensure consistency and compliance? The questions are endless and the answers are nonexistent. Who would build bus lanes around Sydney? Who would crash test new vehicles? Who would manage Australia's largest and most sophisticated heavy vehicle enforcement program? Who would watch over the heritage bridges such as Gee Gee Bridge over the Wakool River? Who would manage and monitor the 240 cameras that make up the intelligent camera network watching over the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Anzac Bridge? Who would paint the bridge? What is the honourable member's plan for running the vehicle ferries that are vital to a number of New South Wales communities? What about traffic management? How does he plan to operate the state-of-the-art Transport Management Centre, which controls traffic across the State and integrates traffic light phasing? Where is the Leader of the Opposition's plan?

The road toll for New South Wales in 2005 was 504. That is the lowest annual toll since 1945, and 60 per cent lower than the highest recorded road toll in 1978. That fall has not been

coincidental; it has been achieved because of better safety technology, better laws, better roads and a higher level of community awareness of the fatal four: speed, fatigue, alcohol and lack of child restraints. The RTA spends \$14 million on road safety campaigns each year, more than \$100 million on other safety programs and much more on road development and maintenance works that improve safety.

Who would be responsible for developing new laws in response to trends in road safety—new laws like the RBT legislation, which was introduced in 1982, the new legislation introduced yesterday dealing with random drug testing and compulsory testing of drivers involved in fatalities, or laws restricting use of mobile phones? Who would identify black spots and deliver programs to improve them? Who would educate the community about road safety and the importance of driver behaviour? These are the tasks that the RTA performs every day. The honourable member for Vaucluse's plan to axe the RTA on day one is a demonstration of recklessness, incompetence and a complete lack of serious claim to the leadership of this State.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: What impact will the harbour tunnel being completely cashless in six months have on traffic flows on the Eastern Distributor?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I thank the honourable member for his question. The Government made an announcement about the harbour tunnel today. There will be additional e-tag capacity as a result of the introduction of a second e-tag-only lane. Motorists approaching the tunnel from the north will soon have the option of a right-hand e-tag-only lane and a left-hand e-tag-only lane. E-tag facilities have also been added to the change and auto lanes. Therefore, all four lanes entering the tunnel will be e-tag friendly. That is designed to encourage better traffic flows through the toll plaza and to offer real benefits to people using e-tags. As part of that program, we have also announced a \$30 toll credit for new RTA account holders to encourage people to take up tags and to enjoy the advantages of the new e-tag capacity.

We have speculated about when to make the tunnel cashless. It is important to understand that throughout the world there has been no successful transition from a toll road with a cash component to a cashless tollway. Many of the projects cited in Australia—the new motorway system in Melbourne, the Cross City Tunnel, the Lane Cove Tunnel and the M7—were all opened as cashless tollways. That is a different scenario from the harbour tunnel because people have been paying to cross the harbour since 1932.

The plan for the tunnel is to improve capacity and therefore offer real benefits to people with an e-tag and to encourage people to take up tags by offering a \$30 credit. Hopefully that will be successful. We have set a tag use target of about 90 per cent. If we can encourage 90 per cent of drivers accessing the tunnel to use tags, it will be feasible to set a date to go cashless. The Government needs to work in partnership with the community. By offering better facilities for e-tag users and incentives we can move towards a cashless tunnel.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: When might the 90 per cent usage target be met?

Mr WIELINGA: The target is six months. However, it will depend on the success of the initiatives that are being introduced. We will continue to monitor that situation and make adjustments if required. The benefits to traffic flow that result from fully electronic tollways are well known. We will continue to adjust our program and our approach to achieve that outcome.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Are air quality issues expected to arise in the tunnel as a result of making the tunnel cashless?

Mr WIELINGA: No. We are looking at the same traffic flow. The tollgates are outside the tunnel. We are not adjusting the flow of traffic within the tunnel.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Is this move to avoid a voter backlash given that more than 100,000 vehicles will flow out of the Lane Cove Tunnel a day and will bank up at the harbour crossing unless it is cashless?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: The premise of the question is faulty, but that is okay, I will fix it. The Epping Road corridor is heavily utilised now. As I said, a \$1.1-billion project such as the Lane Cove Tunnel and the expanded Gore Hill Freeway will produce some teething issues and it is commonsense to look at the whole network. We have had discussions with Connector Motorways and the operators of the tunnel. We believe it is in the interests of motorists and the community to facilitate better traffic flows through the plaza by encouraging e-tag uptake.

CHAIR: Minister, in relation to the Pacific Highway, how do you account for the fact that highway upgrades programs have blown out by more than \$1.2 billion since 1997?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: The Pacific Highway upgrade is one of the largest infrastructure projects ever undertaken in this country. In the past 12 months the Iemma Government has invested \$178 million in the highway. The upgrade is a joint responsibility between the Australian and New South Wales Governments. We will spend \$1.3 billion upgrading the Pacific Highway in the three years to 2009, in addition to the \$2.3 billion committed during the last decade. I must say I am very disappointed that members of the New South Wales Opposition make no effort to lobby their Federal Liberal counterparts to get the funding that would see the upgrading of the highway done more quickly.

I would hope that the New South Wales Coalition would put the interests of people on the North Coast and the community ahead of any other priorities they may have. But I suspect that the right-wing takeover of the New South Wales Liberal Party has probably ostracised them a little from the Federal Liberal Party. People are sick and tired of politicians fighting. They want certainty. That is why the Government is getting on with the job of upgrading the highway—and to a high standard, which means better safety, reduced travel times, and better outcomes for local communities.

When the Pacific Highway upgrade was first initiated more than 10 years ago, the engineering standard was to add additional lanes to the existing highway. I think that is an important point to make. At that stage the engineering standard was simply to tag on an additional lane next to whatever was there. Since then, community expectations have risen to demand a much higher standard of road and a better road. I think it is worth showing the Committee some photographs to illustrate what I am talking about. I am happy to table the photographs if necessary. The first photograph was taken in 1955 and shows the Pacific Highway from Bulahdelah to Coolongolook. As you can see, it was a pretty tragic piece of road at that time. The next photograph shows what the road looked like before the upgrade. The last photograph shows what the highway looks like today.

People talk about the Pacific Highway in an abstract way. But when you see it and understand it, you realise that it is a huge project. Quite rightly, the community's expectations about what they expect in a motorway have risen dramatically. The expectation now from most people—except, dare I say, the Greens, who are anti motorways—is for a standard dual carriageway running the 677 kilometres between the F3 at Hexham and the Queensland border. Quite frankly, I think that is a reasonable expectation, that they should have that level of motorway.

The scope of some projects has also varied to take into account the very legitimate needs and concerns of communities along the highway. This is called responsible planning and being reactive to community concerns. There was a time many, many years ago—I suspect, when the Coalition was in control in New South Wales—when roads were simply shoved through areas without any concern or consideration for the local communities. Today we have a very different approach, a consultative approach, to try to get good outcomes for users of the motorway but also for the local communities, and they are impacted in all sorts of ways. Some are removed from the motorway, some are added, and we take into account the impact on individuals when new routes are determined.

It seems to me that the criticism about the additional cost regarding the Pacific Highway comes from Andrew Stoner. The only way he can justify the criticism is by suggesting that we run a substantive highway through the middle of the rural communities that he is meant to support or represent. I think it is absolutely vital that North Coast communities are consulted—and they have been. As a result, several projects have seen major design changes, including interchanges, bridges, access roads, and environmental protection measures taken into account. For example, the Brunswick Heads to Yelgun project, which I recently visited, is a high-standard dual carriageway adjacent to Ocean Shores. The project design and scope were significantly improved as a result of community

consultation and the provision of environmental measures, including compensatory habitat and noise impact measures. That is an important part of building motorways now. You really have to look at these issues seriously, and sometimes they do add to the cost.

Changes to the design also include extensive bridge works and retaining walls, and the inclusion of a major truck and light and heavy vehicle rest area, meaning a much safer journey for both truck drivers and heavy vehicle operators and motorists. I have inspected the project, which is a substantial one. They face some interesting geotechnical and environmental concerns through that project. Added to these legitimate rising expectations are significant increases in land acquisition and construction costs. Construction costs are approximately 85 per cent of the total cost of building a road. The cost of producing two major components of new road—bitumen and steel—has risen by around 20 per cent in the last year alone. Of course, bitumen is a petrochemical derivative.

The New South Wales Government remains committed to getting the upgrade of the Pacific Highway done as quickly as possible. More than 10 per cent of the New South Wales Roads budget is being spent on projects to upgrade the Pacific Highway. The New South Wales Government will invest \$360 million in 2006-07 for the construction, planning and maintenance work on the Pacific Highway. Since 1996 a total of 45 projects have now opened to traffic. I think it is worth stating that these are not little roundabout projects; we are talking about 45 major projects since 1996. Motorists now benefit from 233 kilometres of four-lane dual carriageway. Only yesterday I announced the preferred routes for three major Pacific Highway upgrade projects. This means that as at August this year 380 kilometres of new highway projects have been approved for construction, and preferred routes identified.

CHAIR: You have spoken about community consultation. With respect to the Banora Point-Sexton Hill upgrade, taking into account great community interest in lobbying for option C, what is the current status of the RTA's review of those route options?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I am advised that the Banora Point upgrading project has been nominated as one of the projects to be included in \$960 million funding for the Pacific Highway over the next three years. It is a 2.5 kilometre dual carriageway upgrade to improve safety and relieve traffic congestion on that section of the highway. I appreciate there is community support for a deep tunnel option under Sexton Hill and that Tweed Shire Council wants the issue of a highway master plan for a Chinderah to Tugun bypass resolved prior to supporting options for the Banora Point upgrade.

I am advised the RTA undertook an investigation into the feasibility of a deep tunnel option, which was publicly released in December 2005. The report concluded that the deep tunnel under Sexton Hill is not feasible due to technical geological restrictions and significant extra costs. I know the community highway group produced its own report in response to the RTA's report on option C and provided a copy to the RTA in late May. Following a meeting with the community, arranged by the hardworking member for Tweed, Neville Newell—who is really a toiler for the area and a very solid local member—I have instructed the RTA to co-ordinate an independent review of the deep tunnel option.

