

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 6 - TRANSPORT

Wednesday 31 August 2022

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

REGIONAL TRANSPORT AND ROADS

UNCORRECTED

The Committee met at 9:30.

MEMBERS

Ms Abigail Boyd (Chair)
The Hon. Mark Banasiak (Deputy Chair)
The Hon. Scott Farlow
The Hon. John Graham
The Hon. Peter Primrose
The Hon. Chris Rath

PRESENT

The Hon. Sam Farraway, *Minister for Regional Transport and Roads*

* Please note:

[inaudible] is used when audio words cannot be deciphered.

[audio malfunction] is used when words are lost due to a technical malfunction.

[disorder] is used when members or witnesses speak over one another.

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

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

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

The CHAIR: Welcome to the initial public hearing for the inquiry into budget estimates 2022-2023. I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians on the lands on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today and anybody who is watching this online. I also make special mention and remind members and witnesses that the New South Wales Parliament has a partnership arrangement with the parliaments of the autonomous region of Bougainville and the Solomon Islands. This twinning arrangement provides the opportunity to enhance relations between our parliaments, exchange information and learn from each other.

Many members of Parliament, including those who have been fortunate enough to visit Bougainville as part of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association program, have found the twinning arrangement to be extremely informative and rewarding. At our hearing on Friday, Minister Elliott made offensive and racist comments about Bougainville. On behalf of the Committee, I apologise for these unnecessary and derisive comments being aired as part of our proceedings. We value our relationship with the Bougainville Parliament and can assure the people of Bougainville that the bigoted views expressed by Minister Elliott are not reflective of the views of this Parliament.

I welcome Minister Sam Faraway and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of Regional Transport and Roads. Before we commence, I will make some brief comments about the procedures for today's hearing. Today's hearing is being broadcast live via the Parliament's website. The proceedings are also being recorded, and a transcript will be placed on the Committee's website once it becomes available. In accordance with the broadcasting guidelines, media representatives are reminded that they must take responsibility for what they publish about the Committee's proceedings.

All witnesses in budget estimates have a right to procedural fairness according to the procedural fairness resolution adopted by the House in 2018. There may be some questions that a witness could answer only if they had more time or with certain documents to hand. In these circumstances and these circumstances only, witnesses are advised that they can take a question on notice and provide an answer within 21 days. If witnesses wish to hand up documents, they should do so through the Committee staff. Minister, I remind you and the officers accompanying you that you are, indeed, free to pass notes and refer directly to your advisers seated at the table behind you. Finally, everyone should turn their mobile phones to silent for the duration of the hearing.

All witnesses will be sworn prior to giving evidence. Minister Faraway, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn as you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament. I also remind the following witnesses that you do not need to be sworn as you have been sworn at an earlier budget estimates hearing before this Committee: Mr Rob Sharp, Ms Camilla Drover, Ms Tara McCarthy, Mr Joost de Kock and Mr Bernard Carlon.

Mr MATT FULLER, Deputy Secretary, Regional and Outer Metropolitan, Transport for NSW, sworn and examined

Mr DALE MERRICK, Chief Operating Officer, NSW Trains, Transport for NSW, affirmed and examined

Mr BERNARD CARLON, Chief, Centre for Road Safety and Maritime Safety, Transport for NSW, on former oath

Mr PETER ALLAWAY, Chief Customer Officer, Regional and Outer Metropolitan, Transport for NSW, sworn and examined

Mr ANTHONY HAYES, Executive Director, Community and Place, Transport for NSW, affirmed and examined

Ms BARBARA WISE, Executive Director, Transport Partnerships, Regional and Outer Metropolitan, Transport for NSW, affirmed and examined

Ms CYNTHIA HEYDON, Executive Director, Planning and Programs, Regional and Outer Metropolitan, Transport for NSW, affirmed and examined

Mr ROB SHARP, Secretary, Transport for NSW, on former oath

Mr JOOST de KOCK, Deputy Secretary, Customer Strategy and Technology, Transport for NSW, on former affirmation

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

Ms TARA McCARTHY, Deputy Secretary, Safety Environment and Regulation, Transport for NSW, on former oath

The CHAIR: Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.30 a.m. to 12.45 p.m., with a 15-minute break at 11.00 a.m. We are joined by the Minister in the morning only, and in the afternoon we will hear from departmental witnesses from 2.00 p.m. to 5.15 p.m., with a 15-minute break at 3.30 p.m. During these sessions, there will be questions from the Opposition and crossbench members only. If required, an additional 15 minutes is allocated at the end of the morning and afternoon sessions for Government questions. Thank you all for your attendance today. We will begin with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Good morning, Minister. I just have a few questions, if I can, to begin with. Former Minister for Transport and Roads Andrew Constance said on 27 February 2020:

It is vital that Transport for NSW ensures that measures are in place to provide clear pathways to safety for community members and emergency service vehicles.

The regional and outer metropolitan division asset and services plan called for the development of a resilient transport network program. Can you please let us know where that program is up to and how much funding has been allocated to it?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I certainly don't have the answer on hand. I might refer to either Rob Sharp or Matt Fuller on that point.

ROB SHARP: The Road Resilience Program is focused on ensuring access, particularly during bushfires and floods. There has been a review, particularly in the southern regions, where we had extensive old timber trees falling on the roads and unable to be removed. That has been a program focusing on clearing those trees. That has actually enabled a safe passageway through that in the case of bushfires. That program continues. I will just hand over to Mr Fuller.

MATT FULLER: Thank you, Mr Sharp and Minister. As the secretary has said, the program obviously is ongoing, and particularly if you think about the recent events across the State and what we have seen in terms of the resilience requirements. Obviously resilience is a key component of everything we do in the regional division of Transport in terms of—it starts in the very early assessment and planning of the works that we are doing, our major project delivery, through to what we are thinking about in terms of how we respond to events that happen around the State, not just natural disasters, but other events that prompt us to think about access and ensuring the vital connections that exist for communities.

We have undertaken an enormous amount of work on resilience of the network. It has been well publicised, obviously, the issues across the State in terms of connectivity to different regions at different times during the unprecedented events that we have seen through natural disasters, but also the sustained wet and what

that has meant for our network. But the planning, as Mr Sharp said, is ongoing. At the moment, specifically, there are a number of things that are being undertaken: planning works in terms of the mapping and assessing vulnerability points across the network. We, of course, will be working in with the independent flood inquiry recommendations that highlight a State-based view in terms of critical connections and evacuation routes and the other areas of the independent flood inquiry that talk about different forms of modelling and things. So there is lots going on in that space at the moment. One of the other things that we are doing is we go back after every single event and we assess what has happened on the network and what we can do to improve the network in an ongoing sense.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Minister, can I just zero in now and basically ask what have you actually done? Presumably, given the importance of this and the amount of effort you say you are putting in, there would be a list of the projects that have been completed and there presumably would be a list of projected projects that you would complete, say, over the next two financial years. Are they available?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Yes, we can certainly table those. But obviously through February, March and April of this year, as has already been highlighted by the secretary and the deputy secretary, large parts of the network were significantly impacted. We will get you a list of what we have on hand before the end of estimates.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Thank you, including what you have done and what you plan to do over the next two financial years. I also ask about the funding allocation, Minister. Can you inform us of what that is?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: For?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: For the resilient transport network program.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Is this in regards to the \$312.5 million that we announced through the betterment fund or are you referring to what we have spent in the 2021 financial year?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Both. I am asking what was your allocation and expenditure, and now what is the proposed allocation. How much money has been allocated for this?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Firstly, it was estimated that approximately half a billion dollars—\$500 million—was spent on flood recovery efforts during the 2021 financial year across New South Wales. In April of this year I was able to negotiate with the former Federal Government a \$312.5 million transport and roads betterment fund for northern New South Wales. This will provide funding in addition to natural disaster declaration funding, whether that be category B or D funding. This is essentially the first time in this State's history that we will have some form of what could be referred to as a betterment fund. That fund will assist the 26 LGAs in northern New South Wales that were disaster declared post that March natural disaster and flooding event. That will assist those 26 LGAs to build back infrastructure better, and that is exactly what the community has been calling on. They want their infrastructure to be built back better. That will mean that we need to build resilience into that infrastructure and that we will need to build it back so it can sustain weather events more often.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: So if I ask for a breakdown of the allocations that have been made from the resilience infrastructure project development fund, would I be able to obtain that?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I will endeavour to get you that information before the end of estimates.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Is there such a fund?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Well, that is different to the fund that I just quoted from. The fund I just quoted from was the Regional Roads and Transport Recovery Package that I announced with the Federal Government in April of this year. That is separate to the estimated expenditure of half a billion dollars that we spent last financial year. I will see what more details we have on hand before the end of estimates.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: To help me understand, Minister, maybe you could also give us a list—and please take it on notice—of the number of different funds that are being drawn upon to actually provide the resilience that you are talking about. From what you have said, it seems that there are a number of different funds and allocations coming from various sources. It would be useful, I think, for the Committee to know what those sources are.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I think it's something that can be explored in more detail, definitely, in the afternoon session. What I would say, Mr Primrose, is that you are right. The Government has more than one funding stream and program available to communities across regional New South Wales that have been impacted by natural disasters, whether that be the bushfire event, where there was specific funding available for those communities impacted by bushfires, or the flooding that has occurred over the last two years, to be frank, and is

obviously compounding to the significant event in March of this year. That flooding triggered my negotiations with the former Federal Government to establish the Regional Roads and Transport Recovery Package.

We are happy to get you details on the different programs by the end of estimates today, but I think the reality is that there is a lot of funding available for regional communities. This is in addition to, Mr Primrose, obviously, natural disaster declaration funding, whether that be category B or D funding. It is in addition to the almost \$65 million to \$69 million that the New South Wales Government, through Transport for NSW, was able to advance local government areas in direct response to the March event. That allowed councils the cashflow to be able to reconnect local roads quickly, to outline areas and to fill potholes. It was the funding that they needed immediately to address emergency works.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Minister, I appreciate that and welcome your commitment to providing that list. Could that list also please contain—I would be interested in the figures of funding available for each of those programs that you will be providing by the end of estimates.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: How about we be clear about exactly what you are asking for? You would like to know what resilience infrastructure packages that relate to road infrastructure are available?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Yes.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: From this year's budget?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Let's begin from this year's budget, and how much funding is available in each.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: We will endeavour to come back to you before the end of estimates and you can explore this.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I appreciate that, Minister. If not, we will ask it at the supplementary. It would help our questions to be more accurate. Has Transport for NSW quantified road damage that was caused by the recent flood events?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: We have been able to quantify some statistics, yes, on our State road network. I have spoken about this, Mr Primrose, in Parliament several times. But, just to confirm, from the latest stats that we have, some of the key statistics are that 2,000 kilometres of roads sustained damage, including State and local roads. The initial estimates indicate that the damage to the State regional and local road network from the March events is \$1.5 billion. To confirm, approximately \$1.3 billion of that \$1.5 billion is the estimated cost to repair the local road network—that is, obviously, the road network administered by local government—and an estimated \$150 million cost to repairs to our State—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Have you been able to disaggregate that by local government areas?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I suspect to a degree, which you can explore later in the day on the specifics. But, yes, we are working directly. This is the March event for northern New South Wales that I am referring to. Those figures relate to the regional transport network. Obviously, we have discussed State versus local roads, but it has been informed by the LGA. It is where Transport for NSW is working and collaborating directly on the ground with those local councils.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: So you have disaggregated it and that is a document that is available to the Committee?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: It's internal data that Transport for NSW have. I am sure that we could supply some of that informed data that we have throughout the day.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: How about we get that when it is available? Thank you, Minister.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, to your credit, you have updated the Parliament about some of those figures. The \$1.5 billion figure, without checking back to your parliamentary comments—is that slightly higher than the update you gave the Parliament?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, I believe that is the most up-to-date data and that would reflect the last time I spoke about it in Parliament. Again, it would be, just to be clear, approximately \$150 million to our State highway and road network and approximately \$1.3 billion to the local and regional road network.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, understood. That is for the March event, but what about assessments of damage for the subsequent events? Do we have those?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: For northern New South Wales?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: For our regional transport network.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Yes. Transport for NSW are constantly working with local government right across regional New South Wales, assessing flooding and damage events, whether it be the March event, whether it be the subsequent event after that or whether it be the flooding events, obviously, through 2020 and 2021 also, where claims are lodged from local governments through Resilience NSW through disaster declaration funding to repair that infrastructure.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Putting those comments aside, you have been very specific on the northern damage to the transport network. Do you have that sort of specific information for the subsequent damage? It has been a particularly rough few months.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Well, we have other data. Across the board, \$30 million has been the estimated cost in repairs to our commuter rail lines within the regional and outer metro network. Now, that's a statewide figure. I don't think it's consolidated to just northern New South Wales. Seventy-three State roads were closed due to the March flooding event. We have discussed the over 2,000 kilometres of damage to the State road network from that March flooding event. We can get you, probably—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We are still in March, though. I am really interested in that post-March event, given it's been so tough. As you know, damage on damage is even harder to—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: The short answer is yes. Transport is working with local government areas right across the State in the events before March and post-March. I would ask if Mr Fuller has anything else we want to add but there would be more data we could draw on from Transport for NSW.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I appreciate it. But, to my colleague's question, what's the assessment of the total damage to the regional transport network after those March events?

MATT FULLER: Thank you for the question. Basically, what Transport has been doing is, obviously, on our own part in terms of the statewide network, and then on behalf of local government, is compiling and providing that information into the State Recovery Centre in terms of the statewide view and dashboard about the impact and the cumulative impact on the road networks overall. The numbers that the Minister talked about, some of those are estimates that have been provided by local government areas. They haven't necessarily been quantity surveyed or they haven't had projects that have been developed specifically, but on the face of it local government areas have provided us with a breakdown of the number of issues—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Mr Fuller, this is useful context but it is not the question you were asked. Do have an estimate of the post-March events' damage to the regional transport network?

MATT FULLER: We have a cumulative estimate and we can provide that for you, yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Do we know what it is? Can you provide that now?

MATT FULLER: Roughly it is about \$1.5 billion but I'll get the exact figures and come back.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And that's on top of the March—

MATT FULLER: No, the 1.5 is a cumulative total that picks up the 28 February, March events and then July events for the State.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And it is statewide, not just for the north?

MATT FULLER: It's statewide, yes. It has been a number that has sort of been further and further defined. In the early stages some of the estimates were a bit rougher than what they are now so there is a bit more detail. As I said, that number has been communicated through our central area that works in with the State Recovery Committee and provided on a statewide view.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Minister, many local councils have accessed the disaster funding to repair infrastructure, but one of the things that causes many of them to scratch their heads is the Government decision to not allow them to use their own day labour to undertake those works, and to require them to use contractors. Why has the Government made that decision?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I was just referring to my colleague because I don't believe that that is accurate. It is not mandated that they cannot use their own internal workforce and crews. It's an opt-in option. It is a decision they have. The reality is, Mr Primrose, that we can't be mandating who can and can't do this stuff because there are capacity challenges across regional New South Wales, in particular, where there have been natural disasters. We need as many people involved in the process as possible. Many hands make light work, and the reality is that we are working as closely as ever with local government through our processes to ensure that

when we rebuild this infrastructure, we are also offering the expertise, the advice, or even additional out-of-scope resources to help them deliver that.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Thank you. Minister, can I go back to those same councils now and say that you think it would be nuts to require them to use contractors instead of their own day labour?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, my point is they have a choice.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Okay. You say they've definitely got a choice. They don't have to use contractors. They can use their day labour.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: They have a choice.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: That is certainly—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: If they have opted in to do that, obviously.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Well, that is certainly something.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Just let me finish, Mr Primrose. That is, obviously, at the prerogative of the local council as to whether they opt in to that process. It is not something that we have defined that is cut and dry, that is, either a complete yes or a complete no; it is at the discretion of local council whether they have opted in. You would suggest that more councils should opt in if they want to use their local workforce.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: That is good news, and I will pass that back to them.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Just one last point: Not one council I have met with—and I have met with almost every northern New South Wales council since the March event, and also the overwhelming majority of councils across New South Wales, not all, but most. Not one council has raised that with me.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Okay, good. The Premier has been talking about "build back better" for Lismore. What does that look like for road rebuilding, please, Minister?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: It goes exactly to the \$312.5 million program that we announced in April. Now, that is, as I said, the first time in New South Wales history that we will have a betterment fund. I have spoken about this in Parliament many a time, and this is \$156 million for a fifty-fifty contribution model from the New South Wales Government and, obviously, a 50 per cent contribution from the Commonwealth. This is exactly what the local community have been calling for, whether it be council staff, general managers, mayors, business chambers—just community leaders and community members—that communities want their infrastructure rebuilt.

I think they appreciate that with the scale, size and scope of the damage, in particular, in northern New South Wales, we can't rebuild that back immediately or overnight. It will take time. It is a journey where we need to go on that journey together. They do now have the certainty that they have a funding program and pool of funds available to draw down on, or to apply for very shortly, that will allow them to build back better, to do exactly that—whether it is replacing a timber bridge with a concrete bridge so when the waters subside at the next weather event, that piece of infrastructure is still there and can be reconnecting those communities far quicker than what we have done in the past.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Do you have a program and some dates for the completion of those individual works?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Firstly, some of the works we are talking about are incredibly complex. They are of a scale that even locals in that region, and directors of technical services within councils, have never seen in their working career or lifetime. It is going to be a complex journey ahead. Firstly, we have announced that that funding is available. I have worked with the new Commonwealth Government in Canberra. Obviously, there has been an election. There is a new Government; they are getting their heads across it. The government agencies have been working together very closely where we will be opening these applications in the very near future. Transport for NSW will be doing the assessment of these applications and, it is fair to say, the crew and team within Transport doing the assessments won't be surprised by what applications are being put in because discussions have already been taking place for the last, I would say, six, seven, or eight weeks between Transport and local councils about what are their top three projects that they wish to submit in the first round of this funding when it is open very shortly, so they can work with them.

