

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 1

Monday 17 November 2008

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

ROADS

The Committee met at 2.00 p.m.

MEMBERS

Reverend the Hon. F. J. Nile (Chair)

The Hon. M. A. Ficarra
The Hon. D. J. Gay
The Hon. K. F. Griffin

Ms L. Rhiannon
The Hon. P. G. Sharpe
The Hon. I. W. West

PRESENT

Roads and Traffic Authority

Mr L. Wielinga, *Chief Executive Officer*

Mr P. Hesford, *Director, Finance and Commercial Development*

Mr M. Bushby, *Director, Network Management*

Mr B. Watters, *Director, Major Infrastructure*

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

Mr M. Veysey, *Acting Director, Business Coordination, Road Safety and Policy*

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

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

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

CHAIR: I declare this hearing for the inquiry into the budget estimates 2008-2009 open to the public and thank those witnesses who have returned for this supplementary hearing. The Committee appreciates their cooperation and their attendance. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of Roads. I would now like to make some comments about procedural matters. I refer to my earlier statement about procedural matters such as the broadcasting of proceedings. All witnesses will be sworn prior to giving evidence. As Mr Wielinga, Mr Bushby, Mr Hesford, Mr Stuart-Watt and Mr Veysey were sworn at the initial budget estimates hearing, they will give their evidence today under their previous oath or affirmation. As Mr Watters did not appear at the initial hearing, I will now ask him to take the oath or affirmation.

LESLIE ROBERT WIELINGA, Chief Executive Officer, Roads and Traffic Authority, on former oath:

PAUL MICHAEL HESFORD, Director, Finance and Commercial Development, Roads and Traffic Authority

MICHAEL BRUCE BUSHBY, Director, Network Management, Roads and Traffic Authority

MICHAEL VEYSEY, Acting Director, Business Coordination, Road Safety and Policy, Roads and Traffic Authority, and

DAVID STUART-WATT, Director, Licensing, Registration and Freight, Roads and Traffic Authority, on former affirmation.

BRIAN JOHN WATTERS, Director, Major Infrastructure, Roads and Traffic Authority, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: We will commence with questions from Opposition members and then questions from crossbench members. At this stage Government members will not be asking questions.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: My first question, which is directed to Mr Wielinga, concerns the Pacific Highway. Given the \$330 million funding cut to the Pacific Highway did you or the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] have any say over the area from which part of that highway funding would be pulled?

Mr WIELINGA: Cabinet made the decision. The RTA provided the normal information that it provides to Treasury, which is a list of projects on the preferred program and the cost benefit ratios.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Were the projects that were chosen those that you recommended?

Mr WIELINGA: They were projects with lower cost benefit ratios. From memory, Banora Point had a cost benefit ratio of one and Ewingsdale to Tintenbar had a cost benefit ratio of ratio of 1.6.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Did you or your department recommend cuts to any other areas in preference to these cuts?

Mr WIELINGA: No. Cabinet made those decisions.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Would you have preferred those cuts to be made in other areas?

Mr WIELINGA: It is not appropriate for me to comment on government policy. The Government made the decision and my job and the job of my team is to implement it.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Mr Wielinga, these projects do not account for the entire \$330 million in savings. Which other projects on the Pacific Highway, or which projects elsewhere, are being deferred?

Mr WIELINGA: Two projects are listed on the Pacific Highway—Banora Point and Ewingsdale to Tintenbar. They account for all the reductions on the Pacific Highway. I should point out that discussions are still taking place with the Federal Government for AusLink II, so we are not sure about the timing of those projects. Until we get some firm allocation from AusLink II and from Infrastructure Australia we are not sure of the timing of those projects.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: The entire AusLink II upgrade was to have been finished by 2016. Would you be able to tell me how much that funding cut will delay the upgrade of the highway?

Mr WIELINGA: Not until we complete negotiations with the Federal Government. For example, a scenario might develop in which it is prepared to put in a little more upfront. That could assist to maintain the current schedule on the Pacific Highway. The short answer is: We do not know until we have those discussions.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Could you provide me with details showing how many fatalities occurred each year for the past five years on the Benora Point and Tintenbar to Ewingsdale highway black spots?

Mr WIELINGA: We can do that. I cannot do that now but we will take that question on notice and provide that information for you.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Could you also provide a breakdown of how many deaths have occurred on all the Pacific Highway black spots?

Mr WIELINGA: We could do that, yes.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Mr Wielinga, last year the Prime Minister promised to fix the Sexton Hill black spot and he pledged \$210 million toward its upgrade. It is apparent from the Roads and Traffic Authority website that quotes have been called for the geotechnical boring on Sexton Hill. Has the contract been let and will it continue, bearing in mind that the upgrade has been deferred?

Mr WIELINGA: I will refer your question to Mr Watters. I do not have the detail but he might have.

Mr WATTERS: I am not sure of the answer to your question relating to whether or not the contract has been let, but it is our intention to proceed with the geotechnical boring and other investigations. We are continuing with the planning and pre-construction work at Benora Point. Sexton Hill is the same project as the project at Benora Point.

Mr WIELINGA: I said a little while ago that we needed to have discussions with the Federal Government in relation to AusLink II and Infrastructure Australia. That will influence the timing of those projects. It is in its forward year program. We expect to get a start on those projects but I cannot tell you exactly when.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: According to documents that I have seen—not from the State Government but from the Federal Government—the investigation of option C has also been completed. Is that correct?

Mr WATTERS: Yes. Option C was an option that was put forward by the community a few years ago. There have been several investigations, which the previous Minister reported on in the House. So far as we are concerned that matter has been closed. The environmental assessment on the preferred project has been completed, as announced by the previous Minister.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: I move to the Harbour Bridge and e-tags. When did the Roads and Traffic Authority find out that there was a problem with one of the tunnel scanners that was picking up people in the western lane of the Harbour Bridge?

Mr WIELINGA: I think it was a couple of weeks, but Mr Stuart-Watt has more detail to assist you on that.

Mr STUART-WATT: The issue of the two toll points on the Sydney Harbour Tunnel and the Sydney Harbour Bridge was anticipated some years ago when we put electronic tolling on the Sydney Harbour Tunnel and a software program was written to make sure no-one was ever double charged—that was put in place a couple of years ago when we went to electronic charging. When the new gantries were put on the tunnel approach if there was any leakage—if you like—of reading, the software program was meant to clean up and make sure that no-one was double charged. Unfortunately we do not know exactly what has gone wrong with the software program because, as has been reported, 25 to 30 people a day for a period of a few weeks have been double charged—1339 trips in total have been double charged—and we are re-crediting those accounts now. What we have done is that we have put in another interim software package to make sure it never happens again, and I am going to adjust the reader as well to make sure. We were aware that there was a possibility with the software program that was written, and for some reason a small number of reads have gotten through that program.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: I am assuming there were trials on these scanners that indicated there was the possibility of a problem?

Mr STUART-WATT: Yes.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Are there any other areas on any other roads that you have had to put this software in because of a concern with a similar problem?