The preferred concept design is expected to be completed later this year. A master plan for the Chinderah to Tugun section of the Pacific Highway has been developed in conjunction with the Tweed Shire Council. I think it might be in the Committee's interests for me to give you a copy of it—I will not go through it, in the interests of preserving our valuable time together—just to show you what the sort of consultation process is that the RTA undertakes, because it is very, very extensive. If the Committee likes, I can ask one of my RTA people to explain the consultation process.

CHAIR: We have had many hearings on that matter. If you could just table the document?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I am more than happy to do that.

CHAIR: Minister, you mentioned the independent review that you have asked the RTA to do in relation to the deep tunnel option. Can you tell us where that review is up to?

Mr WATTERS: It is under way. I have got no details of the state of the review.

CHAIR: Do you know when it is due to be completed?

Mr WATTERS: I would have to take that on notice.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Minister, who initiated the currently proposed traffic changes at the intersection of Victoria Road and Lyons Road at Drummoyne? Have there been any community consultations prior to announcing the proposals?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I might ask Phil Margison to respond to that.

Mr MARGISON: The issue of bus priority measures on Victoria Road is part of the Government's overall plan to improve bus priority in Sydney as a result of the Unsworth report into the bus industry and a number of measures have been already implemented on Victoria Road, one of the major corridors for buses in Sydney. The issue of improvements around the Lyons Road area has been investigated for some time and the current status is that there has been a working party established for that process. The working party is looking at a number of options for the improvement of bus priority in that area, working with the local representatives of the community to come up with the best option that improves bus priority but is also in the interests of the local community, bearing in mind that the local community are the people who are catching the buses as well. When that working party has gone through the options, they will be reporting back and there will be a further development of improvements in that area.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Who are the members of the working party?

Mr MARGISON: I am not sure I have got all that detail here. I could take that on notice.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: And supply it to the Committee. I am happy if you need to take these on notice as well. Have you received any correspondence from members of the public advocating any of the three options suggested as possible changes at the intersection of Victoria Road and Lyons Road, Drummoyne?

Mr MARGISON: I would have to take that on notice.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Could you also, as part of taking that question on notice, provide any copies to the Committee for our perusal?

Mr MARGISON: Could you just clarify, that was correspondence from the community?

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Yes. If I could refer you to the community update that has been put out by the RTA in August 2006. It is specifically about the proposed traffic changes at the intersection of Victoria Road and Lyons Road, Drummoyne. Just to assist I will read a part of it:

The RTA is investigating ways of improving access to Victoria Road from Lyons Road West from Five Dock and Russell Lea. The proposed changes would reduce delays to traffic and buses turning right from Lyons Road West, particularly in the a.m. peak.

The question that I asked, and which you agreed to take on notice, is just related to those specific changes. I am just interested in any correspondence from members of the public advocating those changes.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Are you asking for copies of letters from individual members of the public? Would there not be some privacy implications with that?

The Hon. DON HARWIN: If, in terms of any privacy legislation, there is a problem, obviously that would be excluded, but I am asking if there have been letters from members of the public advocating those changes. If so, how many and what are the nature of the suggestions in those letters?

Mr MARGISON: I will certainly do that, but, as suggested, we will take on board any issues about privacy in regard to responding to that.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: What is the timeline that you are working to in terms of the Victoria Road working party and when they are going to make their decisions?

Mr MARGISON: I will include that, if I may, as part of the notice.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Minister, I would like to ask you a few questions about Style Street in Leichhardt. In case you are not familiar with it, Style Street is a very narrow road; it has medium residential density; there are five child care centres, four schools, three churches and three parks either in or very close to the street. It is a regional road with a 50 kilometres speed limit and there are no tonnage restrictions. Leichhardt council has been requesting funding from the RTA for traffic calming measures for Styles Street, Leichhardt, for a number of years. These requests have been consistently refused. Could you explain why?

Mr MARGISON: I might answer that question. As you mentioned, Styles Street is a regional road. If I might explain for the Committee's information, the road hierarchy in Sydney is the State roads, which are managed by the RTA, and then regional roads are roads which the councils manage but are funded under one of the regional road programs, which carry still significant amounts of traffic. Styles Street has been agreed by the council as well as being in that category. And that is the whole function of a regional road: it provides some local access as well as being a significant contributor to movement throughout Sydney, particularly in the regional sense, and, as I said, it carries a significant amount of through traffic.

My understanding is that there have been discussions between council and the community and the RTA over a period of years about how best to deal with the balance of traffic on that road and there have been proposals which have been considered by the RTA. I am not fully aware of all the details of those proposals, and I would have to take on notice the precise recommendations that have been made by the community and the response by the RTA. I do not have those with me today.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Mr Margison, can I tell you that Leichhardt council considers the safety of pedestrians to be so highly compromised that the council has committed to using its ratepayers' funds to pay for traffic calming works. The council quite rightly believes, in my opinion, that this is a case of cost shifting on the part of the RTA. If it is not cost shifting, will the RTA reimburse Leichhardt council for the works that it has been obliged to undertake?

Mr MARGISON: As I mentioned, Styles Street is a regional road, which is a road that is managed by the council which the RTA and the Government contributes to. There is nothing that prevents the council, provided it is done correctly and safely, from spending its own money on a regional road.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Are you saying there is no obligation on the RTA to fund traffic calming or other improvements on a council's regional road?

Mr MARGISON: Council regional roads are provided with funding, as was mentioned previously, through the regional road block grants system and the repair program, which is a contribution to councils. They receive that funding on an annual basis for them to manage the roads. So the RTA does contribute to that road, and how the council chooses to use those funds is predominantly up to the council, but it also does not preclude the council—and many councils do—from contributing funds from the council to manage those roads as well. That is the way that regional roads have been developed for the last 20 or 30 years in Sydney.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: The Minister earlier in one of his replies spoke at length about how reactive the RTA was to community concerns. Residents of Styles Street have lobbied the RTA for a number of years to have the speed limit reduced from 50 to 40 kilometres. What is the justification for the RTA refusing to reduce the speed limit on Styles Street?

Mr BUSHBY: It may be appropriate for me to answer that question. The setting of speed limits takes into account a lot of differing facets in relation to coming up with an answer as to what the proper speed limit is at a point. It takes into account the adjacent land use, the nature of the traffic,

both using the road and other road users, pedestrians, et cetera. Regional roads, as Mr Margison has already suggested, have quite an arterial component to their usage by the traffic.

As a result, the concept of reducing from 50 to 40 kilometres an hour would have to be balanced against the usage for the through traffic as well as the local traffic. I am not aware of the actual submissions that have been made by the council in relation to that but, in a general sense, the setting of speed limits is a balancing item and my guess is that it would be based on the overall usage of the road.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: As I pointed out earlier, Styles Street has five child care centres, four schools, three churches and three parks.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: It does not have five child care centres. That is rubbish.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: On the length of Styles Street.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: That is not true.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Or in the immediate vicinity.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Yes. There are two child care centres and one school. Do not mislead the Committee or the Minister.

CHAIR: Order! Ms Hale has the call.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: There is no tonnage limit on the road, yet obviously being a site of dense residential development, plus all the schools, child care centres, et cetera, why has there been no tonnage limit placed on Styles Street?

Mr WIELINGA: We will take that question on notice, but being a regional road, it is a matter for council to manage the structural stability of that road and no doubt they have taken into account the capability and that it will be able to carry certain traffic loads.

[Short adjournment]

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Still continuing on roads in Leichhardt, Darley Road-Foster Lane is in a very poor state of repair. On numerous occasions the local member, Sandra Nori, has committed to having it resheeted. Is there a timetable for the resheeting of Darley Road-Foster Lane?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: We will take that very specific question about the resurfacing of one street on notice so that we can give an appropriate and accurate response.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: The road is subject to extraordinarily heavy traffic and has been the scene of numerous accidents, and indeed a fatal accident. Will the RTA enter into negotiations with the council about a reduction of the speed limit from 60 kilometres an hour to 50 kilometres an hour?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: Without wanting to be disparaging to the honourable member, I would like to check those assertions for accuracy, having noted that the previous question was loaded with inaccuracies. We will take that question on notice for an appropriate response.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: In the interests of consulting with the community, there is a pedestrian refuge currently at the junction of Charles Street and Darley Road but there is no pedestrian crossing anywhere along the length of Darley Road- Foster Lane. Will the RTA commit to a pedestrian crossing at the very least at Charles Street and Allen Street?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I will have to take that question on notice in relation to a commitment.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Can you inform the Committee of the number of fatalities of motorcyclists due to wire rope and Armco fences?

Mr BUSHBY: My understanding is that with the wire rope there have been no fatalities. In terms of the Armco fences, I would have to check the database to give you a response.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Are you aware that the data for these statistics is somewhat inaccurate?

Mr BUSHBY: In terms of fatalities?

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Yes, in terms of the cause of the fatalities.

Mr BUSHBY: We hear about all the fatalities.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I am sure you hear about the fatalities but in terms of the cause of the fatalities.

Mr BUSHBY: If there is a fatality where people have hit the guard fence I think the accident investigation at the time would be quite accurate on that.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Is their research into motorcycle fatalities and the effect of crash barrier types? Is this being watched? A couple of years ago assurances were given that there would be research and close monitoring of the situation with Gryffin fences. Has that occurred?

Mr BUSHBY: I am aware that there is a great deal of concern about the type of barrier, the nature of barriers and the effect on different types of road users. Motorcyclists in particular had some concerns about different aspects of the road barriers. The research is ongoing around the world; it is not just an issue associated with Australia or New South Wales. Certainly, the RTA is monitoring the progress of that discussion as it goes forward.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Does the RTA still have Gryffin fences next to the edge of the F4 motorway when there is a huge median strip where the Gryffin fences could in fact be a long way from the road edge?