We have even gone as far as to have a new pilot model in Lismore where we have embedded a very smart gentleman by the name of Andrew who is going to project manage all the road and transport infrastructure rebuild internally for Lismore City Council. He has started, and he reports to the general manager of Lismore City Council. And this model has worked. We have tried this before in another council area. Lismore City Council wanted this

sort of help. They wanted to have someone help them manage, holistically, their rebuild and to have an expert in there that can deal with the complexity of some of these rebuilds.

The CHAIR: Does Andrew have a last name?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We're just seeking an assurance that it is not the former Minister.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: It is not Andrew Constance.

The CHAIR: Minister, I want to ask you about the Great Western Highway upgrade, which I believe falls within your portfolio. It is always difficult to know which project falls in which transport Minister's portfolio.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I talk about it every parliamentary sitting; you should know it sits with me.

The CHAIR: I understand that the project cost is around \$8 billion but that the business case for the project hasn't been released. Are you able to tell us what the benefit-cost ratio is for that project?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Not today, because the New South Wales Government does not release business cases whilst we are in the market, tendering projects within the marketplace. We are in the market as we speak here today, on east and west sections. But the business case is there. It has been through the Infrastructure NSW assurance gateway process. It's also listed with Infrastructure Australia's priority list. With the 34 kilometres of road surface duplication works that we are pushing ahead with, it has an 80 per cent Commonwealth Government contribution to. It has been through the INSW and Infrastructure Australia processes, and we don't release business cases on something that is contractually in the market and of a sensitive nature. But in time to come—

The CHAIR: But in terms of the benefit-cost ratio, can you not tell us that?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Well, it obviously passes in order to pass through the INSW assurance gateway process.

The CHAIR: Did it pass a little bit? Did it pass a lot?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: To be listed on the Infrastructure Australia priority list, it clearly, obviously, passes the criteria that we have set.

The CHAIR: I'm not sure that follows.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: If you would like specifics around the business case and the processes—

The CHAIR: I would.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —Camilla Drover is here today, and she is probably the best person to ask in that respect.

The CHAIR: Ms Drover, can you tell me the number?

CAMILLA DROVER: No. In fact, we're finalising the business case for the central section as well, so we're still confirming the cost associated with that, which would inform the business case.

The CHAIR: So we don't actually have a number? It's not that you won't tell me; it's that we don't have one.

CAMILLA DROVER: We haven't finalised it, particularly for that central section.

The CHAIR: Understood. Minister, I understand that we haven't had the most stringent type of environmental assessment for this project. It clearly runs through one of the world's most important protected areas. Can you explain why you haven't questioned Transport for NSW's decision not to have the most stringent type of environmental assessment for this project?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Well, firstly, Ms Boyd, we have REFs in place. Firstly, the Great Western Highway is comprised of four major update grades, and they're all unique, obviously, in some part in their nature as well. But we do have the REF processes that are underway, and we have three of them: The Katoomba to Blackheath, which is our east section; we have the Medlow Bath upgrade, which is assessed by its own REF; and the Little Hartley to Lithgow, the west section, in its own REF.

The CHAIR: But you don't have an all-project EIS, do you?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, because we are expanding an existing road corridor, and I believe that the review of environmental factors process and criteria are appropriate for the upgrade with the road surface

duplication that we are setting out to do. I did engage with the community, and there were concerns that each individual REF would be only considered by itself, but we made those changes several months ago where those REFs will be linked in considerations from REF to REF so that there is an understanding of the outcomes of what comes out of those REFs on one versus the other. It's fair to say that the three upgrades that we're talking about with road surface duplication are different to the central section. It is different to building a tunnel. As we progress the central section, we will move to an EIS for the tunnel—for the central section—because, in my view, it would be required as our processes, but it is also a new piece of infrastructure that will have an impact on the environment. It is not part of the existing piece of infrastructure; it's a new tunnel. By definition, we should see an EIS for the central section.

The CHAIR: But Transport for NSW's own legal advisers recommended that Transport for NSW conduct an environmental impact statement for the entire proposed upgrade. That has not been done. Why was that advice not followed?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Well, I believe that the review of environmental factors process is appropriate for expanding existing road corridors and road infrastructure.

The CHAIR: Is that on the basis of your extensive environmental science knowledge?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, it's based on that we are expanding and enhancing existing road infrastructure on existing—

The CHAIR: You are, but you are doing it through the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage area.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Ms Boyd, you've asked a question. I am trying to answer it.

The CHAIR: With respect, Minister, your answers are very long. The Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage area, one of the world's most important protected areas—there has been a recommendation that you conduct an environmental impact statement for the entire proposed upgrade. You've chosen not to do that because you personally are satisfied that it's not necessary because it's a road.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, I have consulted with Transport for NSW. I took on board community consultation and feedback that they wanted the considerations that come out of REFs, one to be considered against the other, which is what we agreed to do months ago, which was a change in policy, and I did that on the back of community feedback. Again, myself, I believe that the review of environmental factors is an appropriate process to use when looking to enhance and expand an existing road corridor.

The CHAIR: That was not the legal advice of Transport for NSW, though. What makes you think that you have superior knowledge?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: When you build new infrastructure that is not part of the existing corridor, like the 11-kilometre tunnel that will form part of the central section, I accept that we will be needing to do a full EIS on that infrastructure because that is new infrastructure that is not part of an existing corridor or an existing piece of tunnel infrastructure.

The CHAIR: What are you worried that an entire EIS for the entire project might show? If you understand anything about what an EIS would actually look at and if you understood anything about, for instance, wildlife corridors and the like, you would understand the need to have an entire all-project EIS as recommended by Transport for NSW's legal advisers. What are you worried that one would actually show?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I'm not worried about anything. I have been very clear: I believe that the review of environmental factors process is appropriate for the road surface duplication that is part of the east and west sections, as well as the Medlow Bath upgrade.

The CHAIR: Can you give us an accurate estimate of how much additional Federal money will be needed to finance the tunnel?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I will pass over—I am happy to talk about dialogue I have had with the Federal Government, but in terms of the approximate costings to date, I might hand over to Camilla Drover.

CAMILLA DROVER: As I said earlier, we're still finalising the business case for the central section. Also, when we do the EIS for that central section, we will also understand the impacts and the planning conditions. Those two activities will form up what the expected budget is for that central section and, therefore, we can approach the Federal Government with more certainty about what the funding gap is.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Minister, if that funding is not made available or sufficient funding from the Federal Government is not made available, will you instead be considering having two shorter, less costly tunnels: one under Blackheath and one under Mount Victoria?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Firstly it has been decided that the vision of the New South Wales Government is to create as much efficiency as possible for the Great Western Highway. You have heard me say over and over again that this Government is planning and has a real vision and motivation to make the Western Highway great again. I think an 11-kilometre long road tunnel is the way to do that. It will reduce congestion by up to 30 minutes in peak travel times.

The CHAIR: Sure, I understand that that's the preference. But if the funding doesn't come through from the Feds, is it true that Transport for NSW is considering having two shorter tunnels?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Well, firstly, what I would say, Ms Boyd, is that on the initial advice and findings that have been done on the concept and design of two short tunnels and one long tunnel, when I made that decision on behalf of the New South Wales Government on settling on what it would look like, some of the considerations were that there was not a great deal of cost difference between having two short tunnels and one long tunnel. There were also better environmental outcomes for the project to have one long tunnel.

The CHAIR: That's comforting.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Welcome, Minister. Just picking up on your answer to the Hon. Peter Primrose about meeting all of the local councils, have they raised concerns about Resilience NSW's role in this process in terms of it making it a lot more difficult in terms of submitting claims and getting money to them and getting projects underway? Have you heard that concern?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: With regard to the March flooding event?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Or even the previous ones.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Councils have raised with me dialogue that they have had with Resilience NSW on the 2020 and 2021 flooding events. I am talking more broadly across the entire part of regional New South Wales. I wouldn't say a lot of councils. I would say a very small handful have raised with me the grading process and the work that is done between Resilience NSW and Transport for NSW. Where those concerns were raised with me, I have raised them with the Minister responsible for Resilience NSW, Steph Cooke. I've also spoken internally within Transport, and we've been able to progress some of those issues. But I would say, Mr Banasiak, that I haven't had an overwhelming view put to me by councils that there are underlying issues. I have had put to me some specific small issues by councils, and some of them were actually probably more in western New South Wales.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: You said you've been able to progress some of those issues. Which ones haven't you been able to progress?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Of the small handful of issues that have been raised with me, I think, to hand, we've been able to progress all of them. To answer your question as well, there hasn't been that concern with recent flooding and natural disaster events because I've worked very closely with my bureaucrats and with my agency to ensure that Transport for NSW is on the front foot, in particular post March events. That's why we advanced that almost \$65 million to \$69 million to councils—to get them that funding and cashflow straightaway, within a week of the flooding event, to reconnect roads, to deploy more crews and to hire equipment. We're focused very much on getting the job done and supporting them. We sent in geotechnical advisers. We sent in engineers. We've offered project managers. We are now going to the next step in our collaboration with local government, saying this isn't just all about money. Sometimes we may have technical advice and resources. The way we advanced that money is we literally paid for it from Transport and we, as Transport for NSW, claimed it back from the Federal Government through Resilience NSW.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: So it sounds from that description, in terms of what you have done in stepping up a bit more, is that you've almost sidestepped Resilience NSW?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, in fairness, Resilience NSW have a massive task ahead of them. They have communities like we have seen in Lismore that have massive community issues, with community infrastructure and with a housing crisis that they are working day in and day out to ensure that they address. There was definitely a role for Transport to lead from the front in and around the roads, regional roads and transport space. And that's exactly what we've done. We are feeding our operations, what we do, directly into the NRRC. We're feeding it into Resilience NSW. I update Minister Cooke. I update the Deputy Premier. And it is important, these communities having so much to deal with, that we as Transport for NSW, and as the regional and outer metro division, can lead from the front. Because we have the right people, the right expertise, the resources and the ability to deploy those resources, with the relationships that we have on the ground, to get the job done. Because, let's face it: All the community care about, all I and Transport care about, is getting in there, getting the

job done and making sure we're effective, we're responsive and that we're getting that connectivity back for those communities.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Thank you for that. Can I just go to another particular issue with Wee Waa High School and Transport's role in that in terms of the traffic management and—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Sorry, what was the question again?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: The new proposed Wee Waa High School site and Transport for NSW's view in terms of how traffic will be managed in terms of dropping off and picking up kids et cetera, and bus routes. Minister, are you aware that your agency raised concerns over the proposed traffic plan for that new site?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: No.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, I'm not aware of it, Mr Banasiak, and it appears that the agency isn't either.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Okay. Maybe to assist, I might get the secretariat to hand you up a document.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: But I am familiar with the new Wee Waa High School. I've visited that site. I've spent a fair bit of time in the Wee Waa community—very good people. Now there will be a lot of investment and action in Wee Waa. It's a great place.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: It's definitely long overdue, that school. But my concern here directly relates to the safety of the kids. Having stood outside a number of schools in my previous career, I know how easily it can go wrong when you add kids and cars.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I'll take that on notice for the moment, Mr Banasiak, and I'll endeavour to come back to you before the end of estimates.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I do have some follow-up questions on it. Would you like me to wait?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I think if you wouldn't mind waiting, allow myself and the agency to perhaps come back to you during estimates today to allow for those follow-up questions.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: No problems at all. Can I just go to the Tamworth intermodal, and I appreciate that this is now a project that council has responsibility for. But my line of questioning is essentially around Transport for NSW's role in terms of the upgrade of the line, what they knew and how they made their assessments as to the viability of investing \$34.5 million in upgrading that line, given that there is still no business case for the Tamworth intermodal and the business park. Minister, can you tell me—and I appreciate this is before your time—when Transport for NSW first became involved in this proposal?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Firstly, the \$35-odd million commitment is for the—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: The upgrade?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: The rail reinstatement.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Yes.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: That's funded, obviously, from New South Wales Government but that's not funded from a Transport for NSW funding program. It's administered by Transport for NSW, but that funding comes from the Department of Regional NSW. I actually think your question is better directed to the Deputy Premier.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I asked the Deputy Premier these questions in estimates previously and didn't really get satisfactory answers.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: He's in the other room today.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I know.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Head on over.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I could. Some of those answers raise questions about Transport for NSW's involvement, particularly the fact that he mentions that you now own that asset. So whether you administer the funding or not, you now own that asset in terms of those upgraded lines, which essentially go to nowhere. Because the intermodal, from all reports, has now been delayed with no indication as to when it will be completed.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: To confirm, the \$35 million investment is from the Department of Regional NSW, administered by Transport for NSW. It is for the entire project, which includes the rail reinstatement.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Which has been—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I've been there, Mr Banasiak.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: So have I.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I know exactly what you're talking about. I've been there with the local member Kevin Anderson. The project is finished.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I appreciate the railway line is.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: It is now up to Tamworth Regional Council and private operator Qube to commence their works at the intermodal terminal in Tamworth. The latest advice I have is that that will be happening in the very near future.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: When did you receive that advice? Because it was in the news I think a week-and-a-half ago saying it has been delayed.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: The latest advice I have is that it is now up to Tamworth Regional Council, with private operator Qube, to commence their overall operations and their construction and mobilisation works at that intermodal terminal. The latest I've heard is that that is happening in due course. It's happening in the near future. You'd have to direct the question to Tamworth Regional Council.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: My questions are directed to you in terms of Transport's ownership of this line. Do you agree, you own this line, which has been upgraded and which currently stops before the intermodal project? Do you own that line? My understanding is that you do.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I'll throw to Matt Fuller to answer your question. Transport for NSW did own the existing rail corridor and line. Now it's about putting that into operation as an intermodal terminal. Mr Fuller can confirm the specifics around that, but the point should also be made that all the works that needed to be administered by Transport for NSW have been completed. I can confirm now that Transport have been advised there are some delays in finalising the final part of the terminal and executing the contract between Qube, which is a private logistics company, and their base load customers. But that is really a question, I think, that you need to ask probably Tamworth Regional Council, who are working directly with Qube. With regard to Transport for NSW's involvement, our involvement is now complete. The works are completed that we administered on behalf of the \$35 million investment made via the Department of Regional NSW on behalf of the New South Wales Government.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: My concerns are about the due diligence that your agency took in administering that \$34.5 million. My time has elapsed, so unless Mr Fuller has a quick answer—

MATT FULLER: I'm very happy to say that it is not just Transport administering the funds. We were responsible for reinstating the non-operational line that was part of the country rail network, which we have done. The \$35 million is a Regional NSW administered and governed program. Transport was delivering our part in the line reinstatement, and obviously the funding relates to the overall project and the development of the intermodal as a whole.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Quickly, you had no involvement in the cost-benefit ratio calculation?

MATT FULLER: We would have obviously provided assessments around costs of reinstating the line, including things like the level crossings and the other appropriate infrastructure that was required to support that. We would have obviously been involved in terms of the assessment but not in terms of the establishment of the intermodal and the commercials—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: It is a question directly for Regional NSW because it's their funding stream and program. It's their criteria. We literally are nuts-and-bolts operational around line reinstatement, the works in and around the CRN line and network—we have done what we need to do. I think the issue is that your questions should be directed, really, to the Deputy Premier's office because they relate to funding and a criteria that is developed through the Department of Regional NSW.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: We'll pick up on the due diligence thing in the next round.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you, Minister. Before the last election, we were told that we could have it all. One of the specific commitments that your Government made in February 2019 was that up to

15,000 kilometres of council-owned roads would be returned to State management as part of a broader package of support for local councils to better manage and maintain the rural road network. I wanted to ask you some questions about the progress on that commitment from February 2019. Have the independent panel delivered their final report to you?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: When will it be delivered to you?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: In the last correspondence with the independent panel, they have advised that they will be in a position to close out their consultation, grading and assessment and deliver the final report to me before the end of the year.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: When will you make the record public when you receive it?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: One, I have to receive it first. Two, I have to review it. Three, I need to take a whole-of-government approach to that as well. Once I receive the report, review the report and work through the processes of government around a whole-of-government response, as well as my own, the report will be made public at the same time that the Government's response is made public.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Give us some sense of how long that might be. We've had a history—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I don't know, Mr Graham. I need to receive the report first. But in terms of progress, if you want to know a bit of a time line on where things are up to—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, that would be useful.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Firstly, we are working through the priority rounds. Now, the priority round, as you have often asked in questions in Parliament, revolves around the 400 kilometres that have been identified for either reclassification or transfer as soon as possible, or as a priority. Now, 37 recommendations were made as part of the priority round. Transport for NSW have delivered 16 of them. They were delivered in tranche one. They were gazetted, I don't know, I reckon at least a month ago now. So tranche one is delivered. We are working towards tranche two of the priority round. We have budgeted a quarter of a billion dollars that is parked there for the priority round so we can progress that part of the policy and program. The full round of applications closes at the end of February. If you remember, in the discussions we've had today around flooding, exemptions were given to flood-impacted communities in early March as well.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: That did slow down the process slightly because we gave them some additional time to get back to business as usual and get their applications in. But I can confirm that the application period is well and truly closed. The independent panel have received approximately 500 applications, which could be for either reclassification or transfer or a combination of both.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Correct, yes. From how many councils?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I don't have that figure.