Mr STUART-WATT: No, not that I am aware of. The Sydney Harbour Tunnel-Bridge, with the read points so close to other lanes, is the only one I am aware of. Because we were aware, in the first place, as I have said, that this may happen a software program was written. It has worked perfectly well for a couple of years. We are not sure why all of a sudden, for a short period of time, it has not been working.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: You are telling me that until now the software has been removing that for people who have been double charged?

Mr STUART-WATT: Exactly, but what we are doing now is making sure, if you like, by having a double-proof, double back-up, and adjusting the reader to make sure there are no double scans and we still have the software to ensure that people are not charged twice.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: How can you be sure going back beyond those dates that that in effect was happening? How can you be sure that the software has been working properly all that time? Given that you only found out because of some diligent motorists who were tough enough not to be bluffed by your system in the first place?

Mr STUART-WATT: The software that is in place provides a report to the managers concerned. The software provides a report to say: Here is where I have found some double charging. This is where I have made sure that there are no accounts double charged. Here is the report to say everything is okay. Unfortunately, something has gone wrong with that software.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Can you be sure that the software that is not working now may not have been faulty in providing that information in the past?

Mr STUART-WATT: There have been no double charges in the accounts that we are aware of—because it was so obvious that there was two charges within a few minutes. There have been no double charging in the accounts prior this point—we have done an audit on that and checked—and, as I have said, we have now put in place a failsafe mechanism by adjusting the readers as well as having a software mechanism in place.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Mr Wielinga, in relation to the mini-budget and the tolling that is meant to affect people's driving habits, what sort of research have you done into that for the Cabinet office?

Mr WIELINGA: It is difficult to predict the elasticity in this sort of use. Perhaps I can explain some of the thinking that went behind it? When we have a look at the other motorways and you get to 50-cent increments we can see what happens with the elasticity with the slight drop off in traffic volumes when those tolls go up. With this particular initiative, the idea was that we would try to expand out the peaks to improve the traffic flow through the peak periods. It was the economic principle of making better use of the existing infrastructure when it was not being heavily used. The other thing that was fairly influential in the thinking was that during the school holiday period we only need to get a 2 per cent or 3 per cent drop off in traffic to get a significant improvement in traffic flow. The next bit of information that was fairly important was that when you look at the breakdown of the people using the road network during the peak periods, a large percentage, or over 10 percent, of them do not need to be there. They are either shopping or they are tourists and they could easily make a choice in other parts of the day to use the network.

They were good indicators that there was likely to be some elasticity in the time-of-day pricing arrangement. When you have a look at the traffic that is using the bridge and the Sydney Harbour Tunnel—they work together as a pair—they are servicing employment areas right around the economic arc, from the airport all the way to Macquarie Park. Doing something about spreading out the peak periods, given those other inputs, was seen as a likely possibility of improving traffic flow during the peak periods. Now this is the first time we have done it and no-one can tell you with absolute accuracy what the elasticity is in this environment.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Is that because the report is not finished?

Mr WIELINGA: No, it is because there is very little experience around the world with this type of elasticity. The economic principles of supply and demand are well understood, and there are some good arguments as to why this should have a beneficial effect, but we will need to find out with his trial just how effective. It will be effective but how effective it will be we will not know until we have run it for a while.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Your indication that we need to find out with this trial, means that the report is not completed?

Mr WIELINGA: We are continually updating the traffic model for the bridge. To give you an example, 12 months or so ago when we transferred the Sydney Harbour Tunnel across to fully electronic we did a traffic model in advance of that. When we actually changed it over we updated the model with new information and things happened roughly how we predicted. We have been progressively updating the traffic model for the bridge all year as we have made those staged changes. We have made a prediction, we have had a look at what has happened to the traffic after we have made the change, and we have compared that with the model predictions and put the information back in. We are fairly confident about our projections but modelling is a never-ending process with the traffic network.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Assuming the question you have not asked, the answer is that you have not completed the study.

Mr WIELINGA: You can make that interpretation and I am not going to disagree with it.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: When was the study commenced?

Mr WIELINGA: The work on a cashless bridge has been going on for a couple of years. Time-of-day pricing is something a little bit more recent—a few weeks before the budget period we started looking at it.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: How many weeks?

Mr WIELINGA: I cannot give you the exact time on that. I am happy to come back to you, but I need to go and check records and so forth.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Have you looked at other roads with time-of-day pricing?

Mr WIELINGA: Yes, we have. From time to time our people have looked at the elasticity. I mentioned earlier that we go looking for elasticity. That is the information we are after—with a change in price, what is the changing traffic usage? We have looked at some "hot lane" examples. We have looked at the congestion pricing in London and the impact of that. The thing that comes out of that work is that every city is unique and you need to look at the situation in your own city on its merits.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: With congestion tax you need to take all entrances to a central business district, not just one entrance?

Mr WIELINGA: I mentioned a little while ago that when you look at the bridge and the tunnel it services the whole of the economic arc. The traffic that is using it is heavy traffic in both peaks, in both directions, and it is servicing all the way from the airport through to Macquarie Park—that whole corridor is significant. You get very similar flows in both directions. There are about 160,000 vehicles on the Harbour Bridge—85,000 in one direction and 75,000 in the other. It is not just about servicing the central business district. You have got to think about this initiative in terms of that whole corridor.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: If I accept your argument, it would make more sense if you actually did toll both peaks but you are only tolling one peak?

Mr WIELINGA: No, we are tolling both peaks but we are tolling both in one direction.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Which is only one peak period. What percentage of traffic comes in of a morning from the north?

Mr WIELINGA: I will have to get the figures for you in the actual peak, but there is about 85,000 all day in that direction.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Yes, but obviously there is a much larger number coming in from the north of a morning and travelling from the south to the north of an afternoon?

Mr WIELINGA: You know, I mentioned that you needed to look at this as a big picture. If you have a look at the Sydney Harbour Tunnel and the Eastern Distributor, the tunnel tolls one way and the Eastern Distributor tolls the other way. The bridge and the tunnel work as a pair. So, there are some complications with tolling arrangements on the crossing. When you have a look at the Harbour Bridge, you know that it is one of the only locations in Australia—in the world for that matter—where we change the lanes configurations while the peak is actually in progress. We are delicately moving lanes around during the peak periods so that we can get the maximum amount of traffic through in both directions. So, having some sort of time-of-day pricing is going to benefit those arrangements; it may even reduce the number of movements we need to make. But I will have a look at that.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Looking at the big picture, as you have suggested, what does your work indicate will happen to congestion on the Glebe bridge and Victoria Road because of these changes?

Mr WIELINGA: Well, the history is that there probably is going to be some movement across to Victoria Road, but that will adjust itself in a two- or three-week period. People adjust their travel times a couple of ways. When you have a look at the time-of-day pricing, I said to you that the people we were looking to get were those who are likely to go outside—that is, expand the peaks. We were not looking to reduce the total amount of traffic in that corridor. We were looking to shift people's time of travelling. Because a lot of people who are actually driving in the peak do not need to be there, they are likely to be susceptible to that time-of-day process and move their times. If you are going shopping at 9 o'clock, you may transfer to 10.30, for example.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Do you have a paper on the ramifications for Victoria Road?