Mr BUSHBY: I do not know about the particular location you are referring to. Certainly, the Gryffin fences or the wire guard rails are actually designed and located so that they allow for a vehicle to hit the wire fencing and deflect, absorbing the energy from the vehicle and allowing it to re-enter the carriageway that it is actually travelling, rather than to travel across a median into oncoming traffic. That is one of the main safety benefits of this type of fencing. In allowing for that deflection to occur, you have to put the guard fence off centre, especially on the outside of a curve, to allow the deflection to occur without that deflection going into the oncoming traffic on the other carriageway.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: But if there is a wide median strip, would it not be better to have the Gryffin fence in the middle of the median strip, which would give the motorcyclist a lot more space before he or she hit the fence instead of having it right on the edge of the road and then having a median strip beyond that?

Mr BUSHBY: As I said, I do not know the circumstances of the location.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: But you understand the more run-off space there is for a motorcyclist the better chance the motorcyclist will have?

Mr BUSHBY: Any vehicle, in the amount of time. It is about the geometry of the location, and I cannot answer your question.

Mr WIELINGA: It is horizontal and vertical geometry. Very often with median strips there are drainage slides that are steeper than the cross-fall of the road. That has an influence on how the impact is going to occur on the railing. A lot of engineering factors need to be taken into account.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: But obviously if he hits the Gryffin fence at the top when he may not have hit it at the bottom, a motorcyclist would be a lot worse off?

Mr WIELINGA: It needs to be located where it can get the best safety benefit. The impact itself is obviously taken into account.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: As the number of motorcycles is increasing, particularly the step-through type motorcycle, has it had been taken into account in the planning of roads? If not, why not?

Mr WIELINGA: As Michael says, we comprehensively watch what is going on with research and development and policy development. The RTA is a member of AusRoads. We work co-operatively with other agencies around the State. We work co-operatively with other agencies on road safety. We are constantly looking at all of our design standards, not just the ones you are referring to.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Given that the damage to roads is proportional to or at least the multiple of the mass, or is it the square of the mass?

Mr WIELINGA: It is a little more complicated than that. There is a set of curves called bossany curves.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Given that the registration costs of trucks and cars are proportionate to their mass, as I understand it, why is cost of the registration for motorcycles not also proportionate to their mass, considering the effect they have on the road?

Mr BUSHBY: Certainly heavy vehicles have a greater cost and the weight tax component of registration for those vehicles and light vehicles reflects the mass of the vehicle. There are also administrative components in the registration cost. I cannot answer whether motorcycle registration has a weight tax component but I would imagine it is set in relation to the administrative costs.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Can you give a breakdown of the difference between administrative costs and the weight cost component in registration?

Mr BUSHBY: I would have to take that on notice.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: But can you do so? Can you give me an answer?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: He said he would take it on notice.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Given that motorcycles also reduce the demand for roads—effectively, if you increase the number of motorcycles by a certain percentage you decrease the demand for extra roads by a large component—should that not be reflected in the charges you make on motorcycles?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I am not sure that assertion is accurate.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do you think a motorcycle takes up as much room as a car on a road?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: No, I am just not sure that your assertion necessarily follows through in the traffic modelling. We will have to go back and examine what the international research is before we can accept that assertion.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Have you looked at the difference in road demand as the percentage of motorcycles goes up?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I will take that question on notice.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: That comes to the nub of my question. If you have not looked at it, I am not going to get an answer.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I will take the question on notice.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: With the e-Tags, does the RTA have a way of putting e-Tags on motorbikes so it is easy for motorcycle riders and they do not get pilfered?

Mr MARGISON: There is currently no motorcycle-specific tag, however the RTA has been working with motorcycle groups to overcome the issues about having a tag that is out in the open, so it has to be waterproof, and how to mount it on a motorcycle rather than just trying to hold it in your hand as you go through. Prototypes have been designed but there is no final product yet. So, we are working with both tag manufacturers and motorcycle groups on some prototypes to see how well they work and to see how you might attach them to a motorcycle, because not all motorcycles are the same.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: This is almost the identical answer I got last year. What progress has been made? Surely, to find a way to get a tag that will sit on a motorcycle should not be beyond the technological capacity of our society today?

Mr WIELINGA: There are a number of possibilities on this. Getting an effective outcome on this requires co-operation between both the users and the agency that is working on it. We continue to put up technical solutions but at the end of the day we need to come up with something that the motorcyclists can live with. It is a difficult technical problem. There will be a solution in time. We are not giving up on this. We will continue to work with these people to find a solution they can live with.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: It seems to be taking an extraordinary long time. In the meantime, are the fail-to-read charges still made on motorcyclists whose tags do not effectively display or are not registered?

Mr MARGISON: If customers, whether they are on a motorcycle or in a vehicle, have a tag that is working correctly and they have credit in their account, if the tag fails to read for any reason, that is taken into account. All toll authorities know the vehicle that is registered to the tag. If the vehicle can be identified, the toll can be deducted from the account without the need to contact the driver. If the vehicle cannot be identified, for whatever reason—and motorcycles are difficult because the location and position of the number plates—we would then have to communicate with the driver to make sure that it was registered to his or her account.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do they regularly cop charges when their E-tag does not register because there is no way of mounting it?

Mr MARGISON: I am not aware of any.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do you say that they do not cop fail-to-read charges?

Mr MARGISON: I am not aware of any.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: It may be the case?

Mr MARGISON: I would have to take that on notice. I am not aware of any.

CHAIR: It is time for Government questions.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: I direct my question to the RTA officers. Would you tell the Committee about the efficiency of the RTA's traffic management system, in particular, the Sydney Co-ordinated Adaptive Traffic System?

Mr MARGISON: I will answer that question. As you would all be aware, Sydney is a very big city. However, travel times into and out of the city have remained relatively steady during morning and evening peaks, despite a 25 per cent increase in the number of cars on our roads over the

last 10 years. There have been an extra one million vehicles and an extra 600,000 drivers on our roads since 1995. That is 16 per cent more drivers in 10 years and 26 per cent more cars. However, in that time we have also increased the number of kilometres of bus lanes and transit lanes by more than 250 per cent. Traffic movement is constantly being managed by the RTA's Transport Management Centre.

Managing the smooth flow of traffic in a city of some 4 million people is an enormous challenge. To help meet that challenge the RTA's Sydney Co-ordinated Adaptive Traffic System [SCATS] was designed and developed in New South Wales. It is recognised worldwide as a leading traffic management solution. Following a worldwide search in the 1970s, the then Department of Motor Transport [DMT], one of the predecessors of the RTA, decided to develop its own system, which eventually became SCATS. This system has the advantage of being designed by traffic engineers for use by traffic engineers. SCATS now operates in most Australian States and more than 80 cities throughout the world. It controls in excess of 23,000 traffic signals in over 20 countries worldwide. So commuters in cities across Europe, Asia, America and New Zealand now benefit from technology that was developed right here in New South Wales by the RTA.

SCATS operates in realtime. It adjusts traffic signal timing in response to variations in the traffic demand and the system capacity as they occur throughout the day. It is a complete system which incorporates a unique traffic control philosophy and a "helicopter" view of the city traffic to manage the entire network. Using this practice SCATS is able to manage all traffic signals in New South Wales from one location: the state-of-the-art Transport Management Centre at Eveleigh. SCATS has a number of other unique features that have been developed over the years, including emergency route management which allows emergency service vehicles to receive green light runs if deemed necessary.

Also, in the event of power, communications or regional computer failures, SCATS has an inbuilt historical co-ordination data that is automatically activated in such circumstances to provide continuous and continued traffic co-ordination without the need to refer back to the central computer system. The system also has a spatial database traffic management system, which displays congestion levels, incidents on the network, bus priority and closed-circuit television—which is used to manage the traffic as well—all on one interface. Another technology, called Dial In Dial Out, means that SCATS can monitor traffic throughout the State in remote country towns, even as far as Broken Hill.

Event management systems automatically introduce strategies to manage unusual traffic conditions, such as those generated by major events, like football matches in the Moore Park area. A special breakaway routine is activated in order to clear the traffic as quickly as possible. Also, the sale of SCATS to external organisations worldwide is an export earner for the people of New South Wales. This year licence fees in excess of \$1.5 million are expected, with maintenance contracts for those worldwide licences earning in the vicinity of \$300,000 annually. Those funds are used for the ongoing maintenance and enhancement of SCATS, which is constantly being improved and refined to deliver more benefits to the motorists of New South Wales.

The most recent enhancement allows for the integration of what is called the Public Transport Information and Priority System [PTIPS]. Following a recent development of the system, new satellite-based technology now puts specially equipped buses operating between Miranda and Hurstville in direct contact with SCATS, so, for example, buses running late can receive traffic signal priority. The result is fast and more reliable services along this strategic 10 kilometres bus corridor. Without SCATS and its world-leading traffic management technology, a satellite-based priority system such as PTIPS would not be possible. SCATS, which was developed in Sydney by the RTA, is recognised worldwide as one of the leading traffic management systems.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Mr Wielinga, you mentioned earlier your intention to refocus the priorities of the RTA and its executive. Would you elaborate to the Committee on your plans in that direction?

Mr WIELINGA: It is important that we refocus the RTA. When you look at our business, our priorities as a road agency is to provide roads maintenance solutions, manage the road network to achieve consistent travel times, improve road safety, test and license drivers and register and inspect vehicles, and provide road capacity solutions. This is important and honourable work for our staff. The opportunity is there for us to focus on core business by rationalisation of our senior management,

a reduction in the size of our executive and improving accountability. We have the opportunity to create directorates around those core responsibilities. At the present time I am consulting within the RTA and shortly will consult with the unions and associations to finalise the details of a structure that refocuses the RTA. The new structure will give a clear emphasis on our core accountabilities, streamline our bureaucracy and sharpen our accountability.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: I ask a question of the RTA. Would you outline to the Committee the AusLink agreement and its effect on New South Wales?

Mr WATTERS: I will answer that question. The Federal Government's 2006-07 budget included welcome funding for New South Wales under the AusLink program. It has allocated \$800 million to upgrade the Hume Highway between the Sturt Highway and the Victorian border and an additional \$160 million to the Pacific Highway, on condition that New South Wales matches it on a dollar-for-dollar basis. That was over and above the previously committed AusLink funding. The RTA has a good working relationship with the Federal Department of Transport and Regional Services. I think that good working relationship has played a part in getting this additional funding for these projects.