MATT FULLER: From 78.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Sorry, 78. We do.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So 500 applications from 78 councils?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: So 78 councils have submitted, which forms 500 total applications. But bear in mind that I don't have the breakdown between what is an application for reclassification and what is an application for transfer.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, understood.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Wendy Machin, leading that independent panel, is working through that process. I know they are engaging with the freight sector and I know they are meeting with our Freight Transport Advisory Council that I set up. They are meeting with them in September to also progress their reporting but to obviously get an idea from the freight sector about what is a priority for them.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That's a crucial economic question.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Beyond that, we will wait to see the report when it's delivered to me before the end of the year.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So 500 applications, 78 councils. How many kilometres been applied for, either reclassification or transfer?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: That I don't have on hand.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Do your officials perhaps have that on hand?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I would need to check, but I don't think the independent panel has shared how many kilometres. I'm happy to say that in my last dialogue with my office with the panel, what they shared was approximately 500 applications, 78 councils, and they were working through what was a reclassification application and what was a transfer application.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: When was that last dialogue with the panel? Just give us a rough idea.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I don't know. A month ago.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. And turning back to your—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Approximately a month ago.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, thank you. Turning back to your views about the priority round, that 400 kilometres of reclassification or transfer, 37 recommendations supported—tranche one, 16 projects completed about a month ago. How many of those were reclassification only and how many were reclassification and transfer, given that those 37 were a mix of both?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I am happy to confirm, which you may already have, that of the 37 recommendations that were made in the priority round, 32 were classification reviews and five were transfer reviews. In terms of the 16 delivered in tranche one, my understanding is that all 16 were classification. That is tranche one. I have met with Transport for NSW and they are progressing tranche two. Tranche two, I believe, may include some of the transfers.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Right, so tranche two is progressing. What was the total cost for tranche one?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I don't have on hand. Cynthia Heydon may be able to answer that—you're up, Cynthia. She is right across the reclassification program as well.

CYNTHIA HEYDON: We'll come back to you this afternoon. I don't have that on hand. But essentially, it's our own people's time and work in the administration process for gazettal.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: To date, yes, given that they're reclassifications. Okay, thank you. One of the curious things about this priority round was this regional road reclassification—reclassified roads both in the regions and also in the city. In tranche one, were there any city roads transferred? Or were these all country roads, regional roads, transferred?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Let me just check that. I believe that there was—I might pass to Cynthia Heydon. I have a feeling that there is one. Yes, one in Greater Sydney.

CYNTHIA HEYDON: Yes, there is one in Greater Sydney, and the balance were in regional council areas. But we can get you the details and I can refer you to where they are in the gazettals.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Where was that road in Greater Sydney?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: In Blacktown, I think.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, we were talking about Blacktown, Parramatta, Liverpool.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: But I think what is important to note is that my understanding is that it is in the Blacktown area and it is a business-as-usual reclassification.

CYNTHIA HEYDON: It was a reclassification.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: So it wasn't necessarily one that came out of our policy. It was a BAU, business-as-usual, application to have that reclassified, but it was done at the same time as the gazetting of the others.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. It was recommended by the panel, signed off by you as Minister.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Yes, correct.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And it was in Blacktown?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: Yes. It's Blacktown and it's Schofields Road.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: How many kilometres was that?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: I will have to come back and confirm the kilometres on that one.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It was quite short.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: The other 15, we can confirm, are in regional New South Wales and it's a net change of 81.395 kilometres.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: As of today, how many roads of the 15,000 kilometres—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Up to.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Of the 15,000 kilometres of council-owned roads that are to be returned to State management as part of this promise have been transferred as of today?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: How many have been transferred as of today? Well, as I've said to you, Mr Graham, we are working through that process. We have the priority round, which we worked through tranche one, 16 reclassifications that have been gazetted. We are working through the five road transfers that are proposed as part of the 37 recommendations in the priority round and we're working through that. It's a far cry, Mr Graham, from what the Labor Party did when last in government in palming off all these roads—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Before you go to the history—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —back to local councils with no commitments—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —no support, no funding.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This is a lengthy answer. Can I give you a shorter answer—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —and ask if you agree with it?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: With what?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The number of roads transferred of this 15,000 kilometres—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Up to.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —as of today is zero. Is that correct?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No. I would say to you that we are progressing the priority round—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Or is it a number bigger than zero?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No. I would say that we, again, have one-quarter of a billion dollars budgeted. We have a priority round that has identified—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, that's important context. I'm asking, as of today, is the number zero?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I confirm to you that there are five regional transfer applications as part of the priority round—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That wasn't the question, Minister.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —that the New South Wales Government, with Transport for NSW, is progressing.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: As of today, how many roads have you transferred? Is the number zero?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Today, we have five applications for regional road transfers—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And they haven't been transferred, have they, Minister? Do you agree with that?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —as part of the priority round that we are working through—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You've already made it clear.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —that I believe will be included, some of those roads, in tranche two of the transfer, and gazetted in the months to come.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But Minister, that's in the future when we can have it all. As of today, how many roads have been transferred. The number's zero. You've told us that.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: As I've said, as of today it may be zero but we are progressing five transfers as part of the priority round on top of—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It's not "maybe zero", it is zero, isn't it, Minister?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —the 16 delivered—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Not maybe.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —16 reclassifications that we've delivered in tranche one. We've got \$250 million committed towards this process

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, I'm going to—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: And I must say to you, like, this a far cry—this is a lot of progress, considering what the New South Wales Labor Party—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm going to stop you there, Minister, just to put—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —did when last in government—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, I'm going to stop you there.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —and palmed off, just totally palmed off roads to local councils—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Can I put this to you?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —with no commitment, no support, no funding—nothing.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, I just want to put this to you.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Absolutely nothing.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You've been quite up-front in a range of other areas.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I've been up-front here. I've given you lots of stats, lots of figures.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You've generally been one of the Ministers who's prepared to tell it how it is. I think that is to your credit. However, I don't think you're doing yourself any credit by not answering that simple question here.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Well, I think I'm highlighting some fact, and the reality is that we are progressing—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think you've told us—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —exactly what we have committed to in the priority round.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, Minister. Let me put the question to you.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I've given you a very detailed—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, let me put the question to you, please.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —time line of what we are doing in this space.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, there's no need to interrupt. You've said the number may be zero. I'm putting to you the number is zero. That's the number of roads, as of today, that have been transferred of these 15,000 kilometres. Do you concede that's correct?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I am confirming the facts in front of you today that of the 37 recommendations that were made in the priority round, 16 of the 32 road classification reviews have been delivered in tranche one and that we have five regional road transfers as part of the priority round, which will be advanced in the coming tranches of gazetting of those roads.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, why won't you say what is plainly obvious to you, to me, to anyone sitting here: As of today, the number of roads transferred is zero?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No. Well, Mr Graham, I've answered the question. You've asked, exactly of the 37 recommendations where progress has been made. As I said, 16 of the 32 recommendations for classification—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, you don't get to make up the question as well as the answer.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, I'm giving you the answer.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The question is: As of today, not "it may be zero"; as of today, the number is zero. Do you accept that?

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Point of order: The Minister has the right to answer the question how he would like to answer the question. If the Hon. John Graham is going to continue with the same question over and over and over again, it's going to be a very, very long day. I think the question has already been asked multiple times and perhaps we should move on.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: To the point of order: It is going to be a very long day.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: That is not a valid point of order. I appreciate the Minister is allowed to answer how he sees fit, but it's also the member's right to ask the same question over and over again if they see that as the best use of their time. That is up to them. I'm not going to rule on how someone should ask a question. If it becomes badgering, then we can re-examine it, but at the moment it's not. Continue.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you, Chair. Minister, I do want to press it, only because it is important. I'm happy to concede that you've got this underway. You've given us quite a good update about what will happen. My point is, as of today, what has happened? The number of roads transferred is zero. Is that correct?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Mr Graham, I think I've outlined a very good time line, the exact numbers, what we've delivered, what we're progressing as part of the priority round, how much we've got budgeted. I believe that the next steps are independent assessment—that's why we have the independent panel in place. I've got nothing further to add. I refer to my previous answer.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I agree with all that context, but why won't you say, why won't you tell the public and why won't you tell these regional councils that the number of roads transferred, as of today, is zero? Why won't you admit that?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Well, no. I don't accept that we haven't given the community an update. I have been very clear in talking to local councils, talking to country mayors, talking at the IPWEA, talking in Parliament—very clear about where the process is up to with tranche one, with the reclassification applications, with the transfer applications. We've got an independent assessment underway by an independent panel. We've given an indication of when that report will be returned. One further point I would make—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But you haven't transferred a single road.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: One further point I'd make—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You haven't transferred a single road.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —to your question, Mr Graham—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: If you're going to keep avoiding the question, Minister, I am going to—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, I'm not avoiding the question. You've also asked me about not talking to the community about where this is up to. It is totally wrong.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, you can't invent the question.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I have met the majority of local councils in regional New South Wales.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, I'm going to stop you there.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I accept not all, but I've met the majority of them and this is not a burning topic. This is not a burning topic. What is a burning topic in regional and local roads policy in regional New South Wales is our Fixing Local Roads funding, our Fixing Country Roads funding—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This is not a burning topic—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —the hundreds of bridges that we're replacing—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —the fact that you failed to deliver on this 15,000 kilometres?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —across regional New South Wales—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I can't believe you're saying that, Minister.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —the Betterment Fund that we've been able to deliver.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I can't believe you're saying that.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: But, Mr Graham, you asked a question. I am telling you—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This isn't a burning topic, say, in Dungog?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —in the dialogue I have with local mayors, general managers, community members, this is not a burning issue they have raised with me.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So they're not concerned about the slow progress on this?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: The reality is, Mr Graham, what the community wants.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That flies in the face of the feedback we're getting, Minister.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: The community wants roads repaired, resealed, potholes fixed—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Transferred?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: They don't care who owns the road. They just want it fixed.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Well, this was your promise.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: And that is exactly what I am doing with local government.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, this was your promise.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I am working with them, offering them the right sort of funding, the right sort of commitment, enabling them to deliver it.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, I'm genuinely surprised by that answer.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: We need local government.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am genuinely surprised.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Local government is our delivery partner.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is not the message we're getting. Why did you make this commitment for 15,000 kilometres if no-one cares? This is desperately needed, desperately waited for, and you've transferred zero roads out of 15,000 kilometres. That's the feedback we're getting.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Again, if you'd like me to give you an update on the whole process, the time line, tranche one, I'm happy to do that. But I have nothing further to add, Mr Graham, so I refer to my previous answer.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Where is this referred to in the budget papers? I may have missed it, but I was finding it difficult to locate the financial allocation for this.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I'll refer to Cynthia Heydon. Do we have that?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: Yes. The Regional NSW budget document.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Great.

CYNTHIA HEYDON: It's in that page and identifies \$193 million of capex over two years.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Okay. Fantastic. Ms Heydon, either now or later, if I could just get the page number, that would be helpful, given that you've got the reference. Minister, will there be a future round once this next round is done?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Well, I think it will be important once we have the independent advice in the expert panel come back to us on that report to see as to what the total kilometres have been either requested for reclassification or transfers. I think we need to let that process take its course before we make any further policy announcements in this space around expanding it beyond the current and full round that we have underway now. Just quickly, Mr Graham, it is again in that regional New South Wales budget paper, and it is page 19, down the bottom left-hand corner.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Minister, in light of the recent ICAC report on pork-barrelling in relation to the independent expert panel's report to you, you have the final sign-off. Can you tell us what criteria you are going to use to decide that you may overrule some of the recommendations of that independent panel?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: We put in an independent expert panel to do the grading, to do the assessment, to engage with stakeholders and I will be taking their considerations very seriously. I think it is appropriate for government to be using an independent panel at arm's length from government that can review this process. That's exactly—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: But Wendy Machin at the roads congress said, and confirmed—and you have also confirmed it today—that you will have the final sign-off, which means that you have the ability to accept or not accept some of those recommendations. In light of the ICAC report in relation to pork-barrelling, what public clear criteria will you use to decide whether or not you reject some of the recommendations, if you wish to do so, of that independent expert panel report?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I will be taking the advice and the recommendations of that report when the panel delivers their report to me very seriously and I will be making the decisions that are in the best interests of this State and for the commuters and communities in regional New South Wales.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Are you prepared to enunciate now what criteria you will use to do that assessment?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I refer to my previous answer.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: So you won't? Okay. That's pretty clear.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Minister, I might pick up where I left and through you to Mr Fuller, I want to go to Transport for NSW in this upgraded line, this enabling infrastructure. What involvement did you have in the benefit-cost ratio?

MATT FULLER: Thank you for the question, Mr Banasiak. I would have to get detailed information from the team as to some of those early investigations and exactly what was provided. But at a higher level, what I would say is obviously the cost of the reinstatement of the infrastructure, the rail line, would have been a critical component in the assessment of BCR and a business case more broadly, because it would have related to the overall project cost. We would have certainly been, with our partners at the time, John Holland rail, who were managing the country rail network, providing information and assessment about what it would have taken to reinstate the rail line and, as I said, the other supporting infrastructure that was important to the community—things like re-enacting some of those level crossings, looking at intersections and things around them. I am sure that our team are advised on the infrastructure upgrades. Beyond that, I am sure in terms of the other commercial considerations with the freight and logistics company and Tamworth council, they would have taken their own deliberations around those aspects that would have fed into the BCR.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: You would have had no deliberations on freight from your capacity?

MATT FULLER: I would have to check on exactly what was provided by our team. As I said, the obvious ones that come to mind are in terms of the infrastructure costs, but that would be my understanding at this point. But we would be happy to take on notice and check if there is any other involvement.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: On notice, I imagine you are familiar with this document *NSW Freight Commodity Demand Forecasts 2016-2056*. It has your logo on it. Can you just take on notice as to whether that was considered as part of your considerations?

MATT FULLER: Sure, happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Minister, are you familiar with that document?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Is that Transport 2056, did you say?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Yes, 2016 to 2056. It was produced in 2018, so well before—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I'm aware of the document. I haven't read the document, but I am aware of the document.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: It's a great read. It totally pokes holes in the intermodal's economic viability, but we won't go there—moving on. Picking up on the transfer of roads, Minister, you talked about five roads as part of the priority round. Are you able to tell us what those five roads were and whether Armidale-Kempsey Road was part of that?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No. I don't think that those roads have been made public and they won't be made public until the gazetting of those roads. Just bear in mind, there is a bit of work that needs to happen, which is occurring right now, between Transport for NSW and the local councils that are involved. There needs to be site inspections, grading of those roads and there needs to be an agreement between Government, Transport and local government around the condition of the asset before and when it is transferred.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Just going to Armidale-Kempsey Road, prior to the last election the local member, the Hon. Adam Marshall, told residents—and he put it up on his own Facebook page—that if he was elected the road would be immediately transferred to State Government control. Clearly, where we are now, where we have no roads officially transferred, would it be fair to say that the honourable member misled his community?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, no. I work very closely with the member for Northern Tablelands. Actually, I'm heading up to his electorate on Friday, Mr Banasiak.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: How did he not mislead the community when Armidale-Kempsey Road—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, he hasn't misled—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: He said there was going to be an immediate transfer, if he was elected he would immediately—I am pretty sure I know what the definition or the meaning of immediate is: straightaway. Clearly, either he was at the very least ill informed or poorly informed, but more leaning towards he misinformed or misled his community that this was going to happen.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Firstly, Adam Marshall, the member for Northern Tablelands, has raised Armidale-Kempsey Road with me, so has the member for Oxley, Melinda Pavey. They have both raised this with me. They are important roads to both those communities and connectivity. What is important to note, though, is that Armidale-Kempsey Road has had a significant amount of damage and has received a significant amount of natural disaster funding. They have also received funding via our Fixing Local Roads Program. As part of the transfer program we cannot transfer a road that currently has works or funding attached to it. It can't be. Whilst Mr Marshall is right, that he is committed to seeing the Government progress that road to be transferred at some point at some time, he may not have realised that a road cannot be transferred whilst it has, in particular, any sort of grant funding attached to it or works in progress.