Mr WIELINGA: No, I do not.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: So you have not really done any research on this, have you?

Mr WIELINGA: We have not got detailed traffic projections for Victoria Road, that is correct.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: So we do not know what is going to happen there?

Mr WIELINGA: We have seen price changes in other corridors—for example, in the M2 Lane Cove Tunnel and what happened to Victoria Road. We have seen on the Victoria Road corridor in the past 10 years that we have actually had a slight dropping off of traffic. So, we can give you figures 10 years ago and now and there is a 2 per cent or 3 per cent drop-off in traffic on Victoria Road in that period of time.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: The Treasurer, your former Minister, has said all the money from the Harbour Bridge tolls will go to funding 300 new buses. Are you aware how this is going to happen?

Mr WIELINGA: What, the Treasury mechanism?

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Yes?

Mr WIELINGA: They will take it straight off our net cost to services or our capital limits.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: It is really outside your area, is it not?

Mr WIELINGA: Well, you could go to Treasury, but that is how they will do it. That is how budgeting is done in government and other places.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: You are right. I have several questions, but they are outside your area. In regard to the Pacific Highway upgrade Worrell Creek to Urunga section, constituents in that area have expressed a lot of concern about the way it is proceeding. We were told in 1999 that the then Minister for Roads, Carl Scully, formally approved a five-kilometre section of the Pacific Highway upgrade known as the Worrell Creek section. In 2005 the RTA announced that due to changing parameters in road design there was a need to modify the currently approved Worrell Creek section. Yet in September 2007 the RTA announced three new proposal routes all amounting to a complete relocation rather than a modification of the currently approved route. These new routes seriously impact on the values of a small number of properties purchased since 1999 on the advice of the RTA that the Minister had already formally approved the route. These properties were well away from the

approved route, but are now seriously affected by any relocation of routes proposed by the RTA. What is going to happen to address the concerns of these badly affected people?

Mr WATTERS: If I could give you some background. The Pacific Highway upgrade has been going on since 1996. The first projects that we planned and then built we did to a relatively low standard to the extent that we did not upgrade them to a full 110-kilometre per hour standard modern dual carriageway. Our experience after the first couple of projects was that it was false economy; we were not getting the accident savings that we would have hoped from the Pacific Highway upgrade. Subsequently, in our more recent upgrade projects through the planning and design process we have gone for the 110-kilometre standard.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: I accept that, but people made life decisions based on that earlier understanding.

Mr WATTERS: So the announcement in 1999 was based on that relatively old design. No commitment has been made to build that length of the highway yet. So, there was the opportunity to undertake to review the design process and come up with a higher standard design, and that is what we have done. Obviously, it has moved away from the alignment that was previously announced. That was a decision by the previous Minister, that we would go to that process. Obviously it impacts new property owners.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: And the old ones as well.

Mr WATTERS: The property owners are now adversely impacted. In one case so far we have agreed to purchase the property. Where all property owners are incurring a hardship, from the whole of the Pacific Highway where we have announced a preferred route, we go through an acquisition process where they can demonstrate hardship, even if it is 5 or 10 years ahead of a construction program. When it is within about three years of a construction program, we commence what we call a programmed acquisition. So, in the case of the project you have asked about, we are acquiring properties where they are incurring hardship.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Mr Wielinga, I am sure you are well acquainted with this report, "Traffic flow improvement initiatives for the Spit—Military roads corridor August 2008"?

Mr WIELINGA: Yes.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Could you outline the cycling component of this initiative?

Mr WIELINGA: That project is in Mr Bushby's area. He will start.

Mr BUSHBY: The cycling provision in relation to the lower North Shore comes in several forms. The ability of cyclists to be able to use the bus lanes and the improved traffic flows in bus lanes will give benefits to cyclists who wish to travel along that corridor but, alternatively, there is a regional bike path that runs roughly parallel to the corridor and runs through much quieter local streets.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Why then does this report not mention any aspect of what you have just outlined? When you search the website for "bike", "bikes", "cycling", "bicyclists" nothing can be found. I admit that I have not read the whole report, but I did attempt to find it and from what I could see there is no mention at all?

Mr BUSHBY: The original objective in taking on that project to improve traffic flows was primarily focused on increasing the number of people able to pass through the corridor within the existing road assets. The focus of that is to be able to get more people through, primarily along public transport. So, the focus has been looking at the reliability of travel times for buses. The report has been framed around that sort of objective. The comments I have given you of cyclists being able to use the bus lane is a general comment and they are able to do that anywhere within the road network.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Would you agree that it is surprising the needs of cyclists are not covered considering the RTA website states, "The RTA is committed to making provisions for bicycles in all new major road infrastructure and maintenance work. This is in line with the New South Wales Government State Plan, which is dedicated to decreasing car dependence and improving the environment in New South Wales?" When it is not there, that sounds like an add-on because you have been asked the question?

Mr BUSHBY: I am not sure that I can add too much. Cyclists are provided for by an alternative route on quieter residential streets, which is very heavily used, and they do have the ability to ride in bus lanes.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I will ask you about two of the reports on the north side, that is, items 11 and 14 in the Roads and Traffic Authority's Bicycle Master Plan 2010. Item 11 is Chatswood to Warringah Mall, which is said to be completed in 2009, and the other is the Sydney Harbour Bridge to Warringah Mall, which is to be completed in 2009. Could you give us a progress report on these two projects? I am interested to know when they were commenced, are any maps available, and are local bicycle groups and councils being consulted?

Mr BUSHBY: I have not got those details in front of me. I would be happy to take that on notice and provide you with the information.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Thank you for taking it on notice. To clarify, when you outlined in response to my question about the Spit-Military Road corridor report that they could take a quieter route, you were not referring in any way to the Chatswood to Warringah Mall and the Sydney Harbour Bridge to Warringah Mall projects?

Mr BUSHBY: The regional route that I referred to on the quieter streets is potentially part of the Harbour Bridge to Warringah Mall corridor.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: But you are not sure where it is up to and you will take it on notice?

Mr BUSHBY: I will take it on notice.

Mr WIELINGA: It is probably worth pointing out that when you have a look at that report on the Spit-Military Road corridor you should have a look at the objectives of what we were trying to do. In the very front of the report it says that the prime objective was to improve public transport flows. This was about looking at an existing corridor, trying to get as much as we could out of that corridor, trying to improve the reliability of the bus travel particularly on that corridor. We worked with the State Transit Authority [STA]. All of the initiatives focused around improving those bus reliabilities and at the same time minimising the impact on general traffic but giving priority to buses.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: From your answer that emphasis was given to public transport, it is as though that would satisfy the people who are cycling. They need to be seen as another part of the solution rather than just submerged within the public transport requirements.