In June the Minister for Roads signed two memoranda of understanding with the Federal Government, which spelt out the scope of accelerated works on both the Hume and Pacific highways. The works must be finished by the end of 2009. While the Federal budget included this much-needed funding for two of the State's most important highways, the Federal Government funding system—that is, AusLink—has a sting in its tail. Under the agreement signed last year, New South Wales must now find about \$84 million to contribute to road construction projects on former national highways, which were previously fully funded by the Federal Government.

We must now make a contribution to those projects. In addition, New South Wales must find a further \$215 million to cover the shortfall in the maintenance, safety and urgent minor works on the former national highway system. A Federal safety and minor works programs funded those works on national highways, but it has been abandoned under AusLink, and those works must now be undertaken by the State. Overall, AusLink has had an impact on State programs amounting to \$298 million over four years from 2005 to 2009. That has forced the RTA to make up a shortfall by delaying or reducing budgets for State-funded projects. The previous Minister announced that delays are being experienced with the second Grafton bridge on the Summerland Way, the Alstonville bypass on the Bruxner Highway and the Gardeners Road ramps at East Lakes. They have all been delayed by about four years. The first stage of the Oxley Highway, which leads into Port Macquarie, will be commenced in 2007-08.

Another impact that the Minister alluded to earlier is the shift of cost risks away from the Federal Government to the State. For example, the Federal Government offered \$5 million towards the cost of the Pambula Bridge project in the south of the State on the Princes Highway. That represented 50 per cent of the early cost estimate. The scope of the work has increased significantly since the offer was made and the State is proceeding with it at a cost of \$17 million. However, the Federal Government is not increasing its share beyond of \$5 million; it has refused to increase its share; it is capping its contribution.

Another example of shifting the cost risk is in road maintenance. Under AusLink the State receives less money for maintenance than it did under the former national highways program. The AusLink agreement requires the State to maintain the entire AusLink network at a standard of road condition no worse than it is today. In other words, the Federal Government is providing less money for more road maintenance. It previously fully funded maintenance of national highways. The AusLink network is broader—it includes the Pacific Highway and a couple of other highways—but total Federal funding for maintenance is being reduced. Under the AusLink agreement the State is required to increase its contribution to those roads.

In addition to the extra funding for the Pacific Highway, \$160 million will be spent over three years. That is in addition to the \$960 million of State-Federal funding previously announced by both Governments. That will bring total expenditure to \$1.3 billion over the next three years. That is a significant increase. The State has increased its funding of the Pacific Highway by about one-third and

the Federal Government has increased its funding by more than that. The Federal Government was the minor funding partner with regard to the Pacific Highway but it is now an equal partner.

A number of projects have additional funds and that will accelerate completion of road works on the highway. In particular, the 22-kilometre section between Moorland and Herons Creek, which is between Taree and Port Macquarie, will be undertaken with the further commitment of \$160 million being matched by the State. In addition to that project, which is a specific project to be completed by 2009, a range of major safety projects will be undertaken at various locations on unduplicated sections—that is, sections of road that will not be duplicated for a few years that have known safety risks—such as between Nambucca and Urunga, near Halfway Creek, and between Tyndale and Maclean.

The RTA is continuing to maintain a close working relationship with the Federal Department of Transport and Regional Services. This is proving of great value in having a good understanding of what works are likely to be funded and what works are ready to be funded. We have a number of corridor studies under way with the Federal department on all the AusLink corridors. That will lead to continuing funding for New South Wales in the next five-year AusLink program.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: What effect will the rising cost of fuel have on the Roads portfolio?

Mr STUART-WATT: There are many factors causing the cost of delivering and maintaining road infrastructure to escalate at a rate much higher than inflation. However, the critical component is the cost of fuel and oil-based products generally. Road infrastructure projects require large earthmoving and other equipment to enable the works to be delivered efficiently and effectively. This equipment consumes large quantities of fuel and cost escalation has had a direct impact on contract prices received for works throughout the State, including on projects such as the Hume Highway Albury bypass and Pacific Highway duplications to which Mr Watters just referred.

Bitumen is a critical input to road building and maintenance. The majority of our rural highway network relies on bitumen to provide an all-weather road surface and to protect the road pavement underneath from moisture. In urban areas, bitumen is the glue that binds our asphalt pavements together. The cost of producing bitumen, which is an oil-based product, increased by more than 20 per cent during 2005, generally in line with oil price movements.

As the Minister mentioned earlier, the RTA manages and maintains nearly 20,000 kilometres of roads, including the AusLink network, over 4,700 bridges, over 3,500 sets of traffic signals, and the nine vehicle ferries that were mentioned. As you can imagine, this effort requires a fleet of vehicles and equipment belonging to the RTA and its contractors that consume millions of litres of fuel each and every year. The fuel price increases are having a dramatic effect on the cost of maintaining our assets and keeping the road network in a condition that our community expects. Unfortunately this has not been recognised in the decision-making process that is reducing funding for maintenance of the AusLink network that Mr Watters has just outlined.

In addition to maintaining the road network, the RTA spends considerable effort in ensuring the roads are operational, and that incidents, breakdowns and crashes are dealt with quickly to ensure traffic keeps moving. The RTA operates traffic emergency patrols on the broader Sydney network with 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week coverage. We also respond to incidents and accidents on the strategic rural highway network throughout the State, and manage traffic in the alpine regions during the winter period.

As you can imagine, the crews involved travel many millions of kilometres each year, and increasing fuel prices have put pressure on the RTA's budgets as we continue to ensure that this important community service is maintained and continues to be delivered. Overall, the rising cost of fuel is resulting in fewer dollars going into developing and maintaining our road network. These fuel and bitumen prices are increasing ahead of the rate of inflation, and therefore ahead of the RTA's revenues, and far ahead of the maintenance investment in the AusLink network. Overall, it is not a good-news story for New South Wales.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Minister, could I ask about the Government's policy in relation to the important issue of road safety around schools?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: As you would be aware, the Government has taken a very strong position on school safety, for obvious reasons. School road safety is very important. There have been several incidents earlier in the year, most notably the terrible accident involving Sophie Delezio, which highlight the need to look at improving safety in and around schools zones. That is why on 21 May this year I announced the school road safety package. The package builds on the Government's strong record of safety initiatives on school road safety, including the introduction of 40-kilometre school zones in 2002-03. The key component of this package is the introduction of an electronic school safety alert system, which will be developed and rolled out across New South Wales to increase motorists' awareness of the 40-kilometre-an-hour school zones. I want a reliable and effective system in place, and the RTA is currently progressing an expressions of interest process. I have asked for the first 100 signs to be fast-tracked on a priority basis.

Another major element of our school road safety package is the introduction of 50 fixed and mobile speed cameras to enforce the speed limits in school zones. I am quite confident that the community does not tolerate motorists who disregard the safety of children and choose to speed around schools. That is why I made a decision to increase penalties for driving and parking offences in school zones. This was well supported by school communities and parent groups. Another component of the school road safety package is the drop-off and pick-up-and-go system. In some areas the issue concerning schools is that of vehicles exceeding the speed limit, and in other areas it is congestion created by parents picking up or dropping off children. This creates a hazardous situation for schoolchildren who need to cross the road or move between parked cars.

That is why we have developed a drop-off and pick-up-and-go system. The system allows parents and volunteers in the local school community to become more involved in student safety around participating schools. Schools wishing to participate in the scheme will be provided with an information kit, appropriate signage, and advice on how to get the system up and running. Another component of the package in relation to schools and safety is the school road safety roundtable meeting held on 21 June this year. The roundtable meeting provided a forum for constructive and informed debate on school road safety. It endorsed the Government's package and recommended an ongoing working group to consider various additional issues raised at the meeting.

It also supported a call for reversing technology in new vehicles to be moved forward at a national level with the Australian Transport Council. Such technology, fitted to all vehicles, would contribute to reducing driveway and reversing crashes, where young children are often so vulnerable. I was able to place this matter formally on the national agenda at the last meeting of the State, Territory and Federal Ministers. It is important to emphasise that the reversing technology does not replace the importance of vigilance concerning children around vehicles; it is merely an additional piece of technology that can assist people to be aware of children being behind vehicles. Nothing replaces proper adult supervision.

Another issue I have raised with my Federal counterparts is the mandating of child restraints in cars with children up to four years of age. The current legislation provides for the compulsory restraint of children only up to the age of 12 months. As the father of three children I have found that quite amazing and it is certainly an issue I have taken a strong interest in. Anyone who has had three children in the back of their car would understand why. Toddlers are amongst our most vulnerable vehicle passengers, and the danger of serious injury to them in the event of a crash is significant. This is a comprehensive set of initiatives that underlines the Government's commitment to protecting schoolchildren and other young road users. We can always do more, and I am always open to new ideas. This package represents a comprehensive plan to improve the safety of our children.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Minister, how many times has the M5 East Tunnel been forced to close in the last year due to carbon dioxide levels exceeding World Health Organisation standards?

Mr WIELINGA: The World Health Organisation standards you are talking about are an exposure standard. No motorists have been exposed to the standard that we are required to meet in the tunnel. When there are incidents in the tunnel it is possible that the quality standards could be exceeded, but we do not allow that to happen. We use a combination of traffic management and portal

emissions in the event of an incident, to make sure that we manage that situation. It is a very sophisticated ventilation system in the M5 East Tunnel. Announcements have already been made about the package of works we intend to undertake to improve that further.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Is the RTA pollution hotline still in operation?

Mr WIELINGA: I need to confirm that. I will take the question on notice.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Minister, NSW Health stated in May 2006 that it had not been formally approached in relation to any modifications to the conditions of approval to allow for regular portal emissions in the M5 East Tunnel, and recommended that a thorough health risk assessment be conducted first. Will this occur?

Mr WIELINGA: We are currently preparing a submission for the Minister for Planning in relation to the M5 East air quality management package. We will carry out all studies that are required of the Planning Act, and will ensure that there is appropriate consultation associated with this.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Minister, what is the Government's position on the F6?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: The Metropolitan Strategy states the Government will investigate the future use of the F6 corridor preservation. This remains the Government's position.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Minister, is the RTA responsible for managing litter on the side of State roads and highways, such as the Pacific Highway and the F3?