Armidale-Kempsey Road has a significant amount of natural disaster funding and has had Fixing Local Roads funding attached to it as well. We need to finish and see those works finished before we can have an assessment inspection, before any possible transfer of that road can occur. I also note both those local members have spoken to me about that road, and both those local members are comfortable with where we are sitting on that road now in terms of the funding that has been made available. Some of the works—I referred to Andrew before. Andrew is the individual that helped those local council areas project manage that very project. We have learnt a lot of how to manage road projects from that Armidale-Kempsey Road, and that is exactly what we are planning to do—get that finished and that will allow it to progress to the next stages.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: One allocation of funding, I believe very early in I think 2019, was \$4.5 million for that road. But my understanding is that money was conditional on council being able to use their own funds to get that road up to—when I say council, Armidale council—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: In what year was that?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I believe 2019, shortly after the election. That \$4.5 million that the local member promised was delivered, but it was conditional that council had to use their own funds to get the road up to a level of serviceability before that \$4.5 million funding was approved. Can you confirm that?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No. What I would confirm is that that commitment was before my time as the Minister.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Yes, I appreciate that.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I am not going to comment on what was before my time, because I am not across that detail. What I can confirm with you is over the last few months, through natural disaster funding, we are investing hundreds of millions of dollars into that road. There is significant money attached to the rebuild of Armidale-Kempsey Road and the local members have been consulted and are fully across that funding and what is occurring with how we project manage and rebuild that infrastructure. I think there's a significant program happening on that road.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: The disaster funding you speak of: Is that separate to the budget announcement of \$227 million, I believe?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, it would be the same. That's the same.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: That's the total?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: That is what has been budgeted towards funding that we have received to go into that road.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I just wanted to check whether—there's lots of pockets of money floating around, Minister. I just wanted to—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Lots of investment. Lots of support from the New South Wales Government.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I just wanted to clarify what the cumulative total is. We're saying \$227 million. Do you have a sense of what that would entail? Is that going to completely fix the Armidale-Kempsey road?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: That is what has been estimated as the investment needed to get that road back to scratch. That is why that funding has now been directed towards that road to get that infrastructure rebuilt.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Do we have a project time line yet?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I will have to take that on notice. I will come back to you during the course of the day on a time line of how we are going project managing that piece of road infrastructure. But what is important to note when we do this is that we have put specific resources into place to manage that because a couple of hundred million-dollar rebuild to road infrastructure is a massive task for any local council, no matter how small or big they are in this State. We have put in additional resources in and around project management and expertise to help do that so it isn't just left to council to do that. The reality is that those councils involved have raised concerns about how to manage that. When I made that reference to Andrew, he is now in Lismore but he has been managing Armidale-Kempsey road for some time and he has trained another individual up within Transport to take over. That is an example of how we are using outside-of-the-box sort of resources to assist councils with this infrastructure rebuild.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: That's pleasing to hear, Minister, because I know the local members of the community have raised with me and also the local member their concerns about council's capacity to take on such a project. It's pleasing to hear.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: We're probably happy to come back with a bit of an update during the course of the day on a time line and the resources that we have committed to that project. They're public and I'm happy to talk about them because it's a good news story, Mr Banasiak—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Long overdue.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —about how we are trying to rebuild this infrastructure. But we also need to accept that it's probably been impacted again, over the last few months, by natural disasters. That is why you need to have those resources to manage what is a very challenging rebuild of road infrastructure.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: But you would admit that this is a road that has been plagued with problems well before the most recent floods over the last couple of years? It's been a festering sore for the community for many years.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: The community is frustrated. It is a piece of road infrastructure that has had plenty of challenges. When you have challenges, you need to find solutions. That is exactly what we're doing in how we support local council to project manage the rebuild of the Armidale-Kempsey road.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Are you the Minister responsible for the Singleton bypass or is that someone else?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: That's me.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Excellent. Nothing against the project, Minister; my concerns are centred around the acquisition process. Community landholders are obviously concerned about that process and it not being fair. Are you aware of those concerns?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: The local member, a really hardworking local member in Dave Layzell, has raised with me that constituents have met with him to raise their concerns. We have a very defined process around compulsory acquisition and PANs, and how that process operates. That process is the same process for any acquisition of any property that is required as part of our infrastructure build across the State. In terms of perhaps outlining that process, I might ask Ant Hayes because he is right across how that works.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I'm reasonably well familiar with the process because I sat on the acquisition inquiry. I guess the evidence that we heard during the acquisition inquiry—not specifically with Singleton but overall—was that the community found, yes, there was a process, but it was more the tone and how that process was administered by individual Transport for NSW staff. I draw your attention to a newspaper article around their concerns. In that article they claim that a threatening letter from Transport for NSW was sent to one of the landholders about coming onto their property. Have you investigated the details of that threatening letter or whether the letter was threatening at all?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I've never seen or had this accusation of a threatening letter referred or put in front of me. If you've got a copy, I'm happy to have a look.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I don't have a copy of the letter. I've just got a copy of the article where they've made this accusation.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I haven't seen a copy of the letter you refer to. I suspect, without seeing it—I don't want to make too much of a prejudgment on what that is, but I would think that it is a challenging circumstance. When we have a vision like we do as the New South Wales Government and we go to build legacy infrastructure for this State, in particular in the regions, it's never an easy task because it is a big job when you build legacy infrastructure. At times it requires parcels of land to build that infrastructure. There's a very defined process on how that works. If you have a copy of the letter, I'm happy to look at it. Is it a legal letter or is it a threatening letter? I would have to see the letter itself to make that judgment—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Neither have I. Perhaps on notice, can you get back to us as to what this letter was? Because it's been mentioned in—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, I'm not prepared to take it on notice. But if you present a copy of the letter or the article to me, I'm happy to—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I'm happy to present the article.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —come back to you during the course of the day with some response.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Thank you. I'll present the article to you. I appreciate that, yes, there are challenges when you're building infrastructure. I don't think the landholders are concerned about the infrastructure per se but just how they're treated through the process. They're accepting of the fact that the bypass needs to happen, but it's just how they're being treated through the process. They've made an accusation there also that Transport for NSW has essentially low-balled them in terms of the offer, that it is well below what they've got in terms of private valuations. Are you prepared to, on notice, come back to us and give us a response to that accusation?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Camilla Drover is here, who can also answer these questions with Ant Hayes. But you said earlier, Mr Banasiak, that you understand how the process works, so you understand how the Valuer General is involved in that process and its determinations. That is what government has to turn to when you look to compulsorily acquire land. That is part of the process—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: But we're not at that part of the process, are we?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I would defer your questions to Camilla Drover and Ant Hayes. They will be able to answer exactly the time line of how it works and what triggers there are as part of the process. Again, I've just been presented—this is quite a long article, but—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Ms Drover, have you low-balled the landholders at Singleton? Can you respond to the accusation that your department has offered them a price well below independent valuations that they've got?

CAMILLA DROVER: What I can say is we have been engaging with those landowners for over two years. We obviously acknowledge that this is a sensitive issue when we're acquiring people's homes, particularly in regional New South Wales, where it's often their home but also their place of business. It also makes some of the valuations more difficult because of that. We have had that long engagement with them. If we can't reach agreement, we have the compulsory process. In that instance we don't decide what compensation is paid; it's the Valuer General that—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: But can you confirm that we are not at that stage yet, are we? You are still in negotiations with them?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I'm happy to say that I, as the Minister, am not involved in the negotiation period. Let me finish, Mr Banasiak. I have signed off on the compulsory acquisition of property across New South Wales for our infrastructure projects. I believe that there would be properties in Singleton—I don't know exactly which ones—that I've signed off to be compulsorily acquired.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: On notice, can you provide some level of detail as to what those properties you have signed off on are, Minister, so we get a sense of where we're up to with the acquisition process?

CAMILLA DROVER: Yes, we can provide details on the acquisitions but also if we require access as opposed to an acquisition. Sometimes we use the Roads Act to gain access as opposed to an acquisition. That may be one of the issues in this instance. But we'll take that on notice.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Just to confirm, the Minister has absolutely no involvement in the negotiation. I have no involvement at all in what the compensation or value is. The process is so rigid that it has to point to the Valuer General and then, once it gets to that stage, that is what is utilised. Obviously, as Camilla has highlighted, it is a very rigid process. We can certainly on notice provide details about some of the quantity, perhaps, of parcels of land that have been acquired throughout the course of the day.

The CHAIR: Minister, with respect, you are the Minister for regional roads.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Yes.

The CHAIR: We're not part of the Government; you are. You actually have the opportunity to lobby to change these laws internally. This is something that is not new; these issues have been around for decades. These people are being treated incredibly unfairly because of legislation that you are partly responsible for, alongside the other transport Ministers. You can't just sit there and say, "It's a really rigid process." We know that. We've just had an inquiry. What are you going to do to make sure that the people in Singleton can have a better deal?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Firstly, we have an extensive infrastructure build underway. There are two issues here around the Valuer General, which, to be frank, is a much broader conversation, and it is not directly linked to my portfolio. I have to use the Valuer General's recommendation as part of a process when acquiring land, and that is what is occurring. But the process is the process. I think it is a different conversation if we want reform in that space.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Do you support reinstatement—like for like?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I'm going to refer to my previous answer. I've got nothing further to add in that space, Mr Banasiak.

The CHAIR: Do you support the people who are losing their farms being compensated for the loss of income from those farms?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I accept it is a challenging circumstance when land has to be compulsorily acquired because it is more than just the land, it is more than just bricks and mortar, it is more than just a piece of dirt; it's people's homes.

The CHAIR: That's right.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: It is their home, and I appreciate that. But we have a process for a reason. We have a Valuer General's recommendation for a reason.

The CHAIR: It is a flawed—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Currently, with the infrastructure build I am rolling out on behalf of the New South Wales Government and the people of regional New South Wales, I have to follow that process. A conversation about changes or reforms to the way that we use or point to the Valuer General or use their recommendations is a very different conversation.

The CHAIR: Just to clarify, we're not at the Valuer General point; we're at the point of Transport for NSW low-balling people and then trying to encourage them to accept that offer. You don't have to go to the Valuer General. I do encourage you to read this Committee's report where we explain in detail—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I refer to my previous answer, Ms Boyd.

The CHAIR: It is teatime. We will be back at 11.15 a.m.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: We will start again with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Minister, I understand it took about nine years to complete the Sydney Harbour Bridge, or just a little over. I would like to ask you a question about the upgrade to McKanes Falls Road bridge in Bathurst. I recall that it was first promised and funded by Minister Duncan Gay in 2012. It first appeared in budget electorate reports in 2014-15. It's still going on. I understand from the locals that they've been told they expect it to be finished this year. Can you confirm that it will actually be open to traffic this year?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I will take it on notice for the course of estimates and try to get you an answer on that. I live in Bathurst, for the record. I know of the road and bridge you're talking about. I will just reconfirm the time line and come back to you in the course of the day.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: And—if you would, Minister—if it's not this year, when? And why has it taken so long?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I will find out what the current time line is for "open to traffic" date and come back to you with that during the course of the day.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: A lot of regional councils have very old bridges, as you know, Minister, that predate the 1940s and 1950s—timber bridges that are the target of the Fixing Country Bridges Program. Will the Government extend the guidelines for Fixing Country Bridges to reflect the poor condition of the many concrete, composite, heritage and steel bridges across the State that are also in need of repair?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Firstly, Fixing Country Bridges has been quite a remarkable project. Hundreds and hundreds of timber bridges have been replaced across regional New South Wales with new concrete structures, whether they be small bridges or big bridges, which is really important because this is infrastructure that local government in many ways probably doesn't have the base to support—in particular, multiple bridges when you look across areas like Kyogle, for instance, or up and down the coast. We've obviously had round one—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Thank you, Minister, but is there any chance of answering the question? Will it be extended?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Firstly, there is an extensive amount of timber bridges across regional New South Wales.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: There are also concrete, composite, heritage and steel bridges.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: But even with our latest round 2A that we announced recently—and we will be progressing another round, I would hope, throughout 2022—there are still timber bridges to replace. My priority is to ensure that we get as many timber bridges replaced across regional New South Wales. We have made fantastic inroads to do that, but there's still work to do. This Government is committed to rolling out additional funding to replace timber bridges first before we look more broadly at concrete structures.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: So the answer is no.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No. The answer is that this Government is committed to honouring our commitment with timber bridges. We still have work to do and—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: The question was this: Will the Government extend the guideline for Fixing Country Bridges to reflect the many poor concrete, composite, heritage and steel bridges across the State?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: How many timber bridges did Labor replace when they were last in government? It would be zero. You are a reputable member of the House, Mr Primrose. You have been around a long time.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I have driven over a lot of dodgy concrete bridges.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: How many timber bridges did Labor replace when you were back in government all those years ago? It would have been zippo. That's how many.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Minister, your answer is that you do not propose to extend the guidelines to concrete, composite, heritage and steel bridges. That is right, isn't it?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: My answer is that we have round 1 and round 2A in the marketplace now. We are replacing hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of timber bridges across regional New South Wales and we still have more funding available.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I get the drift.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: We are working directly with local government in and around bridge builders' capacity restrictions and constraints.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Minister, I accept that the answer is no. You don't have to keep rabbiting on.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: You cut me off before I finished the answer.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: What is the answer, Minister? Is it yes or no?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: The answer is that we are committed to supporting local government right across regional New South Wales to replace as many timber bridges as possible. We have hundreds and hundreds of bridge projects underway.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Minister, I will leave it to the people watching to understand. I've asked you a specific question. I have no problems with you fixing timber bridges, Minister. I am sure no-one here does.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: We are actually opening our 100th bridge very shortly.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Excellent. But I asked you about concrete, composite, heritage and steel bridges across the State that are also in need of repair. You have answered that question. **Why did the New South Wales Government approve the Cuttagee Bridge under the program in March 2021?**

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I will refer to Cynthia Heydon with that question.

CYNTHIA HEYDON: Could you just clarify the question, please?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: **Why did the New South Wales Government approve the Cuttagee Bridge under the program in March 2021?**

CYNTHIA HEYDON: I will have to double-check our records in relation to that bridge and the timing; it's not one I have on hand. If you can wait, I will come back with some clarity.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: **You may not have it on hand because the Government withdrew funding for the Cuttagee Bridge under the program in May and June 2021, just two months later.**

CYNTHIA HEYDON: **Again, I'll wait to get some more detailed information. My understanding and recollection of that is that it wasn't a formal approval of that bridge. I believe it was in relation to the bridge not being predominantly timber, as per the guidelines.**

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Mr Primrose, is this bridge in the Bega Valley?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Yes.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I think you will find, which we will come back to during the course of the day, that there was more than just the New South Wales Government removing funding. Bear in mind that these decisions, as you have outlined in the time line, were before I was the Minister for Regional Transport and Roads. But there were also challenges that local council faced and were unable, in my understanding, to deliver the project. It wasn't a case of the New South Wales Government pulling the funding; it was a case of local government returning the funding back to New South Wales Government because they couldn't deliver the project.

CYNTHIA HEYDON: Yes, the council did—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Let's pursue this again. But I'd like to know those details.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: This was raised with myself when I visited the Bega Valley earlier this year and spoke with the mayor. He raised his disappointment that council were not in a position to work with government to deliver that project and why the funding was returned to the New South Wales Government. The funding wasn't pulled.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: The council has undertaken extensive work on this bridge to try and get it back up to standard, as the bridge is clearly nearing the end of its functional life and is subject to deteriorating conditions. Council has said:

It is in danger of a potentially catastrophic structural failure unless remedial action is taken.

What are you doing to assist council in the process to make it safe?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: As I said, I met with the mayor earlier this year. I have said that it is disappointing that council were not in a position to complete the project that they applied for and had to return the

funding to the New South Wales Government. My door is open to work with that council, just like any other council, into the future. There are, obviously, heritage considerations in and around that bridge, to my knowledge and from my visit to the Bega area. My door is open and I am happy to talk to that council. I have a good working relationship with that council. I believe we were able to deliver more investment through Fixing Country Bridges round 2A recently, where we were able to get that council at least another one or two bridges as part of their bridge building replacement program. There are still good things happening there. My door is open to talk about the existing bridge.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I note that in the time line of works—May to June 2021—State Government withdrew Cuttagee Bridge from the funding round as additional time was needed to undertake all the necessary steps before construction could commence, including community consultation. So that means that Cuttagee Bridge could be funded under this program?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I'll certainly refer it and the criteria to Cynthia Heydon. But, to the point, council were in a position where they could not meet the criteria and guidelines and timings under that program and returned the funding to the New South Wales Government.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: When do you expect that some work might be undertaken, given that this is the major coastal route between Tathra and Bermagui?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Again, my door is open. I have made additional funding available through Fixing Country Bridges round 2A only a short time ago. I plan to roll out the rest of the funding through an additional round later this year. My door is open for local government to be talking to my office and to the team within Transport for NSW. We are inclusive people. We are happy for them to work with us in this space. But, again, it is their piece of infrastructure. It will be up to that council and that community to come to government with proposals. We will do our best under existing funding programs to give them the opportunity to seek funding from the New South Wales Government to put towards infrastructure repairs and upgrades of that bridge.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Did the council raise with you the issue of reclassification of the bridge, allowing it to actually apply for funding?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: The reclassification of their asset to what? The State Government?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: To allow it to be eligible for funding.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I don't believe, in my discussions with council earlier this year, that that part of—I don't believe that was raised with me. The bridge was raised and the position and situation council found them in under their application for round 1. But I don't think that was raised with me. I would have to ask Cynthia whether that has been raised with the agency, but not with my office.

CYNTHIA HEYDON: I'm not aware of any request in relation to that. Further to the Minister's advice, the bridge was withdrawn by the council as the bridge was proposed to be a renewal and not a replacement due to its heritage stage. Therefore, it didn't meet the conditions and criteria of the program.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Will the New South Wales Government reclassify the Tathra-Bermagui Road, including its five bridges?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: As part of the reclassification and transfer process, I don't know if that road has been submitted to the independent panel for consideration.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: We'll come back to this when you give me that information.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Just quickly, Mr Primrose, McKanes road and bridge has experienced a slight delay due to the most recent flooding, which has occurred right across the State, including in my home town of Bathurst. We are scheduled to be open to traffic by November 2022.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: You might want to get people to correct your website, which, as of 15 minutes ago, still says September.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: We will take that on notice. We've had recent flooding as of a week or two ago in that region, so maybe that's why. But November this year.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, I want to turn to your involvement in the train dispute. You will be happy to hear that we won't be spending as long as we have in the past on this issue in some other forums. Originally, when we questioned you here, you were not particularly involved. I think that would be fair to say. I think it would be a fair reflection of your earlier involvement, although more recently you appear to become much more central to the Government's engagement with this set of issues; you've been publicly commenting.