Mr WIELINGA: Do not get me wrong; I do understand what you are saying. That report would have benefited by a bit more reference to cyclists. But that was not the objective at the time.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: In 2005 Mr Costa, when he was Minister, said there were 3,000 kilometres of cycle ways in New South Wales. Earlier this year Mr Roozendaal said there were 3,900 kilometres of cycle ways. What are the current kilometres of cycle ways in New South Wales?

Mr WIELINGA: We will have to come back to you with the latest number.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: In 1999 the New South Wales Government committed to delivering an average of 200 kilometres of cycling facilities per year. Is that still the policy that you operate under?

Mr WIELINGA: We still have the Bike Plan 2010. You would already know, I think, that we are developing a new bike plan at the moment with the Premier's Committee on Active Living. They are helping us develop that.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: You have said you will take on notice the current total kilometres of cycle ways. Until the new plan is developed, are you operating under the plan of an additional 200 kilometres of cycle facilities per year?

Mr BUSHBY: We are meeting that 200 kilometres per year.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Can you describe what you put in the category "cycling facility"? I refer to feedback that we receive, and if we get it, I imagine that you would. I am talking about car door zones and

claims that they are really just part of the roadway and have nothing more than a bike stencil on them. I am interested to know how you define a bike lane?

Mr BUSHBY: The bicycle facilities are a range of facilities that are usable by cyclists. They range from full off-road facilities where it is a dedicated bike path right through to the dedicated on-road lanes that you have referred to, which often are identified by stencils in on the road, and facilities that can be used by cyclists in terms of wide shoulders on major reconstructions of roads.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: You referred to off-road dedicated bike paths, then to dedicated bike lanes on roads. Can you really use the word "dedicated" there, considering when cyclists are riding in one of those lanes they can be sharing it and a car door opens or a bus or car moves into that lane? Is it correct to use the word "dedicated"?

Mr BUSHBY: Dedicated in the sense that they are marked for the use of cyclists. It is true that people who move into parking areas and so on cross over those. But in the through traffic they are there as bicycle lanes.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: No-one is fined if they go into them. That is why I dispute the word "dedicated". Anyone can go into those lanes and nothing happens to them, does it?

Mr BUSHBY: That would be an enforcement issue.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: When you say enforcement, there is an implication that an offence could be enforced. I do not believe there is anything to enforce, is there?

Mr BUSHBY: The legal aspects of it I would have to be advised.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Can any other witness clarify that? For example, is it the case that if a car drives in the lanes in the city marked with a stencil that the driver cannot be fined?

Mr WIELINGA: We will get some details of the Australian road rules and come back to you.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: As to the car door issue, many bike lanes are close to parked cars and the car door opens into the bike lane. Do you have any figures on people riding bikes who are injured by car doors being opened?

Mr BUSHBY: We would have to check our road safety statistics to be able to tell you that. I would be surprised if we had them, but we can look at the statistics.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Can you take it on notice as to, one, any figures and, two, any discussion? It is a problem and an issue of debate within cycling circles, particularly for inexperienced bike riders. The experienced ones know to be on the edge of the lane, but others think they are safe. They are cycling along and it can cause a problem. Would you take on notice whether the RTA is giving any consideration to that?

Mr BUSHBY: We will get back to you. I guess it is probably worth adding at this point that certainly some of the councils are aware of the concern that you have expressed. In the city of Sydney the council, for exactly the reason you are talking about, is trying to separate physically the cyclists from the motorised traffic. The council has been working with the RTA to try to identify locations where we could have two-way bike paths.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Totally separated?

Mr BUSHBY: Totally separated. We have been looking at the potential for Kent Street as being a route where we can put a north-south corridor through with that separated arrangement.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Thank you for explaining that to me.

CHAIR: Mr Wielinga, I know this is very difficult with your planning. I refer to the mini-budget papers at page 5-4 where it talks about the Infrastructure Australia Priorities and states that the Government is seeking the Commonwealth Government's Building Australia Fund to provide money for the M4 and M5

extensions. Then it states that these will only proceed before 2012 if they are substantially funded by the Commonwealth. What sort of planning are you doing in regard to that? How do you do that when you are awaiting advice from the Commonwealth?

Mr WIELINGA: Clearly, we do not do a lot. What we do is enough to make a submission to Infrastructure Australia, and they tend to be strategic-type reports. They look at the economic and wider economic benefits of this type of infrastructure. We do enough to satisfy what Infrastructure Australia needs. There is no detailed planning for the project. That comes when it is funded.

CHAIR: Infrastructure Australia gave you an idea of what points you should put in your submissions so that you present a detailed submission?

Mr WIELINGA: Yes. They provide a template of the information that they are after. They gave us a fairly short time frame. All of that was coordinated by the Coordinator-General's Office, and the RTA made some input into the Coordinator-General's Office.

CHAIR: Now it will be a matter of competing with other States and their projects?

Mr WIELINGA: You got it in one, Mr Chairman. That is what it is all about.

CHAIR: How confident are you getting a response on the M5 and the M4?

Mr WIELINGA: When you have a look at the size of our economy and the contribution that New South Wales makes to gross domestic product [GDP], you would expect, just on that basis alone, that we would get a reasonable level of project allocations because of the impact we have on the national economy. But at the end of the day, I do not know in detail the selection process that Infrastructure Australia is going to go through.

CHAIR: In the budget papers, part of the Government's problem has been a reduction in revenue. I wonder if you could explain that? One of the factors has been motor vehicle registration which has been revised down by \$60 million. What is the explanation for that? Car sales do not seem to have reduced as dramatically as that.

Mr HESFORD: It is basically due to the lower number of registrations that have been anticipated over the period.

Mr WIELINGA: It is a projection for the coming period, not what has already happened.

CHAIR: You anticipated higher new car sales.

Mr HESFORD: New car registrations, correct.

CHAIR: Which result in registrations.

Mr HESFORD: Yes, that is true.

CHAIR: What has caused you to revise that figure?

Mr HESFORD: It is part of a Treasury model that we provide inputs to throughout the year. Based on the trends that are being published at the moment, with the lower registrations, thus the lower number of car sales that feeds through registration.

Mr WIELINGA: These are models done by Treasury. Treasury has a projection that in certain economic environments, you get a certain number of sales, and there are certain trends. These are projections made by Treasury.

CHAIR: The current economic crisis affecting the availability of money could reduce the car sales figures even more perhaps than the original estimate? According to newspaper reports, car sales are virtually coming to a standstill.

Mr WIELINGA: If Treasury's model is correct, that is what the impact will be.

CHAIR: So it may be a big impact on the economy?

Mr WIELINGA: Yes. The short answer is that it would be, and it could be less.

CHAIR: Another reason for the Government having the mini-budget is that the budget expenses were higher than expected. The Government has blamed the Roads and Traffic Authority for additional road maintenance. How would you explain that? Have you had more road maintenance than you originally planned, or have roads needed more maintenance?

Mr WIELINGA: No. The Auditor-General did a report on road maintenance in New South Wales about two years ago and suggested that we should invest more in pavement rebuilding so that the turnaround on our pavement got to the 40 or 50-year cycle for the design. We have been progressively upgrading the investment in maintenance over the past couple of years in response to that audit report. We have now increased investment in road maintenance by \$100 million a year. It is all about pavement condition.