Mr WATTERS: I am able to answer that. I believe the answer is yes, and no. The freeways are entirely the RTA's responsibility, if it is a declared freeway. If it is a State highway, there is a shared responsibility with the local council. I am not sure how many metres away from the centre line it is, but there is a metre distance within which the RTA manages, and beyond that it is a council responsibility.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: By way of an answer to our question on notice, could you inform the Committee what the exact arrangements are?

Mr WATTERS: Yes.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: In relation to the RTA's area of responsibility for managing litter, how many contracts have been awarded this year to do that, how many contracts were awarded last year, and have there been any cuts to these programs?

Mr WIELINGA: We will need to take that on notice and give you a comprehensive answer.

CHAIR: Minister, can you advise the Committee how much money the Government has expended to date on legal bills and other professional advice in relation to the Cross City Tunnel?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I will have to take that question in relation to legal fees on notice.

CHAIR: If you could give us a breakdown of the professional bodies, companies, and so on, that have provided each piece of advice, that would be appreciated. How much compensation will the Government be forced to pay to the operators of the Cross City Tunnel?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: The Cross City Tunnel has been a long and chequered project in some respects. We underwent a substantial level of negotiations to try to resolve issues concerning the tunnel. At the end of that period, it was clear that the operators were seeking between \$96 million and \$144 million for some road changes, which we believe is not a fair demand. We have now committed to doing 13 road change reversals, which we are rolling out as we speak. I believe the first was the reopening of Bourke Street, and then Queens Square. A number of others have been continuing. We have advised the Cross City Tunnel of our intentions for those road changes. The

contract has detailed an extensive mediation process and arbitration processes to deal with variations to the contract or potential disputes. We are working through those processes.

CHAIR: Is there an estimate of the compensation that may be payable?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: At the moment we are working through the contract issues with the Cross City Tunnel, and it is an ongoing negotiation.

CHAIR: So there is no current estimate?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I do not think there is any value in speculating, particularly when you are involved in ongoing negotiations with the operators.

CHAIR: Minister, you have said you were involved in negotiations with the Cross City Motorways before the Government decided to take unilateral action and reverse the road changes. Can you confirm for the Committee that you personally attended negotiations about the reversals of those roads?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I certainly had a meeting with the CEO of the Cross City Tunnel, Mr Graham Mulligan, in relation to the Cross City Tunnel, and he clearly spelt out what the Cross City Tunnel believed their demands would be. It was clear to me from that meeting that there was no further possibility of negotiating out a reasonable resolution and the Government then made a decision to reverse 13 of the road changes.

CHAIR: To the best of your knowledge, has the Premier personally ever met with the Cross City Motorways consortium?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I do not believe so, but you would have to ask the Premier that for an accurate response.

CHAIR: Minister, did the RTA advise the Government to reopen the roads?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I think it is important to just be a little bit more specific. Certainly, there have been discussions with the RTA as to what were the appropriate road reversals to ensure that we can provide a direct access through the city via Druitt Street or direct access to the harbour crossing via Palmer Street. We certainly took the recommendations of the RTA to look at those issues to improve traffic flows in and around the CBD. I think we need to be very clear what we are talking about. We have taken a very sensible approach to do what we believe is appropriate to improve traffic flows in and around the CBD to maximise benefits to the community.

I think we can contrast that quite severely with the approach taken by the member for Vaucluse, whose plan was to rip up the contract and, in his words, reverse 70 roads. The problem with the Opposition's position on that is that it would, of course, include, if you have a close look at them, the entrance and exits to the Cross City Tunnel, access to Sir John Young Crescent and a number of critical changes made to improve traffic flows. It is a demonstration of rhetoric from the Opposition, which bears no resemblance to the reality.

I point out, on the issue of road changes, only this week the member for Vaucluse stated that it is his intention to rip up the William Street changes if he were to stumble into government. I just think that is a demonstration of very reckless—and to use the term used, dare I say, in the Parliament only yesterday by the honourable Leader of the Opposition in the Upper House—economic idiot strategy, because we have taken a very reasoned and sensible approach, both in negotiations and working through dispute mechanisms within the contract. We believe it is important to find a balance to ensure that the Cross City Tunnel is a successful project—it is taking over 30,000 vehicles a day off surface roads, and I think that is very important to realise; 30,000 vehicles a day are going under the city as opposed to through it—and, at the same time, that it provides some benefits to motorists around the CBD, which clearly was an issue.

I also note that the recommendations of the parliamentary inquiry did speak about allowing direct access through the city and direct access to the harbour crossings. I think they were, again,

sensible suggestions, which we have taken on board. I must say I am very pleased with the way the RTA has worked through these issues. There has been a lot of examination of the Cross City Tunnel by parliamentary inquiries, the Auditor-General and the Richmond report, and I think the 13 road changes that we have activated and are proceeding with are the right way to go to allow access through the city, allow access to the harbour crossing, and to improve traffic flows in and around the CBD.

CHAIR: Earlier in today's hearing Mr Skinner spoke of a revaluation of roads and bridges that has been done during the year. Can you advise the Committee of the latest assessment of the value of timber bridges?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I think we will take that on notice.

Mr WIELINGA: It is important to appreciate that timber bridges are maintained both by the RTA and a large number by council. The actual valuation of all timber bridges in the State will not be done by the RTA in those circumstances. It would be only those that we are responsible for, and it is a fairly small proportion of our total infrastructure valuation.

CHAIR: Why is there no funding for the Timber Bridge Program in the budget under review today?

Mr WIELINGA: It is always a difficult task to prioritise our road maintenance work and there are many, many competing needs. There has been an extensive timber bridge replacement program in past years. We always look at work on a priority basis and we continually monitor what is going on with the network and work in co-operatively with local councils. If that becomes an important priority in the near future or medium future, or whatever, of course we will look at these things on a priority basis.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: If I could just add to that. More than \$141 million has been given to councils across New South Wales under the repair program in the Block Grants Scheme for their regional roads. In addition, the State Government will spend more than \$35 million on timber bridges under the State Government's bridge maintenance program; that includes \$2.7 million to replace two bridges over Mary Magill Creek on Cobb Highway, north of Hay; \$2 million on the heritage timber bridge over the Hunter River at Morpeth—I think I went and inspected that bridge at Morpeth. It is quite an interesting piece of engineering when you have a look at it. They actually show you the rivets that they use.

CHAIR: We have heard about the rivets. It was riveting to hear about the rivets earlier.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: I have not heard about the rivets. I would love to hear about the rivets.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I am still in the middle of my answer. What I was going to say is that it is actually a compliment to the tradesmen of that area. But I will continue. \$500,000 to strengthen the Gunnedo Bridge over the Yass River; \$85,000 to finish replacing the Yamble Bridge on the Gulgong to Wellington road; and \$77,000 for the maintenance of Tabulam Bridge over the Clarence River on the Bruxner Highway. This Government's commitment to regional New South Wales is evident, with a record of more than \$1.84 billion to be spent on New South Wales roads in rural and regional areas in 2006-07; that is 65 per cent of the RTA's capital works expenditure from its budget committed to rural and regional roads.

This year's total roads budget of \$3.3 billion is the twelfth consecutive record roads budget delivered by the New South Wales Government. The majority of those funds are being spent on roads outside Sydney. Also, 140 timber bridges were replaced or upgraded by the RTA at a cost of \$163 million between 1998 and 2004. These were primarily on State roads and were funded under the Country Timber Bridge Program. The State Government continues to provide councils with financial assistance to maintain their regional roads, including their timber bridges, under two main programs: the block grants provided to each council under a funding formula, which takes into account the length of timber bridges which fall under their responsibility, and the repair program funded by the

State Government on a dollar for dollar basis, which provides funding to councils on a case-by-case basis.

I think it is worth noting that the AusLink agreement has had an impact on State programs of more than \$298 million over the next four years, and that has forced the New South Wales Government to make up the shortfall by delaying or reducing funding to other projects, such as, in the future, the Road Timber Bridge Program, which included the upgrading of 292 council-managed timber bridges on regional roads across the State.

CHAIR: Given that your predecessor, Mr Scully, promised to have a new timber bridge at Nundle, and that community is in the current situation where the school bus from that community across to Tamworth cannot even get across the bridge, why have you not listed Nundle Bridge as a priority under your ministerial responsibility?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I am advised that Tamworth council receives \$1.75 million to maintain roads through the repair program. The State Government is already assisting councils to the maximum extent possible under a number of programs. Councils can also seek funding available from the RTA through the Roads to Recovery Program.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: In 2004, a \$30 million package for safety improvements to the Princes Highway was announced following the 2004 RTA Princes Highway audit. How much of that \$30 million has been spent to date? What is proposed to be spent in this financial year? Where was it spent in previous financial years and how much on each project? Where is it planned to be spent this year and how much on each project?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: That is a very specific request. I might make some general remarks and then refer some of the more specific aspects on notice.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: I think if you could just refer to the specific answers and if you cannot do that, take it on notice and we will move on.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: No, I think there are some points I would like to make for the benefit of the whole Committee. I am advised that the Federal Government's failure to include the Princes Highway south of Wollongong in the new national funding agreement, AusLink, is a massive snub to the people of the Illawarra, Shoalhaven, and South Coast. Despite repeated requests, the Federal Government did not include the Princes Highway south of Wollongong as part of the national network under the AusLink agreement. I am very disappointed about that.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: You did not even ask them to, but anyway, go on.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Did you ask them to? Being a resident, you should have asked them.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: We are not the Government.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: But you are a member of the Liberal Party.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: He is too busy trying to save himself and the Liberal Party from extremists.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: I do not have to save myself at all, as you well know. I have been re-endorsed.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: Sorry? You have just been endorsed?

The Hon. DON HARWIN: That is not what I said.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: You said you have been re-endorsed.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: What about your colleagues? How are they going?

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Keep going, Eric. Stick to the text.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: On the other hand, the New South Wales Government considers the Princes Highway a priority and I think there are some important points to make, having spent more than \$470 million since 1994-1995. I would like to compare that to the \$36 million by the Federal Government over the same period—\$470 million from the New South Wales Government, \$36 million from the Federal Government. That means for every \$1 the Federal Government spent on the Princes Highway, the New South Wales Government spends over \$13.