Could you give us a sense of how you would describe your current involvement in the negotiations in the rail dispute and this set of issues?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Certainly, Mr Graham. Firstly, the current Minister for Transport and the former Minister for Transport have always been the lead Ministers in negotiations around the new enterprise agreement [EA]. Mr Tudehope as the Minister for Employee Relations obviously looks at what is involved in this process as a whole-of-government approach. I am involved due to the new intercity fleet being a topic of conversation and negotiation in EA bargaining process. Yes, it is fair to say I have been more involved recently because I attended a meeting of the combined rail unions on the Thursday of the last parliamentary sitting week. On that Thursday Minister Elliott was unwell and not in Parliament. Out of respect, to be frank, to the CRU, I felt it important that a transport Minister attend, so I attended. At that meeting I gave a commitment to Alex Claassens from the RTBU that I would go away from that meeting, work with them on finalising a deed, an agreement on the new intercity fleet, including the modifications to that fleet. I did exactly that over the course of the following week and a bit, and it got to a point where deeds were presented to that union.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is a useful clarification. Is it fair to say you are the lead on that aspect of this, the new intercity fleet?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I think it is fair to say as of today I am looking after the new intercity fleet considerations because I have given a commitment that I would, following the meeting with the CRU, and, in particular, the commitment given to the RTBU. Minister Elliott is the lead Minister in and around the enterprise agreement intensive bargaining meetings and the overall EA negotiations.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Can you confirm right now that the Government's position is that it will rip up its offer to make alterations to the new intercity fleet if there is one more day of industrial action?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I think what is important to note—and I just received an update during the break—that the Premier of New South Wales, Premier Perrottet, has made public statements today that we will be presenting the combined rail unions with an enterprise agreement this week. At the same time, we will be presenting the RTBU with another version of the deed on the new intercity fleet. We will need to be progressing the EA to a vote. The Premier has made it pretty clear that if industrial action is taken between now and an enterprise agreement vote that he would, one, remove the commitments that are made to the new intercity fleet and he would rip up the agreement and the New South Wales Government would be pursuing action through the Fair Work Commission.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Right. The Premier said, "This ends today." So if there is one more day of industrial action, those two things flow: the negotiations around changes to the trains, the new intercity fleet—gone; the enterprise agreement ripped up—terminated. Is that the Government's position as we sit here day?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: The Government's position is that the combined rail unions will be presented with an enterprise agreement this week. What is important to note for context, Mr Graham, is that in my negotiations with the RTBU over the last week, two weeks—and they were done in good faith and, to be fair, they were very productive meetings; I referenced that we were very close—we were very close. Part of those discussions from the RTBU was that they wanted to go back to some intensive bargaining meetings. I was able to work that to come to fruition this week because the intensive bargaining meetings that are occurring right now, that have occurred since Monday, were not scheduled. This was an additional commitment from the New South Wales Government that I was able to help facilitate with Minister Elliott. They have been very productive. The secretary is here. He has been involved in some of them. They have occurred. What the Premier has made very clear—and I am 100 per cent supportive of the Premier's position—is that commuters have had a gutful. They are sick of the industrial action and we need to allow for peace on our public transport network.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, can I ask—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, let me be very clear about what my position is because it is the same position that the Premier of this State has. That is, the next steps are an enterprise agreement will be presented to the combined rail unions later this week. At the same time, my involvement is that another copy or another version of the deed—an agreement on the modifications to the NIF—will be presented at the same time as the EA agreement. It is very clear that if we see any industrial action, any protected industrial action between now and when that vote is to occur, which will take a number of weeks, the Premier has instructed his Ministers that we will rip up the current enterprise agreement. The NIF modifications will be taken off the table and we are off to the Fair Work Commission.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Let me ask this question as a commuter, as someone who was jammed on to the train this morning: Do you feel discussions have been productive, but this is now a setback?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: You or a commuter probably wasn't on a train this morning because the poor commuters couldn't get on a train and they couldn't get on a bus because of the bus strikes. They were probably stuck in the traffic, the congestion that occurred on our road network.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, I am just commenting on my experience this morning.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I had the same experience, Mr Graham.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am asking you this: You said discussions have been productive; this is a setback, isn't it? Where it has got to today, is it fair to say that is a setback?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, it is not a setback. I think, if anything, this is bringing the issue to a head because what has been evident to me throughout—what I would describe as productive—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, let me finish, Mr Graham. What I have found that is evident from the mostly productive meetings that I have had is that this issue needs to be brought to a head; that the saga has to end. The Premier has been very clear today—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This is the Government bringing it to a head; that is fair to say?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: This is the Government bringing it to a head because the commuters of this city and this State want this issue brought to a head. The Premier has been very clear today, and I support the Premier—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think you have made that clear.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —and my parliamentary and ministerial colleagues' view, that the deed and the EA—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I just want to put a couple of extra questions to you. I think you have been clear about your position. We are not in any doubt about that. Minister Elliott talked about the path of the dispute, when we questioned him last week. I asked him, as a commuter, I just want to know how long will this be before it is solved. He said, "Look, it could be solved next week." That is the best case or the worst case is it could be six months. Given it won't be solved this week—that is what you have clearly told us—how long will it be until this is solved, in your view?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: You can explore these options with the secretary in the bureaucrat section later. Let me be very clear, the Premier is bringing this to a head because the commuters of this State wish for to it be brought to a head. They want peace on the public transport network. Let me finish, Mr Graham. The EA will be put to the combined rail unions at the end of this week—some time in the next day or so.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, I have let you put these views, but I just want to know—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: That forms the process.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —when will I be able to catch the train to work on time?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Yes, but that forms the process, Mr Graham.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is the question I just want you to answer. Minister Elliott was really clear.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I am trying to explain to you the time line—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: As a Minister, what is your—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Point of order: The Minister is being directly relevant to the Hon. John Graham's question. I ask that the Minister be allowed to answer the question in full.

The CHAIR: It is helpful to Hansard if we do not talk over each other. Given the limited time available, Mr Graham, if you could direct the Minister in your question and, Minister, if you could be directly relevant.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I accept all the context you have given, Minister. Minister Elliott gave us a really clear answer. You're the Minister. For commuters, how long could this take before this is solved? What is your sense today?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: From my perspective as a Cabinet Minister—because it will be different to the Labor election strategy that you have with the RTBU, with the CRU—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, there's no need for this. Just answer—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —with the union movement—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Millions of commuters want to know the answer here.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —that Mr Minns, clearly, is incredibly involved with.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: There's no need for abuse, Minister.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: From a Cabinet Minister who is involved in this process, again, we will present an EA to the members of this Combined Rail Unions within this week—within a day or so. At the same time, a deed will be presented. That will kick off the EA vote process, which will take a number of weeks. So my answer to you, Mr Graham, is that it will be—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, this is detail, detail, detail. When will I be able to catch a train on time?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: The EA vote process will take a number of weeks. What the Premier has been very clear about today that if—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: When will the train come on time?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Mr Graham, you have asked a question. It is a complex question. I am giving you a very definitive answer and you are interrupting me. This must form the same election strategy that you have with Alex Claassens—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We will come to that—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —with the RTBU, with the CRU, with Chris Minns.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This is the question commuters want to know.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: The commuters are seeing through it, Mr Graham. They have had a gutful. They have had an absolute gutful.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, there's just no need for this.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: He wants to play politics. That's all.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Ask him on the Admin Committee.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: He's just playing politics.

The CHAIR: Order! We are now into the crossbench time. Minister, this could all go away pretty simply, couldn't it?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Again, the Premier has made it clear that we will have an EA presented to the members this week at the same time as a deed. That will kickstart—

The CHAIR: Okay.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, let me finish, Ms Boyd.

The CHAIR: But you don't even know what my question is yet.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Yes, but it's going to be along the same frame as Mr Graham's question.

The CHAIR: That's a bit offensive. I tend to have my own views and questions.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: The reality is that the EA vote will go through for a period of weeks. The Premier has said we need to allow that process to take its course. In that time frame in the next few weeks whilst that EA vote process is undertaken, if there is protected industrial action, the Premier of this State will instruct his transport Ministers, one, to rip up the EA, the NIF comes off the table and we are going to the Fair Work Commission. This is all on the unions of this State.

The CHAIR: How short-sighted.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: They are the ones that cancelled these trains.

The CHAIR: All right. That wasn't my question.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: They are the ones that caused the disruption to this State, to this city, and the commuters of this city and State are not going to prepare to listen to this, to have any of this disruption any longer.

The CHAIR: Order! Minister, you have had plenty of time to provide an answer to a question I didn't ask. So I will now ask the question: This could all actually go away very quickly if your Government just agreed to make the modifications that the unions are requesting for safety reasons, isn't that right?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: That agreement to modify the new intercity fleet has already been agreed to. It already has been presented to the unions, and they have not executed the deed.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: The deed is there.

The CHAIR: So that's not agreed to?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, no, Ms Boyd. We have already agreed, as the New South Wales Government to, make the modifications to that train. We have gone as far in our deliberations and negotiations to put a time line on testing, a time line on how we progress that. This is not a matter of whether the—

The CHAIR: Are these the modifications actually requested by the unions—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Yes.

The CHAIR: —or are these a different set?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, these are the modifications that have been requested by the RTBU.

The CHAIR: Which you should really have made anyway.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, we don't accept—what I accept is what the national safety regulator says. The national safety regulator has said that that train in its current form is safe to operate on the network. Obviously, additional concerns have been raised from the RTBU with me, with the New South Wales Government, with Minister Elliott, and as part of the EA bargaining process we have agreed—agreed—to modify the train as part of the EA bargaining process.

The CHAIR: But why wasn't that done six months ago? We had a hearing day for this particular committee where we heard very clearly, although these trains had passed basically that minimum standard from the safety regulator, that your own department agreed that those trains could be safer. Those safety improvements are not new; they were requested by the union a long time ago. Why wasn't it just done? Why didn't you spend the \$200 million to \$300 million on the modification instead of deliberately mothballing these trains and denying the people of New South Wales the opportunity to travel on them?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: We have not deliberately mothballed any of these trains. These trains still have in-country and pre-provisional testing to occur. The people who have mothballed these trains are the RTBU. These trains are parked in rail sheds across New South Wales, where they cannot be used.

The CHAIR: But you could have—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: You have heard me, Ms Boyd, in Parliament talk about the type of correspondence I get from commuters across New South Wales of what they want in a new train.

The CHAIR: Yes.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Remember? Coach back seats, USB connectivity, accessible toilets.

The CHAIR: Something that's safe and doesn't allow people to fall between the platform and the doors.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Everything commuters want, that train offers. Now, who I listen to is the national safety regulator.

The CHAIR: We've just had that discussion, that safety is a relative level.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: ONRSR have been very clear that that train is safe.

The CHAIR: Safety is relative.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I am not a train or rail safety expert, and I am never going to claim to be one.

The CHAIR: No, but you have people in your department who are.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: But I will and they, those experts within Transport for NSW, along with my office, along with the guidance I take—I listen to who is the national rail safety regulator because they are the experts.

The CHAIR: Not the people who drive the trains every day? Not the people who have been—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Now, the point about modifying the new intercity fleet is a concession that the New South Wales Government has made to the RTBU in order to finalise an agreement to get those trains on the track, in order to try and bring to a head and finalise the EA bargaining negotiations, because—

The CHAIR: Isn't it true, though, Minister, that it is your Government's stubbornness that has led to this situation—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, it's—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: How about the union changing the goalposts?

The CHAIR: —because you have failed to listen to the experts, to the rail workers, to your own department and make those modifications earlier? This could all have been avoided. The idea that you then put it onto the unions and onto the workers is extraordinary.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, no, Ms Boyd. It is not the New South Wales Government's stubbornness that has caused for these trains to park up.

The CHAIR: I am glad you admit how stubborn it is.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: It is the RTBU's—in collaboration with the Combined Rail Unions—stubbornness. We need to remember the RTBU and the Combined Rail Unions said that they would not negotiate; that they would not accept any form of EA until that new intercity fleet was going to be modified—

The CHAIR: To make it safer.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, that it was to be modified—

The CHAIR: We have had this discussion.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —and that it was to be changed, and they wouldn't agree until there was a legally binding deed and document that held the Government to that commitment. That is exactly what we have negotiated.

The CHAIR: In the face of the Government's lying—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: That is exactly what I have presented to the RTBU.

The CHAIR: —saying it was going to cost \$1 billion, all sorts of rubbish.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: It is exactly what the RTBU have said—that they are not in a position to sign. It has all been about modifying this train, until we agree to modify the train, and then we find out what it's really about. It is not about modifying the train; it is about an EA. It is about extracting concessions from Government that have nothing to do with the new intercity fleet—

The CHAIR: That's why the Government—sorry, let me stop you there.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —because if it was about the new intercity fleet, they would have already signed the deed that I presented them.

The CHAIR: Hang on. So that's why the RTBU members rejected the \$18,000 bonus, is that right—because all they were concerned about was money?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: The RTBU have said for a long period of time that it was all about modifying the new intercity fleet. They wanted to see a legally binding commitment from the New South Wales Government to do that.

The CHAIR: Yes, they are concerned about safety.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: They said that when that is done, that would bring to a close their action.

The CHAIR: Which should have been done six months ago.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: That would bring a close to their action and their campaign. Now, we have done that and it is not the end of their campaign. We have seen continued protected industrial action—

The CHAIR: And yet they are not bought off with your offers of—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —even with an agreement, a legally binding agreement, from the New South Wales Government on the table—

The CHAIR: Minister, I can't help but think you are just saying the words you want to say and not actually listening to my questions.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —that they haven't signed and it hasn't ended the protected industrial action.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I think he's answering the question.

The CHAIR: He's not answering the question.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: He's giving a great overview.

The CHAIR: He's not. He's just saying stuff.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: One would say that it is not about the new intercity fleet any more. It is about a combined and strategic strategy by the Combined Rail Unions to bring disruption to the city of Sydney—

The CHAIR: How convenient.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —to bring disruption and instability to the New South Wales Government. This is about a Labor strategy.

The CHAIR: Yes, no.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: This is not about safety on trains. What has been evident to me recently is that we have figured it out, and the commuters of this State have figured it out and they see it as clear as day that this is all about a strategy: the Year of the Strike. It is all about the next State election.

The CHAIR: Order! I am going to stop your very, very, very long answer.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Great answer.

The CHAIR: It just went on and on.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Fantastic answer.

The CHAIR: You haven't answered—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I have answered the question.

The CHAIR: —the very direct question. This was all as a result of the stubbornness of your Government for not doing these modifications to begin with. What we have now is a process where your Government is demonising the workers of this State and trying to turn people against them. The people aren't fooled. People don't think that this is the fault of the unions.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Maybe in The Greens branch.

The CHAIR: They think it's the fault of the Government of New South Wales treating them so poorly for so, so long. How can you justify all of the statements you just made when you know full well that an offer of \$18,000 as a bonus to these workers wasn't enough for them to drop this action?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Well, Ms Boyd, I am not going to be held responsible for the stubbornness of the RTBU in conjunction with the Combined Rail Unions. You talk about an \$18,000 offer. I have put on the table in a legally binding document to the RTBU the agreed modifications—

The CHAIR: You've already said this.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: And you haven't wanted to hear it.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —to the new intercity fleet, and that was not executed or agreed to by the union movement. Explain that. So that means to say it doesn't matter whether it's about the \$18,000—

The CHAIR: So you think it's about nothing?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: It doesn't matter whether it is about the modifications to the new intercity fleet. This is not about any of those considerations. This is about a consolidated and strategic strategy of the year of the strike, to destabilise the New South Wales Government—

The CHAIR: That's very convenient for you.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —and to cause massive disruption to the commuters of this city and this State.

The CHAIR: That's a very convenient line.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: It's not very convenient for the people of New South Wales.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: And this is all about Labor's strategy for March next year.

The CHAIR: So you take no responsibility at all? Fine.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: You talk about commuters siding with the unions. I don't believe that. I think the worm has turned. I think the union is under significant pressure because the commuters of this city and State are not going to put up with this rot by the unions bringing this city to a standstill anymore.

The CHAIR: Outrageous.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: It is.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Minister, are we in a position to talk about Wee Waa yet?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Let me come back to you on Wee Waa.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I can go to something else.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Go to something else. We'll come back but we are working on it.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Am I right in saying that you are the Minister that has responsibility for freight?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Correct.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: So when I showed you this document, which I will pass up to you now, you said you haven't read it?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I know of the document. I've been referred to the document. I haven't read it from cover to cover.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Have you read it at all?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I have read bits and pieces of it. I understand what the document is, but I haven't read it from cover to cover.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: As the Minister responsible for freight, what's your understanding of Port Botany's capacity at the moment?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: As the Minister for freight, I'm responsible for everything up until it gets to the port. Ports are under the ministerial portfolio of Minister Elliott. But that doesn't mean that I haven't shown an interest. It doesn't mean that I am not committed to working with the freight industry on end-to-end options. We have the PBLIS review, which is currently underway and which relates directly to the functionality and efficiency of port operations. That review is currently underway, and I am working with the industry on how we find efficiencies, whether that be on our road or rail network to the port. And we have seen challenges recently even with the flooding events, challenges that have been created in getting produce and commodities from paddock to port and obviously paddock to plate.

One of the other points I would add, Mr Banasiak, is since coming in as the Minister for Regional Transport and Roads but also the Minister responsible for freight, I have set up the Freight Transport Advisory Council, which is a multimode ministerial council that reports to me as the Minister for freight. We have representatives on that committee in the road freight space and rail freight space, but also NSW Ports, Ports Australia and Newcastle ports are all represented on that council and are working on giving government the best feedback on multimodes of freight across this State, how they intersect, how we can continue to support New South Wales being a massive freight hub and what we can do to find deficiencies in our policy decisions into the future.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Has that feedback from that consultation with—what was it? Freight?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: FTAC.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Has that feedback included the fact that one of their major concerns is that they can't actually get containers to their location and back in time to meet the time frames that these container companies place on them? So the issue is not the railway network itself, or the road network itself, but the issue is that Port Botany is at a point in its capacity, or overcapacity, that it can't actually deliver the containers to the exporters for them to put stuff on and get back in time.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Firstly, I accept there are huge challenges for our exporters in and around the ports in that if you miss your container slot, with global demand and our import and export traffic, it is a huge challenge.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Do you accept that, though?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: What I accept is that, firstly, if you're asking specific port-related questions, they will have to be directed to Minister Elliott. But what I can say is that I know that I'm trying to assist in this space with (1) freight branch, which is a division within Transport for NSW. We have had that moved within Matt Fuller's jurisdiction to allow the Minister for freight to have more oversight of end-to-end options, including what we can do in that space to support our port operations. We have FTAC discussing these very points right now and how they intersect with road and rail operations. And (3) freight branch are involved in the PBLIS review, which is currently underway and which relates to ports and Minister Elliott. But as the Minister for freight, I do inform myself of what is happening in that space because it is really important to the broader freight industry.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: As Minister for freight, do you accept that, if you look at page 23 of that document on the table, you are looking at a 213 per cent increase in commodity forecasts for 2056 and that you're going to have to look at other options besides Port Botany if you want to keep those efficiencies? Again, you want to keep people exporting across the world, because you're not going to be able to wring any level of efficiency out of Port Botany to compensate for that 213 per cent. It's just not possible. Will you admit that, Minister?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: What I say, Mr Banasiak, is that these challenges—I am working with industry on as much as I can in my portfolio area. We have given the freight industry a platform to raise, discuss and work through these issues and give guidance to the New South Wales Government around feedback. Again, the PBLIS review is underway, which directly relates to the efficiency and the operations of ports, and I'm going to allow that process to take its course. With some of your broader questions, I suspect, around specific ports in this State, you'll have to direct them to Minister Elliott.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Sure, okay. In my remaining three minutes, Minister, are you aware of the Future Transport Technology Roadmap?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Which is part of which plan? What's the document you're referring to?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: It looks like that. There are specific regional initiatives, so I imagine you have responsibility for—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: What is it called, Mr Banasiak? Because I can't see that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: *Future Road Transport Roadmap 2021-2024*. I believe Mr de Kock might be able to help assist.