CHAIR: Good. That \$100 million will not be affected by this budget?

Mr WIELINGA: It is not affected by this, no.

CHAIR: That is good. The budget papers also indicate of further savings of \$400 million to 2012-13 of the RTA's capital program, with 90 per cent of this being achieved by setting contribution upgrades to \$500 million. You have referred to that already and I would like some additional information. Would you like to comment on that paragraph in the mini-budget papers?

Mr WIELINGA: That paragraph refers to our forward year capital works program over five years. The forward estimates period in this budget is four years. That explains the difference between \$245 million and \$400 million. Most of that impacts on the Pacific Highway projects we spoke about.

CHAIR: So it is all to do with the Pacific Highway?

Mr WIELINGA: No. There are a couple of other smaller projects to be determined—projects that have not been announced, started, or planned, or anything yet, but we have to find a few tens of millions four years down the track.

CHAIR: When you are forced by this mini-budget to cut back on funding, for example, for the Pacific Highway upgrades, you already have contracts with the main road builders. They are being built by private companies. How does it affect their planning? Do you actually tell them now—

Mr WIELINGA: There is no impact on the capital works program for RTA this current financial year. All existing contracts stay on.

CHAIR: There is no variation to the contract. The contracts are fixed?

Mr WIELINGA: They are. For projects like the Ballina bypass and Karuah to Bulahdelah stages two and three, the work we are doing at Bulahdelah and at Moreland to Herons Creek are all existing contracts, and they will go through to their completion.

CHAIR: That is good news. I note the Government is trying to find a dollar wherever it can. They are now requiring you to sell what I gather is a subsidiary of the RTA—the Roads and Traffic Authority's non-standard numberplates business.

Mr WIELINGA: Yes.

CHAIR: That is to become an asset sale. Would you like to comment on that?

Mr WIELINGA: Yes. We have what we call a special numberplates business. The RTA provides a standard black and yellow numberplate for people. A lot of people like to personalise their numberplates, have their own colours, have their own names, or words, or anything on those numberplates. We sell those numberplates and we have an annual fee with them. That is the special numberplates business. It is an asset.

There is an argument that the private sector can develop this business better than we can because of the commercial drivers, customer focus and so forth—those sorts of things. That is the business that we intend to export leasing.

CHAIR: Do you know who is actually producing the numberplates? There was a report that some of them were being produced through the prisons.

Mr WIELINGA: We have contractors who do that. David can deal with that.

Mr STUART-WATT: Yes. We have a contractor in place. Licensys is the name of the contractor and they supply all our numberplates in New South Wales. It is an open tender contract.

CHAIR: Licensys would have a special equipment to produce them, I assume?

Mr WIELINGA: Yes.

CHAIR: If it went to another company, they would have to purchase that special equipment.

Mr WIELINGA: We would look at how long our contract with this particular company is in place. That would be dealt with as part of the package. The manufacture of the numberplates themselves is really a small part of this business. It is the intellectual property, the different coloured numberplates, and the words that make the value in this. It is the personalising and the personalising-plus of these numberplates—people getting something unique for their own vehicles, such as a special colour, their own words, or their name on it—that is the value in the business.

CHAIR: You have retained the standard numberplates business?

Mr WIELINGA: We have retained the standard numberplates business.

CHAIR: There is no change to that?

Mr WIELINGA: There has to be a standard numberplate that people can get for a nominal fee.

CHAIR: I imagine the temptation, if the non-standard goes commercial, is to put the prices up to produce a higher profit margin. You would have no control over that once you sell it.

Mr WIELINGA: That is not necessarily a good business strategy because you are looking at optimising the revenue that you would get. The customers who buy it have to see it as value for money. I do not know what that would do to prices. We have not even firmed up on the type of model that we will lease it out under. We are putting a steering committee into place at the moment to have a look at our options.

CHAIR: Would that have some way of recommending that the prices remain in a range that is similar to what you have now, and if there was an increase, that it would only be the Consumer Price Index-type increases?

Mr WIELINGA: I am sure these things will be explored as part of the steering committee process. At the end of the day we want to make sure the customers get value for money, and there needs to be an element in that because you have got a monopoly business here.

CHAIR: That is what I am getting at. There is a temptation by some operator now to exploit that. We will wait and see.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Just on the same: Will there be safeguards to stop operators duplicating or going close to duplicating numbers that are already there? People have made substantial investments, for example, in the old black and white 1, 2, 3, 4, et cetera. I saw a number 2 sell for up to \$600,000 from a farmer down near Gunning. Will there be those protections when it is transferred?

Mr WIELINGA: These are things that we are conscious of and will be looking at as part of this process. But the fundamental premise is that each numberplate needs to be unique. We identify vehicles and the operators of those vehicles essentially through that numberplate, so they do need to be unique.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Mr Wielinga, on the topic of flashing lights and road safety, how many companies are involved in the rollout process?

Mr WIELINGA: There are at least three or four. Can we come back to you with the details on those, please?

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Sure. And also what percentage does the company Streetscape Projects have in this rollout and what is the value?

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

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Last Friday night I attended a function in Dubbo. There were about 200 people there and a lot of farmers. At this time of year there is always a bit of angst between the RTA and farmers over the interaction of the haulage of wheat and the movement, but this year it seems stronger than it has been for some time. I was approached by a lot of people expressing concern, and one of the farmers sent me an email, which said:

No farmer or contractor objects to a genuine safety issue being raised and a fine imposed, but such nitpicking at a crack on the passenger side of a truck windscreen or a registration sticker on the back of a trailer not quite in the correct position or a header driver who had not opened his regulations package despite having five open copies and being familiar with the rules. The wheat harvest is a make or break for many growers and we don't need standover men putting our machines off the roads unfairly.

Mr Wielinga, is there anything you can do to make sure that there is a better interaction this season and both sides work better together?

Mr WIELINGA: Our heavy vehicle people have regular meetings with farming groups on this sort of stuff. If you have got any specific incidents I am happy to take them up from my office and deal with them.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: I will go back and take you up on that offer. This is a question about the development at White Bay. As we just saw, the car carriers will not be going in there, and we also know that there is \$150 million being put aside, we believe inappropriately, for the duplication of the Iron Cove Bridge. The release of the White Bay master plan is yet to happen, and that would include a Sydney regional integration of the missing M4 link, a rail station interchange, a park and ride ferry, et cetera. We are still going ahead with the duplication of the Iron Cove Bridge, yet this section of land that is so important to the City West Link, the M4 East, the whole future of our transport needs, has not been finalised.

Mr WIELINGA: The Government has made a decision to proceed with the Victoria Road project; we are getting on with it. It is as simple as that for me.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Thank you, Mr Wielinga. I know you cannot comment on policy. Is the RTA aware that stack emissions records from May to September this year show that the tunnel operators have used daytime portal emissions in order to carry out maintenance on the ventilation systems?