In the next four years the New South Wales Government will continue to upgrade the highway, including completing the three-year \$30 million road safety improvement program announced in 2004. It will also complete the 12-year \$380 million upgrade program announced in 1998-99. New South Wales funding for the Princes Highway has increased 32 per cent to \$49.7 million in this current financial year. That is more in one year than the Federal Government has spent in a decade.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: How much of that is south of Yallah?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: Major funding includes \$15 million to extend the Northern Distributor from Bellambi on the Princes Highway to Bulli, providing better access to Wollongong's northern suburbs and improved travel times on the Princes Highway; \$5 million to start construction of the ramps at Kiama to provide better access between Kiama and the Princes Highway and \$12.5 million for safety works along the Princes Highway.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Are you embarrassed about your safety improvement program of \$30 million? Is that why you are not answering the specific question? Why are you avoiding the question on the safety package?

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: He did.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: He has not addressed it once actually.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: He did, he said that it would be finished. He said they would be spending \$30 million. Why do not you listen to the answer?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I just want to clarify: are you referring to the Federal program?

The Hon. DON HARWIN: No, I am referring to the program that was announced in 2004 by the State Government following your 2004 safety audit.

Mr BUSHBY: The question you asked was a very explicit one with a lot of detail and with several steps to actually answer it. I would like to take that on notice. But I think the Minister did mention that the \$30 million program was progressing this year. In fact, I think the number was \$12.5 million.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: So Mr Bushby and Minister, I take it that you are undertaking to answer the specifics of the question I actually asked on notice?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: Yes.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Has the Government made a decision to implement a container levy for trucks? If so, at what level is the levy set and what exemptions will apply?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: That falls outside of my portfolio.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: The imposition of a container levy would not fall inside your portfolio. Can you advise the Committee as to the progress that has been made towards the Government's target of moving 40 per cent of container freight off trucks and moving it by rail?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I believe that question would really be more accurately directed to the Minister for Ports or the Minister for Transport. I used to be the Minister for Ports.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: What plans does the RTA have to manage the increased truck traffic that will result from the expansion of Port Botany?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: Of course, the planned expansion of Port Botany is a huge project and I am not sure what the target date is for that. I think it is to be completed by 2010, from memory. Obviously, the RTA is carefully monitoring the proposed plans for the expansion of Port Botany and we will take appropriate action in relation to the roads there.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: You say the expansion will be completed by 2010. We are now midway through 2006. Surely there must be plans in place at the moment to handle that anticipated increase in truck traffic. Can you provide the details of those plans?

Mr WIELINGA: Clearly the planning strategies are still being finalised for the expansion of the port. There was an inquiry by Laurie Brereton into the possibility of expanding the rail line. That is currently being considered by government. The RTA will work closely with the other government agencies in responding to that strategy when it is finalised. That detailed planning will occur but it is step at a time sort of stuff.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: But it is the Government's objective to have 40 per cent moved by rail, but that leaves 60 per cent of containers to be moved by truck. Knowing that figure—and it is an objective that the Government has announced—surely there must be plans in place or at least reaching finality as to how this massive increase is to be handled, given that the Minister for Planning has just approved the construction of a fifth dock at Port Botany?

Mr WIELINGA: I understand what you are saying. The point I was simply trying to make is that a recommendation has been made to government. That is being examined by government at the moment and, like all plans, you start with a target. Then you look at how it could be implemented and what sort of infrastructure is needed to respond to it. It is early days with that particular initiative and, as I said, when the RTA is asked to play its role and work on the levels that we are responsible for, we will fit in with that planning strategy.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Minister, I think you responded earlier, in answer to a question from Mr Harwin, that planning is continuing for the F6 Motorway. There has been an allocation of funds for that project?

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: No.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: What did you say?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: My answer was, just off the top of my head, that the metropolitan strategy states that the Government will investigate the future use of the F6 corridor reservation. This remains the Government's position.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Given the partial lifting of the road widening zone along the Johnsons Creek corridor, could you explain why that road widening zone was retained at the southern end of the corridor?

Mr WATTERS: I can answer that. The Johnsons Creek corridor was a remnant of an orbital road. The northern part through Leichhardt Council area was abandoned 10 years ago roughly. The remaining southern part through Marrickville municipality had not been removed from Marrickville's planning scheme. As the Committee may be aware, there has been a study of possible public transport usage of the F6 corridor. The study was commissioned by the Department of Infrastructure, Natural Resources and Planning and the southern most end of that Johnsons Creek corridor potentially could be used as access to the railway line and railway station so the opportunity to use the F6 corridor for public transport or road in the future and access to connect into the public transport network warranted retention of the southern most part of that corridor.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: I have some questions about the proposal to upgrade the Great Western Highway to four lanes in parts of Lawson. Community groups in that area are concerned that expansion of the Great Western Highway will lead to the demolition of a majority of a proposed heritage conservation area—a conservation area that is included in the Blue Mountains City Council local environment plan 2005. Has the RTA assessed the implications or taken on board the community opposition to the demolition of the heritage precinct at Lawson?

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Proposed heritage precinct, you said first.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: The proposed heritage precinct at Lawson.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: There is a fairly important difference.

Mr WATTERS: The history of the highway widening at Lawson is that a few years ago the Blue Mountains City Council mounted an exhibition of options for the Lawson centre, including the highway widening and potential highway relocation. There was a lot of opposition to the highway relocation. The council adopted a scheme for Lawson that widened the highway and redeveloped the existing shopping centre. The RTA has developed a widening proposal for the highway which is consistent with council's adopted master plan for Lawson. We have had many meetings with council and local representatives. The council view is that demolition of the shops is the preferred way forward. Council is managing the process of redeveloping the shops to its master plan which it has exhibited.

We have had the road plan on exhibition. We have undertaken a review of environmental factors, which has considered the alleged heritage value of the shops which are not State listed. That has been fully assessed. I am not a heritage expert so I will not pass comment on their heritage value. No doubt there are some old shops in Lawson. The review of environmental factors has been determined, and it has been announced that we are proceeding with the scheme, which requires acquisition and demolition of the shops. The shops are in the ownership primarily of three owners. They are all prepared to redevelop their shops as part of council's master plan, and we are proceeding with that process. We are aware that there is an active small group of residents who oppose the road widening in Lawson generally and oppose the specific demolition of the shops.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: It is my understanding that the review of environmental factors failed to consider in any detail the impacts of the demolition on the proposed heritage precinct. Will there be any re-examination of the review of environmental factors to take into account the potential loss of heritage items?

Mr WATTERS: My understanding is that that assertion is untrue.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Are you aware of alternative options that have been advanced by the community which would avoid the demolition of the historic precinct and would also potentially not only save items of heritage interest but also possibly save money that would otherwise be spent on the upgrade?

Mr WATTERS: We have had an option presented to us by this particular residents group. We have fully assessed it, and from a road safety point of view it is not acceptable. It is also not necessarily any cheaper. It requires more extensive acquisition of railway land and more extensive relocation of rail infrastructure. But that is not the reason we do not favour it. The reason we do not favour it is primarily to do with road safety.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Would the Minister care to comment on comments made by his predecessor—they are in the *Hansard* of 23 June 1998—when the National Party proposed to put a road through the middle of Blackheath which would have led to the destruction of Blackheath, Medlow Bath and Lawson. The then Minister said:

Warming to its work, it would smash right through the middle of Blackheath. What a great benefit for tourism! A lovely, traditional mountain village...

This Godzilla of a road would lurch onwards, wiping out part of the rhododendron garden ...

Obviously, the then Minister for Roads had a significant interest in the preservation of the Blue Mountains as a tourist precinct and also because of its heritage value. Why has that interest dissipated?

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Have you seen the difference between the Blackheath and Lawson shops? You would not ask the question if you had.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I believe that commenting on remarks made many years ago falls outside the terms of reference of this Committee.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: I am trying to establish the policy with regard to the preservation of areas that could be of heritage significance.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: Ms Sylvia Hale has some form on looking at issues through coloured glasses—not to suggest that she is not being honest in her questions—but I have learnt in my short time in this place that it is always good to check things stated by Sylvia Hale for accuracy. I note that she has already had to correct herself about whether it is a real heritage precinct or a proposed heritage precinct. I note it then became a potentially historically significant precinct. I am also conscious that earlier we had child care centres disappearing off Styles Road in Leichhardt.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: I have not asserted that they disappeared at all.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: In all reasonableness, I can be as honest and accurate as possible with questions, but I am not about to engage in debate about comments made by a previous roads Minister in relation to Blackheath. I understand the question was written in relation to Lawson. I do not accept their case that the community has great concern over those shops; I understand that part of the community has concern over those shops. There are major impacts on the rail infrastructure if you move the highway in the other direction.

I understand that the council is quite supportive of the RTA strategy. We are talking about a major upgrade to the Great Western Highway on a road safety basis to improve road safety both for the people of Lawson and for motorists using the Great Western Highway. We have committed more than \$360 million towards the Great Western Highway upgrade and \$100 million of funding has come from the Australian Government towards upgrading the Great Western Highway. I think I will leave my answer at that.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: There was an announcement today that four-wheel drive vehicles do not have an increased accident rate and thus there will not be any increase in road taxes or registration. When smaller cars are involved in accidents with four-wheel drive vehicles do the occupants of those cars have worse outcomes?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: That announcement this morning that the honourable member is referring to was made by the Hon John Della Bosca in his capacity as Minister for Commerce. It is probably more appropriate that that question be referred to him.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do you have any data on the fate of people involved in accidents with four-wheel drive vehicles? Does the RTA keep those statistics?

Mr BUSHBY: We have statistics relating to road crashes and I cannot tell you at this stage whether we have done the analysis to pull the exact question that you are asking, whether that has been pulled out of the statistics. We have obviously seen the reporting of the release this morning. There are some interesting issues related to this release, but obviously we have not had time to study the road safety implications of the report as it has been put in the newspapers this morning.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Will you give us statistics on the fate of occupants of smaller vehicles involved in these?

Mr BUSHBY: I will certainly undertake to see if there is research in relation to that.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: If there is no research, will you do so?