JOOST DE KOCK: Yes, I am familiar with that document.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Can you update us in terms of the regional initiatives? Where are we up to in achieving those regional initiatives, given that we're probably 18 months away from the end date of that document?

JOOST DE KOCK: Thank you so much for that question. The Future Transport Technology Roadmap—we released that about a year and a half ago. It positions Transport to be a lead adopter of transport technology, and it contains six priority areas. Actually, to reflect the importance of technologies in the regions, one of the six priority areas is regional technologies, and the road map has a number of initiatives in it that are well underway. For example, the transport connected buses, which provide the 16 cities with buses so that passengers can see where they are and how the occupancy is—that program is well underway. We've rolled it out already to—I believe it's 13 cities. And the remaining cities are soon to be rolled out.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: On notice, can you tell me what those remaining cities are?

JOOST DE KOCK: I can. The remaining cities are Orange and Griffith, and they're expected to be launched next month. So that will provide, in total, 1,300 buses operating in 16 regional cities. It gives customers real visibility of where the bus is, it gives visibility of the timetables and it also gives operators visibility of how their buses are operating. It's a great initiative for both operators and regional customers.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: In my remaining minute can we just confirm that this document makes no mention of flying cars?

JOOST DE KOCK: No, it doesn't.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Just very quickly, Madam Chair, we have some feedback or a response on Wee Waa in your next session.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Okay. We might have to leave it to the afternoon. I need to go to another meeting. But thank you, Minister.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Anthony Hayes will be able to inform a response for you.

The CHAIR: Excellent, thank you. I might just steal your last minute, then.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Yes, go for it.

The CHAIR: Excellent. Sorry, just coming back to the apparent deed that was sent, apparently that has not been received by the unions. It was a promise to deliver a deed, but here we are on Wednesday and we still don't have any deed being received by the unions. It's just another Government stunt, isn't it?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Ms Boyd, don't be like that. The deed was presented to the RTBU last week.

The CHAIR: Yes. That's the one, though, that needed to be amended.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I was very clear—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: What did Alex send you?

The CHAIR: I wish I was on Alex's little phone list. I'm not.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: He only messages John and Peter. You're left out.

The CHAIR: Yes, apparently. Sorry, Minister?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: A deed was presented to the RTBU last week. I was very clear on Friday that the deed that was presented last week was not acceptable to the RTBU, and it was disappointing that they couldn't sign that. They have since offered a modified or revised deed that we are working through.

The CHAIR: Oh, okay. So it's not agreed?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Yes, but the deed doesn't relate—no. Without trying to talk out of school, the changes to the deed that you are referring to don't relate to the modifications.

The CHAIR: That's not what you've said, though. You said there is an agreed deed that has been sent to the union and that somehow they've not responded. But that's not actually true, is it? They've not received anything.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, that is true, because the modifications that have been agreed to in that deed have not changed. What the union is seeking is other clauses to be changed in that deed that tie in to the enterprise agreement.

The CHAIR: On Sunday—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, no, Ms Boyd. Let's be very clear. The discussions and negotiations around the modifications, the actual modifications and time line and how we will manage that moving forward when an agreement is reached—

The CHAIR: That's not relevant.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: That has not changed at all.

The CHAIR: On Sunday the New South Wales Government wrote to rail workers saying that they would agree to the safety concerns and would send a signed commitment. As of today, no signed commitment has been sent. So when you were saying that an agreement had been made and why are the unions not accepting it—blah, blah, blah—that's nonsense because they haven't even received this signed commitment.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No. That's totally inaccurate, Ms Boyd. Again, I presented a deed that was unacceptable last week to the RTBU. They have come back with a change to clauses within the deed that do not relate specifically—

The CHAIR: That's not what you said.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Ms Boyd, you've asked a question—

The CHAIR: And you're not answering it.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I'm trying to give you the answer. This is complex. You can't just come in as an outsider to understand how complex the negotiations are.

The CHAIR: Okay, but you can't come in here and misconstrue what that deed was.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I'm not misconstruing. I am being very accurate.

The CHAIR: You made out in the last round of questioning that this was all in the union's court because the Government had delivered this signed deed. "What the hell is their problem?" was basically my impression of what you said. And yet it turns out that you haven't sent that signed commitment at all.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: We're going around in circles. To summarise and to best answer your further questions, because my previous answers were accurate in today's session, the changes that the RTBU requested after my presentation of the deed late last week were agreed to by the Government in the event that the RTBU, in partnership with the CRU, withdraws industrial action.

The CHAIR: Where's the signed commitment letter, Minister?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Yes, but that offer was put back to the combined rail unions—specifically, the RTBU—that the Government would agree to their final change to the deed.

The CHAIR: You can see how this looks like a stunt.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: But the Government agreed to that change if the combined rail unions withdrew their industrial action today. Now the combined rail unions, specifically the RTBU, said that was unacceptable and that they would not withdraw their industrial action.

The CHAIR: Right. So we're taking this as clarificatory evidence?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, no. I've been very clear about this.

The CHAIR: You haven't been very clear. You have made out that it's the unions that are holding out.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: But it is the unions.

The CHAIR: But you haven't delivered the signed commitment letter, correct?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, no. We have agreed to the changes the RTBU requested and the condition was that the CRU withdraw their industrial action for today. Now that was not done, Ms Boyd. That was not done, so when you say that I haven't been clear—

The CHAIR: The message the Government sent on Sunday was that it would send a signed commitment letter. Where's the signed commitment letter?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: That offer was presented from Minister Tudehope on Sunday. That was presented to the RTBU—

The CHAIR: A signed commitment letter?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —and to Unions NSW.

The CHAIR: A signed commitment letter?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: A signed letter to Unions NSW—

The CHAIR: But not the commitment letter.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —and the RTBU that we would agree to their final change to the clause—

The CHAIR: So not the commitment letter?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Ms Boyd. Ms Boyd.

The CHAIR: Yes, Minister?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: The agreement was that we would agree to the final change to the clause if the unions withdrew their industrial action. Do you think as a commuter, Ms Boyd, that it is fair that the Government has conceded, given the RTBU what they want? All we ask is for peace on the public transport network. The unions have effectively got what they set out to achieve—

The CHAIR: No, they haven't. They haven't got a signed commitment letter.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —in the modifications to the new intercity fleet with a legally binding deed that they could execute—

The CHAIR: They don't have it.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —and they turn around and say, "No, industrial action remains for Wednesday. It remains for Wednesday."

The CHAIR: Because they haven't got what you've told everyone that they have got.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I'm sorry, but the voting public and the commuters of this State are not going to put up with that. Despite what you say, they are not going to put up with it.

The CHAIR: Well, if they get that kind of misinformation from the Government—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Then again, I suppose The Greens preference the Labor Party at the State election and the Federal election, so I suppose—

The CHAIR: Oh, here we go. I love these deflections. These are my favourite of the deflections from Ministers: the attack on the questioner. Go ahead.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I suspect that you are probably a part of this strategy about the "year of the strike"—

The CHAIR: Yeah, no. No.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —and that you find pleasure in commuters of this State being totally disrupted. That casuals going for their first casual shift can't get to work—

The CHAIR: Do you think people believe this, Minister? This is very unbecoming.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —or that people who need to get to work can't get to work.

The CHAIR: Alright, enough. Order!

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I heard a story on Sydney talkback radio this morning—

The CHAIR: No, Minister. Order! It's the Opposition's time.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you, Chair. Minister, I might turn, if you are comfortable with this, to some other issues.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: You don't want to talk about your mates in the unions?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'd just take the offer, if I were you.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Okay.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I want to ask about the Government's changes to the signage that applies to speed cameras. The Government paid for the signage, which is now on top of the cars. How much did taxpayers pay?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I'd have to refer to Tara McCarthy on the specifics about exactly what that cost, but what I will say is a little bit of context from the beginning—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Well, I'll ask that you are directly relevant, and we might ask Ms McCarthy.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, directly relevant to the signage.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: To the cost of the signage?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Well, to the signage. As the incoming regional roads Minister, from the community feedback I was pretty clear that we needed to find the balance, and the balance was to have our mobile speed cameras—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, I'll draw you back to the cost of the signage. I think you've referred that to Ms McCarthy.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I'll refer to Tara McCarthy. You obviously don't want to hear—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you.

TARA McCARTHY: Can I say that the cost of the signage was done within the existing contract and it was \$2.6 million.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That's the cost of the contract or the cost of the signage?

TARA McCARTHY: The cost of the signage was \$2.6 million, but it was done within the existing contract.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We might return to that in the session. Thank you, Minister. I might turn to the Government's Future Transport 2061 plan, the draft plan, the plan that has since become "reasonably public", is the way I would describe it. In relation to one of the discussions in there, the draft transport plan—the 10 February 2022 version marked "sensitive, New South Wales Cabinet, not for further distribution"—says, "More than 80 per cent of the rural road network has a default 100 kilometres per hour speed limit, regardless of safety protections. Speed limits across our rural network should be assessed and adjusted to best suit road conditions." It goes on to give some examples, including as we're approaching level crossings, where perhaps the limit there should be 80 kilometres on the approaches. Is the Government considering—are you considering, as Minister—lowering speed limits across the rural road network?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Firstly, thanks for the question, Mr Graham. The Future Transport 2061 plan is a draft plan. It is where we are updating our future vision for transport across New South Wales, and regional New South Wales will be included in that plan as well as other portfolio areas, like freight. But the reality is, Mr Graham, that it is a draft plan. I will have more to say when the Government has more to say—when we announce what is the final plan for Future Transport 2061.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, I accept that answer in relation to the transport plan. I'm asking something slightly different, though. Given that the draft plan says that, are you considering lowering speed limits across the rural road network, as is referred to in the draft plan?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I'm not going to be talking about a draft plan that isn't the final plan, and I just refer to my previous answer.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Let's separate the two things, then. Let me just put the question to you without this reference. Minister, are you considering lowering speed limits, perhaps to 80 kilometres an hour, across the rural road network?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I refer to my previous answer.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Your previous answer gave no answer at all to this.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: If you would like to talk about speed zones across regional New South Wales and how we review speed zone changes and how they're done on merit or on consultation or feedback, I would refer you to the process. Mr Carlon can answer those questions. With regard to the Government's policy position in and around Future Transport 2061, it's a draft report that isn't finalised. You're referring to some documents that have not actually been made public. I'll have more to say—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Good.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —when we finalise Future Transport 2061 and the portfolio areas of mine that are relevant in that future plan.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you, Minister. I'm familiar with the process but I might just note for the record you've refused to rule that in or out. I will ask this question—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, I have asked you—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You've given your answer, Minister.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I have referred the question to an expert—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You've referred the process to an expert.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —who can give you how we review speed changes in regional New South Wales.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm familiar with the process.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: That's a very, very tricky statement, Mr Graham. For the record and for *Hansard*, I have given you the ability to ask an expert in Mr Carlon, with years of experience, to outline the process on how we review speed changes in regional New South Wales.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm familiar with the process, Minister.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: You elected not to take that option and to provide a tricky statement.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, are you aware of a grant that was given by John Barilaro in Narromine out of the Regional Investment Attraction Fund to develop flying cars in New South Wales?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I'm aware of an announcement that was made in Narromine with the then Deputy Premier and Minister and the now member for Dubbo, but that's the extent of what I know. It is not within the funding program of Transport for NSW. I believe that the question should be directly referred to the Deputy Premier's office and the agency of the Department of Regional NSW.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Just to establish your alibi, you weren't there at the announcement. That's correct, isn't it?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But you're broadly aware of it?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: When was the announcement? I don't think I was the Minister.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It was 8 July 2020. You were not.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, I wasn't the Minister, either.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, exactly. But there was some suggestion you were there.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I just want to clearly establish on the record your alibi. I think we both agree you were not present.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Who's suggesting it?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: It's only you suggesting it.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Is this serious, though, that we might have flying cars in New South Wales?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Well, you'd have to—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Have you watched *The Jetsons*?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: *The Jetsons*, yes. In and around the funding for what you've described as flying cars and the Narromine investment, pose those questions to the Department of Regional NSW. But what I can say—and we have Mr de Kock who can answer more broadly—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think he would be most unwilling to do that.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: He's a flying car expert.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No. In Transport for NSW and my portfolio area, not that far from Narromine we have our emerging vehicle technology facility at Cudal, the home of Hazelton airlines—a very reputable long-serving business in the regions. We've been able to convert Cudal Airport into an emerging vehicle tech facility.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You're talking like a fan of these ideas, Minister. This is the sort of big talk—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: It's not talk. We're delivering.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —that produced exactly this grant.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: It's not talk. We're delivering.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The reason I'm asking you is this is in the Future Transport Strategy. It promises, in fact, flying cars in New South Wales by 2026.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I'm not talking about—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Given we can't run the trains on time, given the trams don't work at all—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Here we go. Here we go.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Maybe they could fly over the wooden bridges.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —and given you've got to duck when you're on a ferry, are we seriously going to have flying cars in the next term of Parliament?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: It will be more vision than you and Minns will ever come up with. Mr Graham, what I'm talking about is actual funding, actual commitments and actual delivery.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And what I'm asking about is your strategy.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, you've asked a question.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You're talking about something entirely else.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I'm not referring to Future Transport 2061. I am referring to our emerging vehicle facility in Cudal—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Well, I am referring to it.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —that we have delivered on, that we have autonomous vehicle testing, that we have direct collaboration with the private sector—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, Minister. We agree. You're talking about something else. I'm asking about your strategy that promises flying cars in the next term of Parliament. Is this serious?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: It's not within—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It sounds like a joke.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I've said to you that the funding, the criteria, the rollout of that program is directly related to the Department of Regional NSW.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It's in your strategy.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: The Deputy Premier—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Don't laugh, Minister. Don't laugh.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —and his very hardworking bureaucrats are in the next room. Maybe you should fly over there and ask the questions to the relevant Minister because you're an experienced individual, Mr Graham. You're here and you're not even asking—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, can you rule out—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: — the correct questions to the correct Minister.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Can you rule out—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Fly over to the Macquarie Room. Fly over there and ask Minister Toole and his hardworking bureaucrats. I'm sure they will answer the question for you.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, I'll just ask you a couple more questions. Can you rule out the Government having a sky toll program when they introduce these flying cars in the next term of Parliament?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I refer to my previous answer, Mr Graham.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I mean, are you seriously saying to us—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Maybe you can get up with sky toll signs, John. Get those signs out!

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, this is in your draft strategy. Are you seriously telling us that, in the same amount of time that it's taken us to not fix the new intercity fleet, we might have flying cars?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Mr Graham, I refer to my previous answer.

The CHAIR: Do we need a fifth Transport Minister?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'll turn to the issue of taxis, along with my colleague. Minister, you tend to get along pretty well with most of your colleagues—that is my observation—in the House.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Popular bloke.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Who do you blame, given they blame each other, Minister Kean or Minister Elliott, for the fact that taxi plate owners have not yet been compensated?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Firstly, it should be noted that our point to point reforms are progressing. We need to progress and finalise our reforms and what the final transitional payment and package looks like to the taxi industry. As the Minister for Regional Transport and Roads, I am here to represent regional taxi operators and plate owners in regional New South Wales. That's exactly what I've done. To clarify, Mr Graham, I have met with the NSW Taxi Council face to face a number of times at a number of meetings. My office, I think, also keeps in touch with the Taxi Council weekly.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But Kean and Elliott blame each other. What's your view about who's at fault?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I have met with regional taxi plate owners-operators. I've discussed it with local government as well. The reality is, Mr Graham, that I have reflected the consultation I've had with regional taxi operators into a submission, into the processes of Government, and those processes of Government are being worked through in due course.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Can I talk specifically about ground-based vehicles, taxis? Can I quote from Mr Geoff Ferris, President of Country Taxi Operators Association, "Why is it taking so long for the Treasurer to support the need for fair and proper compensation? \$1.6 billion has been taken from licensed owners in New South Wales because of a NSW Government decision, with a number of these owners in regional NSW with multiple licences. The industry is unable to move forward." How do you answer that?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Well, firstly, again, I would say that I'm here to represent the views of regional taxi plate owners. I have met Mr Ferris a number of times, the same as Mr Rogers from the Taxi Council as well as regional plate owners, co-op operators. I've had a lot of consultation in this space. I have reflected the views and consultation with regional taxi operators into the submission. I've represented those views in what I thought was the right approach.