Mr WIELINGA: Yes. Under the conditions of approval, while they are doing maintenance or when there is an incident in the tunnel they are entitled to use portal emissions.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Daytime?

Mr WIELINGA: Whenever they are doing maintenance, yes.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: My understanding is that the recommendation is that it is done in night-time, not daytime portal emissions.

Mr WIELINGA: If my interpretation of those conditions is incorrect I will come back to you and correct that.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: In fact, I am told that this is clearly in breach of the COA relating to the avoidance of portal emissions and the interpretation used by the Department of Planning during the M5 East compliance audit. Tunnel pollution levels on Saturdays are about one third of those experienced on weekdays, but about 90,000 vehicles still use the corridor and pollution levels are still higher than weekday levels in other

city tunnels such as the Lane Cove Tunnel, and dangerous when emitted at ground level. That is why the suggestion is it is better to do it at night than even during the day at weekends.

Mr WIELINGA: I understand that suggestion, but now that you have mentioned it we will look into this and I will come back to you.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Did you put forward suggestions of areas of reform and cuts during the mini-budget?

Mr WIELINGA: Yes, we did.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Could you tell us what they were?

Mr WIELINGA: We put in a proposal for utilising RTA's motor registries as a one-stop shop for government services. Instead of being able to just get your registration and licensing for cars, you could go to the motor registries and also get your maritime licence, your taxi licence, your shooter's licence or anything—a one-stop shop. That has been approved as part of the mini-budget. We made some suggestions about rationalising some of our driver testing and creating education centres for driving and that is being looked at as part of the mini-budget. When we looked at those suggestions from the RTA's point of view we wanted to find a way to save a dollar and improve services at the same time, and we thought those initiatives met that objective.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Could I go back to Mr Watters and the Worrell Creek, Macksville to Urunga section upgrade? I am informed that in a statement from the Pacific Highway upgrade project manager from Grafton, when asked if the RTA intended to honour its assurance regarding the ministerial approval of the Worrall Creek section, he stated, "We don't have to honour our assurance if we can find a better way." I do not for one moment assert that he was saying that he was looking for a better way not to honour the assurance, but it fits very closely with the statement you made, Mr Watters, a moment ago that the RTA is entitled to look for a better route. My question, which you did not get around to answering, is what happens to the people that were affected in your original details and considerations—people that actually sold land and people that bought land under the premise that the RTA had put forward at the time, now to find there is an entirely different premise? These are the people from that area that are very concerned and appear not to be getting answers.

CHAIR: Do you want to answer the question, Mr Wielinga?

Mr WIELINGA: I was just trying to put some words into Mr Watters' mouth. Just to make sure I understood your question, what I said to Brian was, look, we have had a recent example with one of the property matters on that new line and we have been talking to them about the impact on that property and how they would like to resolve it. The RTA would normally only take the land that it needs for the new road works. In certain circumstances a property is affected to such an extent where it is appropriate that we purchase all of the property. In this particular case we offered to purchase all of the property and the owner is thinking about that option.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: My concern on this is we have had a change of route and people make life decisions based on the original information from the RTA. There has now been a change of route and these are the people that are affected. In fact, one of them, Mr Wielinga, wrote to you on 25 September and is complaining bitterly to me that you have not answered his letter yet.

Mr WIELINGA: If we are talking about the same person, my project manager has been back to him with the offer that the Roads and Traffic Authority put on the table. It is one thing to answer a letter. I think it is better to send out a live body to go and talk to that person, and we have done it.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: On the subject of e-bikes, are you aware that about 10,000 motorised scooters known as e-bikes were sold in New South Wales after the Roads and Traffic Authority advised that they did not require registration? Are you aware that the High Court has since deemed the bikes illegal to be ridden on public roads? Are you aware that the director of the bicycle company called EziRide, Mr Patrick, who has since closed his business, has said in media reports that he was assured by two senior RTA officials that e-bikes do not have to be registered and could have been ridden like bicycles for this reason? Do you accept that the RTA is responsible for a huge amount of confusion and thousands of dollars in fines and court costs?

Mr STUART-WATT: We have recently updated our website, and so have the police, to clarify what is meant by an exemption under the legislation for e-bikes. It is a longstanding exemption, essentially, for pedal cycles with power assist. Under the legislation, there is even a limit in the power that can be applied to those bikes. It is a pedacycle with a power motor no bigger than 200 watts, and that has been in place for a long time. You are right that a case went to court recently. A person tried, basically, to overturn that decision and lost that case in court. We have been reviewing that with our colleagues around Australia whether such an old piece of legislation still applies. A lot of bikes have come to Australia that have various motors on them. Some of them have false pedals, the pedals have been taken off some of them, and some of them do not have any chains connected to the pedals themselves.

Ourselves and the police have always provided the advice that there is only one style of bike that is exempt under the legislation. I do not have any information that backs up that our staff provided the advice that you are suggesting, but our advice is very clear. As I said, it is relatively old legislation and the information is on our website. What we have been doing as part of our review of national and international standards is working with our colleagues around Australia to see if there is an opportunity to update the legislation and update the power that may be allowed on pedal assisted motorbikes, but this is not to bring in motor scooters and similar devices, the mini bikes, that the police are having trouble with on the network. It is about a sensible new power decision on pedal-assisted bikes. There has been some suggestion that perhaps the wattage could increase from 200 to, say, 300 or perhaps 400 watts, and we are looking at that at the moment.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: If there is evidence that the RTA officials did provide this information and that has subsequently lead to businesses being harmed or even being forced to close, are you willing to consider that if we forward you that?

Mr STUART-WATT: I have no such information but I would be very happy to receive it and investigate it.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: And that investigation could be made public. Given your answer on the cooperation with the New South Wales Police Force and so forth, can you give us a time frame when you think this process will be finished and that the public can be fully assured of the situation with registration and licensing standards? At the moment there is still confusion out there. What time frame are we looking at?

Mr STUART-WATT: I do not agree there is confusion. The legislation is very clear. The majority of the new mini bikes and power-assisted bikes that are coming into Australia at the moment are not meeting legislative requirements and cannot be registered and do not have an exemption under the legislation. We have made that clear, the police have made that clear, the national body has made that clear and the national department has made that clear. As I said, we have updated the website and provided more information to make sure that consumers are not being hoodwinked into buying bikes that are not meeting the legislation. What we are looking at with our colleagues around Australia is to see if there is a sensible change to the legislation to increase the power on pedal-assisted cycles, not looking at the mini bikes and other bikes that are being proposed.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Are their attempts to investigate a national agreement on these vehicle standards by the RTA? Are you driving anything like that?

Mr STUART-WATT: What we are looking at is a national approach to increasing the power that may be allowed on a national basis. The 200 watts is a national decision.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: Is New South Wales leading this charge or participating with the other States?

Mr STUART-WATT: It will be a change to the national road rules, and we are working with our Federal colleagues accordingly.

CHAIR: You said a moment go that you would not consider registration of the mini bikes. Is that a firm decision?