Mr BUSHBY: We will have to look to see.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: We might look at other agencies to see whether that research is done.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The thought of being hit by a larger vehicle is a major disincentive to people buying smaller vehicles, which they might otherwise do given the increasing cost of fuel. Along that line, does the RTA try to get movement towards smaller vehicles in order to make road capacity better—in other words, to manage the congestion by going to smaller vehicles?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I am sorry, in what sense?

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do you try to get commuters in larger vehicles to go to smaller vehicles and do you get commuters to go from smaller vehicles to bicycles or motorcycles?

Mr WIELINGA: There is no definite pricing strategy to do that. We do not interfere with the market out there on the sale of motor vehicles. Our major focus is the standards of motor vehicles and their safety. We are actively involved in national committees that look at these issues. We make a significant contribution to that. The RTA is conscious of the importance of these vehicles on roads. We now have 23 petrol-electric vehicles and 21 vehicles with liquefied petroleum gas. We have more than 200 motor vehicles that are now four cylinders and which used to be larger vehicles. We are adjusting our fleet for multiuse. We are using more commercial vehicles, like utilities, and we are reducing the size of our fleet.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: But you do not do that at a road planning level? At a broader level it is left to the Department of Transport, is that the bottom line?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: With respect, how do you suggest we force people into smaller vehicles? That is not the role of the RTA. This is not a Communist state. If you want to look at the broader sense of encouraging people to public transport, the implementation of a better train system and improved bus lane priorities is a demonstration. We spent a lot of money on cycleways to encourage people to use bicycles as an alternative form of transport. We have T-2 and T-3 lines to encourage more occupancy of vehicles, to take more vehicles off the road as well.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: One might think you could do more for bicycles, Minister, but I will not go to that on this point. Are you responsible for footpaths beside your roads?

Mr WIELINGA: It is the yes and no answer that Brian gave before. It depends on the type of road. Generally, our responsibilities on RTA arterial roads go to the curb and not the footpath, but if you had a footpath on a freeway corridor, for example, we would be responsible for that. You give us a particular area you are concerned about and we will find out for you whether we are—

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: So you are responsible for the footpaths beside freeways, if any?

Mr WIELINGA: I would imagine so because we are responsible for the whole corridor. If they are inside the road corridor, we would be responsible.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: Say, for instance, the Spit Bridge, for which we have announced an \$11 million commencement of tender. It includes a new bicycle-pedestrian shared line. Anyone who has crossed the Spit Bridge, which I did the other day, they will know it has quite narrow footpaths and traffic moves quite quickly. So, there we are implementing a bicycle and pedestrian way, which will provide safety for both bicycles and pedestrians.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: So they are not sharing the route? The bicycles and pedestrians are not sharing the same area?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: Yes, they are but it will be a wider line. What is there now is quite narrow. It will substantially improve road safety and remove a major bottleneck from that network.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: With black spots, I understand if there are a certain number of deaths per year you fix the black spot, is that correct?

Mr BUSHBY: The black spot program has prioritisation methodology, which looks at previous history relating to crashes of all types, whether they are fatal crashes or just property damage crashes. That is one of the components that goes into prioritisation to generate the benefit of being able to correct the location so that crashes of a particular type will no longer occur.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: How many dollars do you spend per human life that you can save? Are you going to say the formula is more complicated than that?

Mr BUSHBY: I was going to suggest there is an evaluation of projects, which looks at benefits in a general sense, and improvement in crash outcomes is one part of that.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Minister, can you nominate a date for the public release of the public transport options for the F6 corridor?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I am advised that in 2003 the former Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources commissioned a report on the feasibility of public transport in the F6 corridor. That report was completed in October 2004. It is not secret. The report is publicly available from the Department of Planning and a copy was sent to the honourable member for Cronulla in late 2005. The report is a feasibility study not a policy document, and suggests options for heavy rail, light rail and bus along part of the corridor.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: I would like to ask one of the RTA members whether they could give the Committee some information on their heavy vehicle compliance and enforcement?

Mr BUSHBY: I think it is probably appropriate that I address that question. With heavy vehicle compliance there are probably two areas I need to address. The first of those relates to the compliance and enforcement legislation introduced last year, and the second is about our enforcement activities generally. I might start by looking at the legislation.

Since September 2005, when the Government introduced the new chain of responsibility laws, all parties in the transport supply chain are responsible for overloading. Since that time a number of transport companies have been hit with heavy fines, up to \$20,000. That is a significant fine. The new laws came into force in September last year and introduced a chain of responsibility concept that makes parties, other than just drivers and transport operators, responsible for behaviour on the road. The laws specifically target companies along the whole supply chain that encourage truck drivers to overload their vehicles on the road.

Previously, compliance with laws in relation to matters of mass, dimension and load restraint was the sole responsibility of drivers and operators. The new laws require not only drivers and operators but other participants to consider their role in upholding the transport law. Now all parties in the supply chain who bring their goods to market—that is the consignor, the packer, the loader, the receiver, the driver and the operator—must all take steps to prevent breaches of the road transport mass, dimension and load restraint laws. Everyone responsible for activities that affect compliance with the law can be held legally accountable for their actions, their inactions and the demands they put on the process.

To reflect this new level of accountability, the new laws come equipped with new penalties for when parties cross the line and are found guilty. The road freight industry moves billions of dollars of goods around New South Wales every year. Many companies in that industry legitimately make millions of dollars out of that industry. Overloading vehicles gives some operators an unfair

competitive advantage over companies that act responsibly and legally. Even more significant than this commercial advantage is the fact that the behaviour has a real and adverse impact on road safety and road infrastructure. While the moral blame for this may lie anywhere along the supply chain, the legal blame rested only with the drivers.

The new laws were designed so that responsibility would legally rest with all involved. In particular, it allows for corporations to be identified. I am pleased to advise the Committee that the new laws, which provide for stiffer penalties, are receiving the support of the judiciary. The RTA has made a number of significant prosecutions that have resulted in companies being convicted of major overloading breaches and issued with heavy fines. In a number of cases trucks were caught travelling with in excess of 30 per cent over their legal weight, or three to seven tonnes overweight. Load limits are imposed for good reason. Overloading of this magnitude is dangerous for drivers and other road users; it damages our roads and can prematurely wear out parts of the network.

In May this year two companies were issued with significant fines of approximately \$20,000. The fines related to overloading in southern Sydney. The Government is providing a safe industry. Through the new legislation the RTA is able to act to address some of the overloading offences, making the roads safer for everyone. We are minimising the impact of road transport on our roads and saving the community millions of dollars in the process. Those who have been caught pay the price.

I have referred to compliance and enforcement generally. I would like to add that we have elaborate compliance and enforcement arrangements within New South Wales. The Minister mentioned previously that it is a complex arrangement. I would like to highlight a couple of areas. We have an integrated arrangement. Our seven heavy vehicle checking stations which operate largely across the road network also protect most of the access roads into and out of Sydney. Our 300 heavy vehicle inspectors inspect vehicles, monitor the use of the road network and provide assurance that the users of the network are doing the right thing. They operate 42 cars equipped with computer technology. The computers provide inspectors with the information they need about the heavy vehicles they have intercepted, such as registration and licence details. They can look up information about a heavy vehicle on the side of the road.

Through the Safe-T-Cam network, which has 24 sites across New South Wales, the inspectors are able to access information based on Safe-T-Cam sightings to check driver logbook entries. All the various parts of the enforcement network come together in an integrated way to allow RTA management of heavy vehicles. I have already referred to the changed responsibility legislation. The heavy vehicle checking stations have recently been updated to include screening technology so that we can target vehicles that are believed to be associated with risk. That technology draws on all the information we have about particular heavy vehicles. In summary, we have a comprehensive enforcement network and the complementary legislation provides for action to be taken against serious breaches of road transport law.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Mr Wielinga, I asked you earlier to enlarge on your remarks about refocusing the priorities of the RTA. I did not ask you about other issues in your opening statement. Would you speak to those other important issues?

Mr WIELINGA: I was going to talk about some of the major projects that the RTA has been delivering. I want to give recognition particularly to our country project managers and their achievements in projects throughout the year. When we look at some of the achievements throughout 2005 and 2006, the project manager has construction well advanced on the \$114 million 11 kilometres project on section one of the Karuah to Bulahdelah project. Work began in November 2004 to provide dual carriageways on the new highway alignment.

This financial year we will have made good progress on all of these major projects. Work has continued on the Bundacree Creek to Possum Brush project, a 20 kilometres \$115 million project 22 kilometres south of Taree. The work, which commenced in September 2004, includes new bridges over Willamba River and Pipe Clay Creek and a major interchange at Nabiac, which had to be done in close co-operation with highway traffic and the local community. I am particularly proud of the project manager, who worked effectively with the people in the area.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: I drove through there twice on Sunday. I was amazed to see how it is coming along.

Mr WIELINGA: The project involves two pedestrian underpasses beneath the highway and a pedestrian cycleway linking Clarkson Street south with the Willamba River Bridge. The Taree to Coopernook project presented particular engineering challenges because of the soft soil in the area. The project manager worked well in overcoming engineering difficulties. The \$59 million Taree to Coopernook upgrade, which was opened to traffic in August 2005, provides 7.5 kilometres of four-lane dual carriageway. Traffic was moved onto the new highway over four stages, beginning in May 2005. Construction of the road pavement began in March 2004 and work on the new bridges over Ghinni Ghinni Creek started soon afterwards. The engineer faced particular challenges to make sure the embankments were stable. He monitored the settlement of the embankments and made good engineering judgments about when the final infrastructure could be completed.

There were similar challenges on the Coopernook bypass. The Lakes Way interchange has been completed. The Minister earlier referred to the work on the Windsor Road upgrade. As we have continued work on those projects we have improved the co-ordination of construction activity. As the latest work is unfolding, we can see high standard urban design and landscaping being delivered in parallel with civil engineering works. I particularly thank the project managers for their work on delivering that infrastructure. I also refer to the Bangor bypass, Hoxton Park road upgrade and Cowpasture Road upgrade. The north-west T-way works are under way, as can be seen on the Windsor Road project. Other projects include the Sunnyholt Road widening, the Parramatta transport interchange, the Camden Valley Way upgrade, the Narellan Road upgrade and the Patrick Street bus tunnel at Blacktown.