They have been put into the submission, which has gone through the processes of Government, and we are all working towards finalising our point to point reform, which will include what the final transitional payment looks like. The taxi industry was supported during COVID with COVID-specific assistance, and \$145 million has already been disbursed and paid to industry from the PSL. For the record, Mr Primrose, I remain committed to ensuring that regional taxi plate owners do get a fair, and in some ways, a generous transitional payment.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: When?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: It's going through the processes of Government and Ministers Kean, Elliott and I are working through those processes so we can finalise the transitional payment and we can finalise the reforms to the point to point industry.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: These operators are talking about leaving regional communities, which means that they won't have taxi services. It would seem to me and them that the issue is the length of time this is taking. So I ask again: When do you expect that a decision will be made? I don't need a day, but these people are asking when they are actually going to get an outcome of this process?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I will continue working through the processes of Government. I do not sit on the Expenditure Review Committee; neither does Minister Elliott. That is obviously for senior Ministers, including the Treasurer of this State. We are working through the processes of Government, of what the final reforms to the point to point industry look like, which would include the final transitional payment. I've even gone as far as to understand how you disburse a transitional payment and the tax obligations for taxi plate owners in that space. I have done the research. I have reflected the views of regional taxi plate owners into my submissions. Minister Elliott is looking after the views, concerns, considerations of metropolitan taxi plate owners. You would have to ask him questions that relate to metropolitan area plate owners. For Mr Ferris, that you refer to, who I have met, for Mr Rogers of the Taxi Council, and for the numerous taxi operators that I have met with and discussed these reforms, I have reflected the views and those considerations into the processes of government and into submissions, working in collaboration with Minister Elliott's office.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Do you agree with them that this whole process within government is taking too long?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I say we need to follow the processes of government. I want to ensure and remain committed that regional taxi plate owners do get a generous and fair transitional payment. Again, there are processes of government. We are working through those processes and I would hope that we can finalise our point to point reforms as quickly as possible.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: In February the taxi industry submitted a proposal on behalf of the entire point to point transport industry for a change to current policy. Did you read that?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I would have to refer back to which document you are referring to because there has been a lot of work done in this space, a lot of consultation, a lot of meetings. I will come back to you on that on notice.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: It has been seven months on and the industry is still awaiting a decision. When do you think they'll get a response?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I will refer to my previous answer.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: There is a significant shortage of drivers in the industry. What are you going to do to help address this issue?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: It is fair to say that the industry has raised concerns about taxi drivers who are re-entering the industry, because taxis have seen an uplift on the back of some form—as we are seeing COVID recovery, whether it is in the city or the regions. There are previous taxi drivers who are returning, either back to Australia or back into the industry, and there are some reforms or there are some ways government can assist in getting more of these drivers back into taxis and on the road. I would refer to Tara McCarthy and Joost's team if you want to specifically talk about some of those changes that I have taken from the feedback with the industry and we are trying to work through now how we can assist industry to get these drivers to return behind the wheel into the industry sooner.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: There is one particular issue I would like you to address, and that is currently you need an Australian driver licence for 12 months in the last two years to be eligible to drive in the point to point industry in New South Wales. In Victoria and South Australia it is only six months. Are you proposing to change the eligibility guidelines?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: That is exactly some of the consultation I have had with the industry. The Point to Point Transport Commissioner is also within the industry and available to discuss these changes or challenges. But the challenge you have described has been raised with me from the taxi industry and Transport for NSW. I will hand over to Tara, because they are looking at this right now.

TARA McCARTHY: We have received representation from the taxi industry and the ride share industry more broadly in relation to their concerns about the difficulties getting drivers. We have been working closely with them to look at a number of options for a variation to the current requirements. We have been working closely with the point to point commissioner. We believe we have an option and the point to point commissioner is currently considering that and will take that to government for consideration.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Are there any proposed time lines on this?

TARA McCARTHY: My understanding is that's imminent.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: What's imminent? That the matter will be taken to government?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Imminent that Transport is working, as Ms McCarthy has said, on a change and we are working with the point to point commissioner on this and it is in the near future.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Forgive me, but we discussed earlier on the glacial nature of the roads reclassification program. People would like to know that it will move a bit faster than that.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Weeks.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Weeks? Thank you, Minister. Because I just mentioned the issue of the roads reclassification program, I will refer to a resolution that came out a couple of weeks ago from Bega Valley Council in relation to a matter we discussed earlier. The resolution of the council was:

That council urgently seek an update from the New South Wales Government on the progress of the regional road transfer and classification review, which may impact future management responsibility for the Tathra-Bermagui Road and consequently Cuttagee Bridge.

How would you respond to them?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: What specifically is your question, Mr Primrose?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: My question is they are seeking an update about the progress on the route.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I would give them the same update that I gave you today, Mr Primrose, and it is the same update, I believe. I have been on a panel with Wendy Machin, the chair of the independent panel, of the reclassification and transfer panel. I would give Bega Valley Council the same update I gave you today so they could understand how we are progressing this program, when we look to have the report back, what the independent panel is doing right now and, again, how we are progressing the priority round so Bega Valley can see that yes, we have got a commitment there, yes, we have got funding there, we are progressing the program, but whilst at the same time working with that council and all the other councils across this State on broader road funding, on road repair, on natural disaster declaration funding. There is more to road funding and considerations for councils than just the road reclassification and transfer program. They need the support, which they are getting through our funding programs, through direct collaboration with government, whilst at the same time we are progressing the commitment around the road reclassification and transfer program.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I think it is also worthwhile pointing out my last point, Minister, that you indicated that no councils had raised this issue with you.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, no. I said very few councils.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Very few councils? Well, Bega Valley Council is definitely one of them, because they are concerned about this.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Yes, and I believe from memory they have written to me on this as well.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Because they are concerned about that bridge.

The CHAIR: I will ask a couple of questions, then I will hand back to the Opposition. I ask you, Minister, about the Inland Rail project. The initiative and the goals are well supported across political parties and also across the State, but I understand that there are a number of local areas that are a bit concerned about the impact on regional towns. Have you had any councils approach you with concerns about the way that the Inland Rail project is going to impact on their town?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Firstly, for context, prior to being the Minister for Regional Transport and Roads, even as a Parliamentary Secretary and backbencher, I have met with members of the broader community that have concerns around the Inland Rail project and I have been able to, in some of these instances, organise meetings with the then interim CEO of Inland Rail-ARTC and those community members. I have been able to do my bit to make sure that their voices and concerns are heard. It is worth noting it is a Commonwealth government-funded project and Inland Rail-ARTC are administering and rolling out this project. Transport have involvement, obviously, around acquisition of the corridor and in and around—a funding commitment with grade separation and level crossings. But to the specifics of your question, it is really a question that has to be put to the Commonwealth Government because it is their project, it is their program and they are rolling it out.

The CHAIR: I accept that you have played a role in coordination in some cases, and that sounds great. But, for example, Wagga Wagga City Council is very concerned about the impact of the Inland Rail project there. Have you spoken with the Wagga Wagga City Council in relation to this?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I met the mayor of Wagga Wagga City Council, Dallas—I have forgotten Dallas's surname—recently, when I was in Wagga Wagga visiting and making a Government announcement. I can confirm that Joe McGirr, the member for Wagga Wagga, has spoken to me in the last seven days regarding concerns that he has in and around the Inland Rail corridor and some concerns he has for the Wagga Wagga community.

My office has been incredibly responsive and proactive to Dr McGirr. Obviously, we have explained to Dr McGirr that this is a Commonwealth Government project. This is not one that we have complete oversight with. We have involvement, as I said, in and around land acquisition, grade separation and level crossings and our funding and commitment in that space. But in terms of the corridor, I have explained to Dr McGirr, representing Wagga Wagga City Council, that he will have to direct that to the Commonwealth. I think my office has gone as far as to organise Dr McGirr a meeting between him and the CEO or senior personnel from Inland Rail/ARTC.

The CHAIR: I was in Wagga Wagga about 10 days ago and saw for myself the existing rail and where we're now going to expect these far more frequent and larger, longer trains coming through once the Inland Rail project has been completed. I saw the way that the level crossings will need to be coming down and really blocking quite frequently high-traffic areas within Wagga. There is a real concern that it's going to split the city in two. Are you saying that there is no role for the State Government in trying to ameliorate that impact?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I'm saying, as I said to Dr McGirr, that is a question in relation to the corridor. The corridor is not set by the New South Wales Government. The corridor is set by the Commonwealth

and then Inland Rail/ARTC need to, obviously, abide by planning laws and any other considerations. But the question really goes to the corridor and whether the rail should be going through cities like Wagga that you've referred to. That is a question for the Commonwealth. That is why I have said to the local member for Wagga Wagga—and I've just had it confirmed—that we have arranged a meeting for Dr McGirr and ARTC/Inland Rail in the coming weeks.

The CHAIR: Just to confirm the nature of the State's involvement, if, for example, the community were to say, "We would like a tunnel under or a bridge over," or "we would like something else in order to reconnect our town", is that something that is within the State's responsibility or no?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I'll pass on to the department secretary, Matt Fuller, to answer those questions specifically about what our involvement is but, more broadly, as I've said, grade separation, level crossings and some planning and property acquisition as part of the corridor. The corridor is well and truly set by the Commonwealth—it is their project—but Mr Fuller might be able to elaborate on where directly our involvement is.

MATT FULLER: Thank you, Minister. Chair, the regional division of Transport, through our western division, has been extensively engaged with the Inland Rail project. They work closely with them to try and help identify and work through with the communities any of the concerns around what is going on within the corridor. There's a number of ways we've been doing that. As the Minister said, some of that is around assisting—the State has provided the process for property acquisitions, one. We've been helping there and making sure that community concerns around ensuing that there are independent property managers assisting landholders to understand—

The CHAIR: Sorry, can I bring you back to the question, just in the interests of time?

MATT FULLER: Sure.

The CHAIR: What I am particularly interested in knowing is what the State can do to ameliorate some of the worst impacts of this. For example, can the State put conditions on the development to ask the Commonwealth to build a tunnel or a bridge or do something else?

MATT FULLER: My understanding is that Planning are the ones that are assessing the project. We've worked very closely with Planning on a number of examples where we have flagged issues that we'd like to see addressed differently. I think where your question comes from around the Wagga situation is about the treatment of level crossings.

The CHAIR: Yes.

MATT FULLER: The State and our team have been working very closely with Inland Rail on prioritising the grade-separated level crossings.

The CHAIR: Can you explain what that is?

MATT FULLER: The grade separated is where you have road that goes over rail to avoid that issue that you talk about in terms of cut-off when a train comes through and the traffic comes to a stop. Grade separation is something that we've been working very closely with. There was a recent announcement from the Federal Government to further support the rollout of grade separation on the Inland Rail project. We've been helping and, I guess, informing Inland Rail on what we'd like to see in terms of those prioritised grade separation crossings. At the moment there have been four that have been agreed, but the State's position has always been that we would like as many grade-separated crossings to take place as is possible to avoid the sort of issues that you talk about, along with the obvious other issues related to safety.

The CHAIR: It would go a long way to addressing those concerns if we could have a grade separation crossing in Wagga. Just to clarify, though, is that something that could be made a condition on this project?

MATT FULLER: My understanding is it's not something that could be made a condition. We've been working cooperatively with Inland Rail to try and influence and inform as many of those crossings as we can and build cases to seek the funding that would be commensurate with those.

The CHAIR: Thank you, that's very useful.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, are you aware of the issue with the regional seniors travel card where, if the balance falls below \$5 and is unspent in 30 days, the cards are cancelled and the funds forfeited to Transport for NSW?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I'm not aware of that specific issue, but Joost de Kock may be able to answer the question. But I think it is worth noting how successful this regional seniors travel card has been.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But why are we taking that \$5—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Mr Graham, this is the same card that your party opposed.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, you're not aware of this issue. Why are—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Over a million cards have gone out since the start of this program.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And how much have you taken back, I guess, is my question, Minister? How much money has been taken back off people that was promised and delivered to them, now reclaimed?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I'll pass over to Mr de Kock.

JOOST DE KOCK: Thanks, Minister. As the Minister said, the regional seniors travel card has been really successful. After a two-year trial it has been expanded. As the Minister said, nearly a million cards have been distributed. It's a \$250 card for regional seniors to pay on travel expenses. The balance is \$250 and—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Mr de Kock, I'm well aware of this. How much money has been taken back off people?

JOOST DE KOCK: I don't have those figures at my fingertips so I'll have to take it on notice as to how much exactly that would be.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you, Minister, I appreciate your answer that it's not an issue you're aware of, so we might come back to that in the officials' session.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Can I confirm for the record, Mr Graham, that to memory—I sign a lot of correspondence and I read all of it before I sign it. I haven't seen this raised with me at all. I've just checked with my office—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, I appreciate that.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —and I don't think we've received any. We'll certainly go and look into it. It could be some sort of technical issue, but we're happy to look into it.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Good. I really appreciate that answer. We might raise it again this afternoon and get some more details. I want to turn to the regional apprentice and uni travel card as one of the \$42 billion worth of new initiatives by the Treasurer. This \$98 million, two-year pilot was announced. When will the program commence?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: You will be as excited as I am when I announce this in the near future. Some \$98 million—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: When will I be excited?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —obviously has been set aside for this really important card.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I've read the budget, Minister.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: On the back of the success of the regional seniors travel card, yes, I've been able to work up what will be the regional apprentice and university travel card. We're finalising the criteria, the application process and how to roll this out, in particular, in a way that will work for the community. We'll have a lot more to say in the very near future but also—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Can you give us some sense of the timing, though, Minister?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —another really important initiative around cost of living—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Sorry, Minister, I'm going to stop you there. You have to be directly relevant. I've asked you when. One of the ways to deal with this would be to have it in place for next year. Is that the goal here? When will this be in it place?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I will have a lot more to say about when the application process will be open in the very near future.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: How many people are expected to take up the regional apprentice part of this card?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I refer to my previous answer.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Your previous answer gave no detail. This is budget estimates. As Minister, can you tell us whether you have the first clue of how many people are expected to take this up?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I can confirm that \$98 million is listed in the budget papers—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I've read the budget.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —for the regional apprentice and uni student travel card. We are finalising the criteria and what the application process will look like and—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, you have allocated this money. Do you even know—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —I will have a lot more to say in the near future once we announce when the application process will be open and—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You're avoiding the question, Minister. Do you even know how many people—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —the criteria has been finalised.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Do you even know how many people are expected to take this up?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I refer to my previous answer.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Which gave no detail. This is budget estimates. I am asking about a program in your control. You are proud of this program. How many people are going to take it up?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: When I announce it shortly—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Again, you're avoiding the question, Minister.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —you will be as excited as I am because this is an important—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: It's hard to be that excited.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —cost-of-living measure that this Government—the NSW Nationals, working with our Liberal colleagues—will be delivering into regional New South Wales.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, you're giving the impression that you're not across your brief here.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: It is all about putting the budget and money back into the pockets—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You're not doing yourself any favours.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —of our hardworking apprentices and regional uni students who do face costs in delivering their course, in making sure that they can complete those studies. We are finalising the criteria—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, I will—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: We will have a lot more to say in the very near future. And when we get to that point—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But you can't tell me today how many people are expected to benefit.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —you will be as excited as I am.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But you don't know how many people will benefit. Is that a fair comment?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I am not using budget estimates to make policy announcements here. Again, I confirm for budget estimates today there is \$98 million in the budget. We are finalising the criteria and the application process.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you, Minister. If that's all you've got to add, we will move on, thanks.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I am excited about it—really excited about it.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, we are moving on given your lack of detail.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: We will have a lot more to say shortly.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We are moving on.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Minister, can I just have a look at the Fixing Country Roads program? Is it the case that in 2019, \$80.3 million was taken from that Fixing Country Roads grants program and that you have recently announced that that's going back?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I can confirm that the \$80.3 million in the final round of what has been a very successful \$543 million program, delivering funding into regional communities for lane widening, bridge enhancements, with a very clear focus around freight movements and enhancements for our freight industry and shoring up our supply chain—that is what this fund is for. I can confirm that the \$80.3 million has been made available and applications are open.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Before it was taken out, back in 2019 there were something like 69 applications from local councils. They have now been told that they need to resubmit those applications. Is that the case?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Yes.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Okay.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Which I think is fair, Mr Primrose, because I think this would be the opportunity in that if there is a change in cost or delivery around those projects that were sitting there that they may want to resubmit, they are invited to do that. I have written, I believe, to a lot of the local government areas across the State, advising them that the funding is available, encouraging them to resubmit those applications and to take the opportunity to see if there are any changes in cost while they are doing that. But also it shouldn't be just because they are sitting there that they are the ones we look at.

Priorities might have changed in these local government areas for those projects, or they may have been able to secure other State or Federal funding already for those projects. I think it is a prudent way to advise that the funding is there. It is going to be round six, I believe, of the Fixing Country Roads program. Let's get these applications in and let's get the grading to occur and we will roll out these announcements and support councils yet again, in addition to our Fixing Local Roads Program.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Minister, the applications had gone in. Councils had spent a lot of time and money and resources putting them in.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Yes, but all they have to do is update their application and resubmit it, Mr Primrose. I don't think that that is an unreasonable ask on local government. We have our Transport for NSW team working directly with these communities and councils. If they need some assistance in time or if they need some assistance in a bit of extra resource to help do this, or scope, or if they want another set of eyes to look over their proposal to make sure that they are on the right path—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But the years have rolled on here, Minister.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —that can be done.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Many of these staff might have left the council. Some or all of that knowledge has gone in the years it has taken for you to deal with these issues.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Yes, well, at the end of the day, Mr Graham, we have round six of our Fixing Country Roads program. I announced on 22 August that the \$80.3 million that was made available in round six is open and I encourage councils that had previous applications in to have a look over their proposal—"Is this still a priority?"—and, if so, resubmit it.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Can I ask you where the \$80.3 million appears in the budget papers, please?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: It is a decision of the Expenditure Review Committee since the budget was published.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: There you go. More good news.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: When was that decision made?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: I will come back to you throughout the course of estimates as to which ERC meeting, which I think I can find, and which date that occurred. But it was over the course of the last eight weeks.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, since 21 June, in the last eight weeks. What triggered that decision?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: It was a proposal that I have been working on and put up to make sure that the \$80.3 million is returned back to Transport for NSW and that we open round six, which is a commitment that I made and that I would be doing I think maybe even at my last estimates appearance.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Was it new funding?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: But, as the Minister for Regional Roads, I want to make sure that we've got as much funding available to our regional communities for road repairs in light of what has been a challenging time as well.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Full credit to you, Minister, on getting it. It is not often that one gets to bounce the Treasurer just weeks after the budget. Was this new funding?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: So 19 August is when the ERC decision—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you. Was this new funding?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: No, it is funding via the Restart NSW Fund.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Right, okay. So that's the—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: This \$80.3 million is part of the overall \$543 million—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It is an allocation from—

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: —Fixing Country Roads program that this Government committed to. We've already, to date, spent \$462.3 million and that has committed to 325 projects, Mr Graham.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, I am trying to ask you a question. So you are telling us this is an allocation from the Restart NSW Fund? An allocation?