Mr STUART-WATT: They are not eligible for registration, and that is not being considered.

CHAIR: But that would solve the problem and you would have the revenue from the mini bikes? Or is it a road safety issue?

Mr STUART-WATT: It is a road safety issue. A lot of those mini bikes and other vehicles that are coming in have fewer features than current motorbikes, which are also a road safety problem.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: On the e-bikes, at the moment we do not have consistency between the States. Is that the case?

Mr STUART-WATT: The 200-watt pedacycle is uniform in Australia.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: That is uniform in all States.

Mr STUART-WATT: That is the national approach. It is how the States have applied it. If there is a variation somewhere, I am not aware of it. It is not an RTA decision; it is a national decision.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Mr Bushby, earlier you took on notice a question about providing the total kilometres of New South Wales cycleways. Can you also, in providing those figures, give a breakdown of the total kilometres for the different types of bike lanes that you described? I am probably not using the correct language but I think you divided them into three categories: bike lanes that are dedicated separate from traffic, bike lanes that are marked on roads, and wide shoulders that you judge bike users can cycle on. Can you also give us a breakdown for those three categories and also provide the correct language for those three categories?

Mr BUSHBY: I am certainly happy to investigate it. If we have that information, I will be happy to make it available.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Mr Wielinga, with the Iron Cove Bridge upgrade, the main emphasis that you have been giving for that project, I understand, is that it will improve public transport as in buses moving into and out of the city. Is that correct?

Mr WIELINGA: That is correct, yes, on that length of Victoria Road.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: But in providing a three-lane bridge, by the very nature of that project, being additional to what is already there, will that not encourage more private vehicles on to the road?

Mr WIELINGA: I guess what you need to keep in mind is the total number of lanes. What we are doing is providing a bus lane by a tidal flow arrangement. So there will be the same number of lanes going into the city, reducing the lanes out bound and vice versa in the evening peak. You have to remember that you still have the constraints at either end.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Precisely.

Mr WIELINGA: So you will not get more general traffic. You are enabling buses to travel quickly along those 3.7 kilometres of Victoria Road and getting to the front of the queue to get onto the approach to the Anzac Bridge.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: There is much evidence that when you provide more roads the cars fill them up. So would that not still be the case with the Iron Cove Bridge, where you are expanding the number of lanes? Although you are saying that all you are doing is giving a dedicated bus lane, that ends up becoming an additional traffic lane for private use because the buses now have their own lane?

Mr WIELINGA: You have to look at the number of buses. The dedicated bus lane can take a lot more buses than will be running up eventually now and those buses are currently caught in congestion in the general purpose lanes. We have used the road space to isolate a dedicated bus lane coming into the city, providing the same number of lanes for general traffic in the peak direction and one less lane in the outbound direction of general traffic. We are not increasing capacity for general traffic, we are increasing capacity and a dedicated lane for buses.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I think many would probably dispute your language. You are saying you are not increasing capacity for general traffic but by taking the buses out of that lane clearly you are increasing capacity?

Mr WIELINGA: Yes, but when you look at the modelling, we are also reducing right hand turn facilities at some of the locations for general traffic. So there is a combination of things that come together. You know there may be a slight improvement for general traffic but it is not significant because we are not providing any increased capacity.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: When you looked at the part of Victoria Road, and coming down onto the Anzac Bridge, the T3 lane I would imagine would be very significant to your decisions. What consideration did you make to ensure that that was policed more thoroughly so it was used as intended?

Mr WIELINGA: Which T3 lane are you talking about? The one on Victoria Road?

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Yes.

Mr WIELINGA: Transit lanes are difficult to enforce without dedicated enforcement bays. Its easier to enforce bus lanes, that is true. The whole objective of this project was to improve the reliability and predictability of bus lane travel on that corridor. That is what drove the project. I know people are having difficulty believing the Roads and Traffic Authority would do something like this, but that is what it was all about.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I think why it has also been difficult is because when Mr Roozendaal started talking about this project, he did not talk about buses.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: There are some cynical people around.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: He started talking about buses when there was such an outcry about it.

Mr WIELINGA: The only defence I can make is, you go back and have a look at every document we have ever produced, and have a look at what the first objective was right from day one.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Why do you say T3 lanes are so difficult to police?

Mr WIELINGA: Well you have got to get a police officer's visual sighting of the vehicle. New technology is overseas with some infrared facility to count the number of passengers but it is still fairly new. With bus lanes we can identify the vehicles with cameras to find out whether they should or should not be there.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: In relation to the Iron Cove Bridge, does the project also involve upgrading the existing bridge because of its poor condition?

Mr WIELINGA: No, what we have said is that in the next decade or so we have to do significant maintenance to that structure. That is what we have said.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: That is additional to this project? That is after this project?

Mr WIELINGA: Yes, that is after this project.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: You spoke earlier about decreasing traffic volumes along Victoria Road in recent years. Would you provide data on that?

Mr WIELINGA: Yes, we can. It is actually in those Victoria Road documents somewhere but we will get it for you.

Mr WATTERS: It is in the environmental assessment. It is on display. There has been a reduction in travel along Victoria Road.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Would you provide that to us because it is often time-consuming to locate it?

Mr WIELINGA: Yes.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: How do you make decisions about speed limits? The speed limit on some parts of the Princes Highway is undivided and is 100 kilometres per hour. Obviously safety is paramount in work with the Roads and Traffic Authority. At what point does the RTA decide on the final speed limit? On a road with many twists and turns and is undivided I am continually surprised that the speed limit is set at 100 kilometre per hour when the F3 is set at 110 kilometres per hour maximum but in parts 90 or even 80 now kilometres per hour on divided road. You have obviously made a judgment that even on a divided road with twists and turns that a lower speed limit should be set. The Princes Highway has been fixed up with markings in many places but it has a 100 kilometres per hour speed limit in parts.

Mr WIELINGA: A number of factors come into play and the volume of traffic is one. On some they have high volumes of traffic and they cause accidents so you adjust speeds. The geometry of the road both vertical and horizontal is a factor. It is probably worth reflecting on a bit of the history. A decade or two ago we used to have a prima facie speed on the road network. The approach was it is 100 kilometres an hour generally everywhere on the network and 60 kilometres per hour in urban areas in those days. We used to have those black on yellow advisory speed signs on things like curves. The strategy in recent times has been to provide advisory speed limits along different sections of the highway where you have got more roadway. We are taking into account geometry, traffic volumes and accident history. Providing advice to people of speed zoning over a length—we like to have a minimum of about 1½ or 2 kilometres in a speed zone. We think that new policy over the past decade or so has made a significant contribution to road safety and reducing the road toll.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Are you lobbied about speed limits? Do you then come under pressure? Are you saying it is just decided in the Roads and Traffic Authority or is it also sometimes a government policy decision that certain roads have to be at a certain speed?