The RTA has hundreds of projects under way at any one time. To give some statistics on the projects, we hold about 400 public meetings a year. That is more than one meeting a night. Our people at the coalface, project managers and community consultation officers, work together effectively to try to get the best outcomes. They work in a difficult environment because we are presented with a range of community views on our projects. They identify issues and are keen to receive constructive criticism. We use commonsense suggestions from the community in delivering our projects. I am certainly proud of the RTA's project managers and engineers in the delivery of our projects. They are entitled to be proud of what they do.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Would you provide the Committee with information about what you are doing to meet growth in the metropolitan area?

Mr WATTERS: I can provide that advice. The north-west and southwest areas of Sydney are the fastest growing regions in the State. The Government has focused on the growth centres. We are part of that whole-of-government approach. Those areas deserve attention and are receiving significant road infrastructure investment. Both areas are home to new suburbs as well as major industries. If members recently have been along Windsor Road and around the M7 corridor, they would agree with me about the rate of commercial development. The area has changed every time I go out there. I recommend that everybody goes to see the rate of economic and residential development that is occurring in the region. The three major projects in the north-west that we are managing are the \$524-million North West Bus T-way, the \$420-million Windsor Road upgrade and the \$30-million Patrick Street tunnel and bus station in Blacktown.

The North West Transitway is part of the State's network of strategic bus corridors. The network is a Government initiative to provide western Sydney with road-based public transport that improves access to existing and developing urban areas. The T-way network is a bus-based, rapid transit system designed to link people with education, employment, health, recreation and essential services, as well as the CityRail network. The \$524-million north-west T-way provides 24 kilometres of new bus-only roadway linking Parramatta and Rouse Hill and Blacktown and Parklea. The two transitways intersect at Parklea. The Parramatta to Rouse Hill T-way also links to Westmead Hospital and one of the campuses of the University of Western Sydney. It includes 30 T-way bus stations along existing local roads and new bus-only roadways.

The North West Transitway construction started in June 2005 and, based on current projections, commuters will be using the Parramatta to Rouse Hill section early next year and the

Blacktown to Parklea section by late 2007. The people of the north-west will then experience the benefits of a bus-only transitway, which is already familiar to the people in the south-west, where the first rapid bus transitway—the Liverpool to Parramatta T-way—has been operating since 2003. The Liverpool to Parramatta Bus Transitway has carried more than five million passengers since then and now carries two million a year.

Some 21 kilometres of the T-way route was on purpose-built bus-only roads, with the remaining 10 kilometres comprising bus or bus-only lanes on existing roads. The T-way offers fast, reliable public transport to a large number of people, not only those commuting to Liverpool and Parramatta but also those commuting to the Wetherill Park industrial area, which previously had poor public transport access. People had to rely on a combination of train services and infrequent local buses. In some cases, journeys that once took one and a half hours can now be accomplished in 15 to 20 minutes of comfortable T-way travel. I recommend that honourable members who have not experienced it should do so. It is a good service.

As the Minister said, the upgrade of Windsor Road is the largest urban arterial road program undertaken by any State Government. Work is proceeding at a rapid pace, with only two sections to be completed. Work began in 2001 and so far 18.8 kilometres of road have been upgraded to four lanes following the opening of the Kellyville and Baulkham Hills sections in July this year. Those sections were opened well ahead of the schedule. A successful alliance between the contractor and the RTA's project management team ensured early delivery of that work. By the end of this year, a further 8.4 kilometres is expected to be open to traffic, providing four lanes from Parramatta to McGraths Hill.

Windsor Road corridor is one of the oldest roads in Australia. It is an important part of Sydney's road network providing access across the Blue Mountains. The upgrade was designed to provide progressive benefits to road users. The project was broken into 14 sections, 11 of which have now been completed. The 3.2-kilometre upgrade between Boundary Road and Level Crossing Road at Vineyard is expected to be open to traffic in September and the 5.2-kilometre section between Mile End Road at Rouse Hill and Boundary Road at Box Hill is expected to be open to traffic in December, subject to weather conditions.

Construction of the Windsor flood evacuation route across the South Creek flood plain is expected to be completed in mid-2007. That is a rapidly moving and spectacular bridge construction. I recommend that honourable members take a look at it. This flood evacuation route project involves building a new 2.6-kilometre road between Day Street at Windsor and Railway Road South at Mulgrave, including a 1.6-kilometre bridge across the South Creek flood plain. That is part of the Windsor Road upgrade program and the Hawkesbury-Nepean flood evacuation strategy. The bridge is above a particular level if there is a major flood.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Minister, what involvement did you have—

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Had Mr Watters finished his answer?

Mr WATTERS: No, I had not finished, but it is at the Committee's discretion.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: What if I want to hear the end of the answer?

CHAIR: Mr Harwin.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Bad luck, Amanda.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Minister, what involvement did you have in the secondment process and the drawing up of a contractual arrangement for Mr Willoughby to leave the RTA to go to New South Wales Police? Did you have any discussions with Minister Scully about the secondment of Paul Willoughby?

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Point of order: Some questions were asked about this matter on Monday night by the Hon. Melinda Pavey, who later participated in a 17-minute broadcast

with Stan Zemanek. I suggest that much of what was said was certainly defamatory and probably in breach of a number of parliamentary rules. I ask that you counsel a considerable amount of caution in relation to this issue.

CHAIR: Thank you for your advice.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Thank you. I have just asked about the secondment process.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Given what was said in the committee examining the Premier's budget the other day and what was said later that night in relation to the man in question, I would imagine he would be taking some legal advice.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: I am sure he is.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: It was an absolutely disgraceful performance by The Nationals.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: I take all of that on board and thank the honourable member. The question is: What involvement did the Minister have in the secondment process and the drawing up of a contractual arrangement for Mr Willoughby to leave the RTA to go to New South Wales Police.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: That is an excellent question.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Did you have any discussions with Minister Scully about the secondment of Paul Willoughby to New South Wales Police?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I had no involvement in that.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: No involvement and no discussions?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: That is right.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Have you receive any written complaints about the behaviour of Paul Willoughby?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: No.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Did you or your office—

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Given what was said the other day and what has been said on radio—the outrageous, I suspect drunken—

CHAIR: Order! The honourable member knows perfectly well that she cannot—

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: —performance at 11.00 p.m. on Monday by a member of The Nationals, I suggest that this line of questioning is absolutely out of order and totally disgraceful.

CHAIR: Order! It is not out of order.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: I am merely asking questions about the Minister's role, and that is it.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: It was merely wonderful on Monday, too.

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Minister, did you or your office have any conversations with the then RTA CEO, Paul Forward, Les Wielinga or any other RTA personnel concerning the conduct of Mr Willoughby?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: No.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Are you aware of any level of disapproval at any time within the RTA of Mr Willoughby that led to his secondment to New South Wales Police?

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Point of order: The letter, so-called, that the Hon. Melinda Pavey quoted on Monday has been denied by the body that she alleged wrote it. As I said, I strongly advise caution. We are dealing with an allegation repeated under privilege by the member of The Nationals. The alleged writers of the letter have denied that they wrote it. We are dealing with the rights of an individual who is not a public servant and who has been defamed by the Hon. Melinda Pavey. The basis of her allegations has been denied by the people she claims wrote the letter. Madam Chair, I object violently to this line questioning and I ask you to put a stop to it.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: To the point of order: What may or may not have been said on Monday night should not interfere with what the Hon. Don Harwin is asking today, which surely should be taken on its merits. The fact that a line of questioning has some similarity to a previous line of questioning is irrelevant. Surely, the questions must be taken on their merits with regard to this Committee, and time should not be taken up on what may or may not have been said on Monday night.

CHAIR: Correct.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Point of order: My point of order relates to paragraph 4.11 of the Budget Estimates Guide 2006-07, which provides that objection may be taken to a question on procedural grounds if the question seeks adverse reflection on another person or the question is not relevant to the Committee's inquiry. I believe that this line of inquiry is directly in contravention of that provision in the guide. I foreshadow that if you do not give due consideration to that provision, there may be other procedural options available to the Committee to consider. There is absolutely no way you could say that the question being asked does not seek adverse reflection on another person. Witnesses, as well as Committee members, have the right to object to a question on that basis.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: To the point of order: The Minister's relationship with his staff is obviously quite an important issue, and questions about this are frequently asked in both committee hearings and the House.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: But the person is not a member of staff; he is a former public servant.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Yes, but the staff of the department are frequently—

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: The letter on which the allegations made by the Hon. Melinda Pavey were based has been denied by the people who allegedly wrote the letter. They say they never wrote the letter.

CHAIR: I will rule on the point of order. The Hon. Don Harwin did not refer to any letter; he simply asked a question about whether or not the Minister had been aware of any level of disapproval of Mr Willoughby within the RTA that led to his secondment to NSW Police. Minister, could you answer the question?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: No.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Did you give any advice to Mr Wielinga relating to restructuring out of existence Mr Willoughby's position?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: Staff members within the RTA are the responsibility of the chief executive officer.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Point of order: The hearing has now passed the four hours set aside for today's budget estimates hearing. I therefore ask you to draw the hearing to a conclusion.

Mr WIELINGA: It is important I make it clear that staff matters and the structure of the RTA are matters for me and I make those decisions.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Did you receive any advice from the Minister?

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Madam Chair, I have drawn your attention to the fact that the four hours set aside for today's hearing has expired. The Hon. Don Harwin has no right to ask any further questions.

CHAIR: Mr Wielinga, do you wish to add to your answer?

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Madam Chair, I will move dissent from your ruling. The four hours set aside for today's hearing has expired and the Hon. Don Harwin is not able to ask any further questions.

CHAIR: We obviously have the opportunity to deliberate on further questions—

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Madam Chair, what do you intend to do about my motion? I moved dissent from your ruling, on the ground that the time set aside for the hearing has expired.

CHAIR: The time allocated for the hearing has expired. Minister and gentlemen, I thank you for your time this morning and for answering our questions. I remind you that the questions on notice are to be answered within 21 days from the time you receive them.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.