Mr WIELINGA: The lobbying that takes place about speed zoning invariably is associated with accidents on the road network. They are investigated as part of the speed zoning considerations anyway. Every example that I can think of in my 30 years as an engineer about community input on speed zoning on a road network has always been about safety, about accidents, pedestrians nearly being hit and all of those sorts of things. They are things we take into account anyway. But at the end of the day we will take a look at the geometry, the traffic flow and the accident history and that is what we will make the decision on for speed zoning.

CHAIR: Many recent reports have been about serious accidents when the driver was under the influence of alcohol but not over the limit of 0.05. The *Daily Telegraph* and some people have said "Why don't we have a zero tolerance level for all drivers?" As far as your research on accidents has that been considered or will it be considered in the future?

Mr WIELINGA: We have zero tolerance for our P-platers, that is where it has been considered because there is a special need there and they are a special group that are learning to drive and so forth. We have always got an open mind about evidence-based policy outcomes for road safety but we are not looking at that seriously at the moment. We are looking at what is happening with alcohol-related accidents on the roads and so forth but that is not an initiative we have got in the pipeline for the immediate future.

CHAIR: Are you collecting figures so that would be valuable if the Government wanted to look at it as a future policy?

Mr WIELINGA: Absolutely.

CHAIR: In discussions about the increase in the Harbour Bridge and tunnel tolls you said a number of people were travelling at peak times may be domestic drivers going shopping or tourists. Has any research been done on that? Can you say at 7.30 a number of people are shoppers or tourists?

Mr WIELINGA: Yes, we can provide you with some information if you like. We do have information about the rough percentages in each of the corridors.

CHAIR: How do you collect that information?

Mr WIELINGA: We do a number of numberplate surveys, origin destination surveys, those sorts of things and we sample the community to find out what their travel intentions are during those periods.

CHAIR: Have there been face-to-face surveys of drivers?

Mr WIELINGA: I believe so.

Mr WATTERS: The Transport Data Centre, which is now part of the Ministry of Transport, does a annually based but continuous home-based survey of population. So it is a statistically valid sample across all the population groupings in Sydney in the greater metropolitan area. They publish data on existing trip characteristics. It is used the strategic travel model which they also operate. It is used for forecasting future transport demand and that is then used by the public transport authorities and by ourselves to do traffic modelling. The basis of all the travel forecasting we do really goes back to this home-based survey that is being undertaken by the Ministry of Transport. We actually part fund that and are involved in the structuring of that work.

CHAIR: In the discussion on the new bridge on Victoria Road, there was some concern that this was going to lead to increased car traffic. Have you done any assessments that if you had a far more efficient system—which you expect will happen—faster and more regular on that designated laneway, that more drivers will then leave the car and travel by public transport? Is that a factor in your considerations?

Mr WATTERS: Part of that network-wide strategic travel model I mentioned looks at the different mode choice. But in answer to your question, I think the best illustration of the potential of bus lanes is when the bus lane on the Harbour Bridge was introduced, and that was when the Sydney Harbour Tunnel was built. It was promoted at the time as being four additional lanes but it was three additional lanes because a lane on the bridge was converted to buses only, and the number of buses crossing the bridge—I have forgotten the exact statistic—was something like 20 per cent in the first year, and it has been a very substantial increase in passenger usage across the bridge because of the dedicated lane and the very fast bus service from the lower North Shore into the city centre. That one lane now carries more people than all the other traffic lanes. It is difficult to forecast how people might switch but history has shown that by putting in a dedicated bus lane you get a shift over time.

CHAIR: I notice the issue about buses overlaps into another department, but, as you do all the registration of buses and other things, there has been some talk that it is not going to be easy to get new buses. The companies that produce the buses are at their full limit because of orders that have been placed. Are you aware of any potential problems of, say, suddenly wanting another 300 buses that may not be able to be produced for five years or something like that?

Mr WIELINGA: The short answer is I do not. Buses from Europe and America have different dimensions to Australian buses. But, if they have a proposal that we can look at on its merits, we will.

CHAIR: So it would be difficult to import the buses, you are saying, at this stage unless the buses were modified for Australian purposes?

Mr WIELINGA: Yes. For example, in Europe they have a 2.55-metre width for buses. The standard right around Australia is 2.5 metres. In America some of the buses are 2.6 metres wide. There are some safety issues associated with that. The buses from overseas tend to be a bit larger, a bit higher and have longer overhangs than the Australian buses. They carry more weight on individual axles than our standards. But those buses can still be manufactured overseas to Australian standards. For example, the chassis can be built overseas and brought into Australia and the rest of the bus built around it. But if they need to get buses faster and they have a particular model they want us to look at, we will look at it.

CHAIR: I note in the budget papers there is another measure to reduce the budget expenses. It says on page 8-9 you are consolidating testing locations across greater Sydney, the Illawarra, Hunter and the Central Coast. What would that involve?

Mr WIELINGA: What we are talking about is the driver testing part of obtaining a licence. Just for driver testing we are looking at expanding that into an education arrangement as well. It means we put together critical mass of driver testing so it makes it easier for people to get in and get tested. We think it will make things happen faster. We think it will facilitate us to have a random selection of driver tester so people do not get the same one each time they go back to a motor registry. There are a number of advantages in doing it that

way. The key is to set it up in such a way that we can cover areas appropriately and minimise any inconvenience to the people of those metropolitan areas.

CHAIR: The word "consolidate" seemed to suggest reducing the number. Is there a reduction in the testing locations?

Mr WIELINGA: We are doing a combination of things. We are improving the driver testing but we are not closing any motor registries or expanding those motor registries to provide other services.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: When we were together last you spoke of the second part of the filtration trial of the M5 tunnel, which, I understand, you expected to have significant benefits. Why has there not been a call for expressions of interest and when will the call be issued?

Mr WIELINGA: Is this for the current trial that is going on at the moment?

Ms LEE RHIANNON: No, you talked about a second part of the filtration trial.

Mr WIELINGA: I think I might have mentioned last time we were going to put a roof cavity in.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Is that what you call the second part?

Mr WIELINGA: That is the second part of it, yes.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Can you explain where that is up to?

Mr WIELINGA: We are writing the specification at the moment. I think I might have mentioned last time, to do that we were getting some input from Mark Curran from RAPS.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: When will the call be issued for expressions of interest?

Mr WIELINGA: Can I come back to you on that, please? I do not have an exact date.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: It is my understanding that the Roads and Traffic Authority does congestion modelling. In that congestion modelling have you ascertained how much worse congestion will be after the decision to axe so many of New South Wales vital infrastructure projects like the North West Metro, jet cats? I noted and commend you on your joy of working with buses.

Mr WIELINGA: I was fair dinkum about it. I am not kidding.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: I knew you would be. Has the Roads and Traffic Authority been working with transport officials to key in these cuts to your congestion modelling?

Mr WIELINGA: I said earlier that we were waiting for Infrastructure Australia and AusLink 2 to announce. We will know then what the final products are. The modelling is done in the Centre for Project and Product Development in the Ministry of Transport. It looks at what is happening with Sydney from land use and from infrastructure and models what it expects to be the mode share. I expect that modelling will be updated when we know the final suite of projects that we are going to do.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.