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: That is where the funding was returned from.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you.

The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY: Which I think was on the record from last estimates, to be frank, so I don't think that's new information. But what is important is the \$80.3 million is now being made available, as of 22 August, for applications. Councils are encouraged to dust off those applications, make sure they are still a priority, make sure they are still within budget and, if not, adjust it and submit it.

The CHAIR: Have Government members got any questions?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Not today.

The CHAIR: Entirely satisfied—excellent.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: More than satisfied with this Minister.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister, for your attendance. To the extent that there were questions taken on notice or supplementary questions, the Committee secretariat will be in touch. We say goodbye to you, but we will return at two o'clock with the rest of you. Thank you. Enjoy your lunch.

(The Minister withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

Ms TRACEY TAYLOR, Chief People Officer, Transport for NSW, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Welcome back to this afternoon's session. We will commence with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Thank you, Deputy Chair. I will begin by asking if you have any updates from the morning session. A number of questions were taken on notice. We were told we'd be getting some material; I just thought I'd check if anything has come through.

MATT FULLER: I might kick off and state that in terms of your question about resilience funding this morning—two things. If I could just clarify, we have specific resilience funding arrangements that have been in place post-bushfire and, as the Minister spoke about, the \$312.5 million that has been allocated to the fund that is occurring now. I guess, resilience is dealt with across the whole operating budget and as well as in our capital

budget. It really extends to every project that we are actually undertaking across regional New South Wales. Should we clarify that your question relates to those two specific buckets related to resilience?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Specific buckets.

MATT FULLER: Right. Thank you.

CYNTHIA HEYDON: In relation to your query on Cuttagee Bridge, we are still waiting on some information. If we can't get it back to you this afternoon, we'll take it on notice.

ANTHONY HAYES: My response was regarding Wee Waa primary school. Forgive me if I read it because I'm not particularly familiar with the subject. Narrabri Shire Council didn't support or does not support the installation of a pedestrian crossing on the Kamilaroi Highway. The proposed kiss and drop zone in the submission was also deemed to be unsafe on the Kamilaroi Highway and that was also not supported by Narrabri Shire Council. The original design had a student drop-off on the Kamilaroi, which was opposed by us, Transport for NSW and the shire council. Due to the nature of the highway, traffic volumes and heavy vehicle composition, Kamilaroi is obviously designated as an oversized transport route and a road train route, so the original design didn't satisfy the appropriate needs in terms of the warrant. We are now working with Narrabri Shire Council and the Department of Education for a dedicated kiss and ride and drop-off zone to be installed on a local road on George Street as an alternative solution.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: No others? I will begin. One issue, and it is a very localised one that is of interest to me because of my duty electorate, is the subsidised school transport scheme for flights from Lord Howe Island. Students from Lord Howe Island who travel to New South Wales schools have issues getting flights and are often forced to take extra time off from school in order to access flights. Can I ask whoever is responsible, are you aware of issues being experienced by isolated children living on Lord Howe Island under the school student transport scheme? I can list some of the issues, if you wish.

JOOST DE KOCK: We do have a school student transport scheme in place that has over half a million active school travel pass entitlements and that also includes special arrangements for school children in Lord Howe Island. I'm not aware of any issues of the scheme that you just mentioned.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: That concerns me because I am and there is a number of parents who—basically, what parents want is to be able to book flights themselves and to be reimbursed by the subsidised school transport scheme or have a dedicated human contact in Transport for NSW to address their needs. I can go through quite a few concerns that have been raised. Can I ask you to please take the question on notice and come back with if you are aware or not aware of any specific concerns just from correspondence you have received? I've got a whole lot of students and their parents who have raised specific concerns. It's not a political issue; it's simply just a way of—they are saying the booking arrangements are clunky and outdated and they've got some sensible suggestions. If you could look at those, that would be great.

JOOST DE KOCK: I'm very happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I want to clarify some of the evidence that was given this morning and some of the issues we were asking about. The first of those I might deal with is the flood damage estimates. I'm asking you, Mr Fuller, because I thought you gave quite clear evidence. I heard a difference between what you told us and what the Minister told us. I don't expect you to comment on that. I think that would not be unfair to you, but I want to make sure I understood what you told us; what evidence you are giving us today about that.

MATT FULLER: Sure.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So, \$1.5 billion in damage in total on State roads and regional roads; is that correct?

MATT FULLER: Yes, Mr Graham, that's correct. What I think we should do is take on notice the latest available figures that we have provided to the State recovery committee because, as I said, we have been providing updated data pretty consistently. Of course, as we've gone on, as the Minister highlighted, we had an initial assessment that was around that \$1.3 billion mark. We understand now, more fully, that basically our latest estimates are about \$1.3 billion on the local and regional road network.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Correct, yes.

MATT FULLER: And as the Minister talked about, another 150, thereabouts, on the State road network.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes.

MATT FULLER: If you combine the two of those, we are in that circa one and a half. But, as I said, I think it would be good for us to make sure that we come back because it is something—they were initial estimates; they have been refined over time.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. I think you made that point in the earlier session. I understood that clearly and I heard clearly the comments you put on the record. They coincide exactly with what you've just told us. I accept that you've taken those on notice and you'll come back with specific estimates. But, just to clarify the numbers you have just given us, I understood they were the figures for the three events—that is, February, March and July.

MATT FULLER: The cumulative total as at July, based on all of the natural disaster events that have occurred in the time.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And they are statewide figures, not North Coast figures?

MATT FULLER: Yes. I probably should say that the figure hasn't moved a whole lot since July. There was much less damage in that July period and also, as we have refined, some of those estimates have come back a little as we get more detail from our local government partners. It was important in the early response to the flooding events, particularly in the north of the State, that we gave local government the chance to really send in and for us to collate information on the extent so that we could really inform the response, particularly around what the Minister spoke to this morning in terms of the funding arrangements we advanced and a range of other things that our task force that we set up initiated in the early stages in response.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Great, thank you. I might come to the reclassification issue shortly but I think I will hand to my colleague first and then come back to that, if that suits?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Yes, thank you. I would like to ask briefly some questions about the bus service alteration requests. Can I ask how many requests Transport for NSW received in the last financial year for a bus service alteration?

MATT FULLER: I'll actually hand to Barbara Wise to take these questions.

BARBARA WISE: No problem. Thank you. Are you specifically interested in regional New South Wales or overall?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I am happy for it to be disaggregated for both.

BARBARA WISE: Okay, we will need to take that on notice. I am happy to provide details around that matter.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Let's begin then with just regional. Have you got those figures?

BARBARA WISE: Not off the top of my head. There is a little bit of backwards and forwards when we do get a request because sometimes not sufficient information is—and then sometimes it doesn't actually turn into what we would call a bus service alteration request. It can be an inquiry. I will need to provide on notice the details.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Okay. My request is in relation to last financial year. How many requests have been finalised?

BARBARA WISE: Yes.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: How many requests were received? How many have been finalised? How many are still outstanding? What was the average wait time?

BARBARA WISE: For the financial year 2021-22?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Yes.

BARBARA WISE: Not a problem, we'll take on that notice.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Can I ask you, generally bus companies are reporting that it is taking two years to get routes approved? Can you tell us if that is correct and why is it taking so long to assess the applications if it is?

BARBARA WISE: Well, I'm not aware personally of any that have taken that long. They do get put up as a request kind of repeatedly. Say, for example, because lots of students move schools, particularly at the start of the school year we will often get a very similar request resubmitted each year. So sometimes that occurs but I'm not aware of—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: How long would you say it would take on average?

BARBARA WISE: On average, I would have to get you some details. As I said, because there can be some backwards and forwards, it may be that from when the actual final submission to a BSAR it would be a number of weeks or months generally.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: A number of weeks or months?

BARBARA WISE: Yes.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Okay. We have been advised that many of these requests are for desperately needed additional services in high-growth areas. Do you think it's acceptable for transport providers to be funding these additional routes because of the delay?

BARBARA WISE: Certainly in high-growth areas we deal with requests routinely for when there is high-growth residential areas going into schools. I'm not aware of operators funding these themselves. In the event that that did occur, we would certainly reimburse operators as part of a contract adjustment once it was sorted out.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: There are probably not a lot of additional questions I can ask without having the data. If you could get me the data we might look at this again at some supplementary hearing, if you can, in relation to this.

BARBARA WISE: Sure.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I might go to reclassification then I'll hand back to you. If we turn back to the reclassification issue, I just had some more detail. Essentially, the main thing I'd like to understand—which I was having a bit of trouble as the numbers were flying around—is what has actually happened with the expenditure here. What is the cost, I guess, of the priority round?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: I can advise in relation to tranche one, which was the 16 classifications that we have progressed, the costs are less than 5,000 and that relates to TFNSW employees.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Less than \$5,000?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: For tranche one, yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Would it be fair to say that's how much has been spent prior to June 2022?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: No, that is in relation to tranche one. There have been other activities in relation to other stages we have started to work on, inspections et cetera. I'll have to take that on notice and get back to you with those figures.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Let me ask the question more broadly. How much has been spent on reclassifications to June 2022?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: If we can get that information before the end of the session, we will provide that; otherwise I'll take it on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Great. That would be very welcome. This is just the standard budget reporting that we'd expect. How much has been allocated for this financial year for this program?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: I don't have the breakdown from specifically within the budget. But the budget paper identifies 193 million in CapEx over the two years.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This is a signature commitment from the Government. There must be a budget allocation for this financial year. I don't mind if you want to take a little bit of time to find it—

CYNTHIA HEYDON: Yes, we'll get that confirmed.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But I would expect to be able to ask how much has been—I might just explain what I would like to know, and then I'm happy if you want to take a little bit of time.

CYNTHIA HEYDON: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I just want to have a clear understanding of the standard budget reporting how much have we spent to 22 June? How much has been allocated this financial year? How much has been allocated over the forwards, expecting that, given what is printed in the budget, I would have thought that is only next financial year. I may have misunderstood that, but I would have thought it is spent to date, allocated this year, allocated next year. I want to have an understanding of what are those figures.

CYNTHIA HEYDON: We'll come back and confirm that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Great. Thank you. There are a couple of other things. We know there are 500 applications. We know 78 councils have made them. We just don't know how many kilometres of road have been asked. I was surprised by that answer.

CYNTHIA HEYDON: It is an independent panel. We don't have visibility of that detail.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Okay. What are the terms of the members of the independent panel's employment—that is, for how long are they appointed?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: I can get you the details. It is published and I'll confirm, but I understand it is through to the end of this year. But we'll confirm the actual date

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Through to the end of 2022.

CYNTHIA HEYDON: Yes.

MATT FULLER: Mr Graham, just to clarify, there was a recent extension granted to panel members by three months basically to pick up and take into account that many of the councils had asked for an extended period of time to put their submission forward because of what was happening obviously in the environment around them. So there was three-month extension granted.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Okay. Then the expectation is they'll have delivered their final report by the end of the year, they'll finish their role. That is the expectation?

MATT FULLER: That's what the current terms of reference indicate, yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, it obviously could change. There is nothing to stop the Government changing that. Does that mean that question that we were starting to get to, but there was a lot going on, is they'll make their report? This is the final round, isn't it, for councils wondering—and this is a question which has come up on the ground—"Is this is my chance? If I've missed this, have I missed my chance?" The answer really is yes.

MATT FULLER: I will defer to Ms Heydon because I think there is still some opportunities and discussions that are being undertaken with local government.

CYNTHIA HEYDON: I have already distinguished the difference between the reclassification process and the regional roads transfer, which are two separate things. The regional roads transfer is a policy that the Government had out there and essentially this is part of that last full round. I suppose it is a conversation and discussion for government beyond that. The reclassification process is actually an ongoing BAU, essentially clean-up. So councils can still submit for, you know, reclassifications.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But when it comes to the 15,000 kilometres that might be transferred—that should be transferred, that will be transferred—that opportunity is now closed. Is that a fair statement?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: As part of this process, the full round was, yes, to identify any proposals from councils for transfer as part of this full round.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The independent panel does its report, then they're thanked, wished well on their way, and then it's over to the Government, the Minister and those processes. Thank you. Can I ask about one of those issues, which is reports from Albury saying they had been discouraged from applying as they were a regional city rather than a regional area. That was the message they got, possibly unfairly, but that was what they felt they had been told. Are you aware of those concerns? Have those concerns been reflected elsewhere?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: I'm not aware of those concerns. If there were concerns, I expect that they were raised with the panel directly, who are managing the process. But that council is eligible and would be invited, as were other regional councils, for the transfer and all councils for the reclass process.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Sometimes when it comes to transport projects for border communities, they are treated differently in the way we assess projects, particularly where the benefit flows—does it flow in New South Wales or Victoria? Is there any difference in the way that border councils, border communities or border projects are treated under this program?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: Not as far as I'm aware and definitely not within the guidelines, but the actual process for the assessment is with the panel.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. So they may introduce something in their final report but there's nothing that you are aware of?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: No.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Okay. If we can come back with those financial figures, that would be very helpful.

CYNTHIA HEYDON: Yes.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Can I just ask briefly some questions about Fixing Country Rail? I note that, having had a brief look at lunchtime on the website, I couldn't see any details of the 18 successful projects that were funded under the \$17 million allocation for the 2020 round that was announced in February 2021. Is there a reason that they are not there, or have I just missed them?

MATT FULLER: I think it's fair to say that the website probably requires an update, but I will hand to Ms Heydon because I know she's well across the detail of the number of projects, including the 26 that have been completed.

CYNTHIA HEYDON: Apologies; the website requires an update. We can provide the information around that round to you—if not today, we will take it as a question on notice.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I might just invite Mr Hayes back. I've just got a few follow-up questions on the Wee Waa school project. I note that you mentioned that you're working on a new proposal, which is a kiss-and-drop on George Street. Is that the same proposal that was originally put forward on the planning portal, which included compulsory acquiring of two residences to make room for this kiss-and-drop facility?

ANTHONY HAYES: I would need to take that away, I'm sorry. I don't have that level of detail, no, so I don't know.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Perhaps on notice, would you be able to—

ANTHONY HAYES: Yes, of course.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Obviously, this will probably be on notice as well: Did Transport for NSW support that original proposal to acquire those residences and put the kiss-and-drop on George Street?

ANTHONY HAYES: I will have to take that on notice.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: If it didn't, why? Any level of detail as to why that proposal was withdrawn or—the community are concerned because they saw that as the best option as well. Has Transport for NSW seen TTW—I'm assuming who is the contractor for this project—their response to your concerns? Have you seen that? I might pass that up to Mr Hayes. Obviously, part of Transport for NSW's concerns was that the design wasn't really future-focused in terms of the growth needs of the school and the contractor's response was, "Well, we can stagger the bell times in terms of students exiting the venue." Does Transport for NSW see that as a viable option?

ANTHONY HAYES: I'm not terribly familiar with the initial proposal. If I can take that away, we can certainly look into that. But our initial response would be that we would always be looking for a safe place where kids can cross the road and that wouldn't be dependent upon a bell.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Staggering bell times doesn't navigate buses and the need for parents to pick up two kids across multiple year groups. That response is probably a bit nonsensical.

ANTHONY HAYES: We were certainly fairly negative about the proposal to park on the other side of the highway, though, and that scored very lowly when our safety assessment was undertaken.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Yes. So you're renegotiating a design. That's obviously pushing back the approval on the planning portal, or what's—

ANTHONY HAYES: Yes, I don't have a time, I'm sorry, at the moment. It doesn't provide that information at the moment other than that we're in discussions right now with the council and the Department of Education.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I might just quickly turn to—while I'm bringing that up, the Wool Track road, which is the road between Cobar and Ivanhoe and Balranald, is there any indication as to whether funding will be granted to have that sealed all the way through, given it's an important freight route and becomes impassable in bad weather?

MATT FULLER: I think, Mr Banasiak, we would have to take that one on notice fully and just check whether or not there have been any submissions made and how we have responded to those.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Sure. Thank you. I've just got the question I need. There have been some concerns from residents in Menindee, both to my office and to my colleague Roy Butler's office, about the

quality of work done on the sealing of Pooncarie Road—basically showing that 12 months after the work has been done, they are already in a need of drastic repair. Has the Minister tasked the department with looking into the shoddy workmanship and what can be done?

MATT FULLER: I might just see if Mr Hayes has got any information on Pooncarie Road. Can I just say more broadly, without reflecting on workmanship, we've had a number of challenges on works that have been recently completed under various programs across the State because of, obviously, what has been going on in the environment with weather. There have been some projects that have needed revisiting in terms of their pavement, the sealing, because of the unprecedented wet. Mr Hayes, do you have any specific on Pooncarie Road?

ANTHONY HAYES: No, I have nothing here. I would have to take that on notice.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: You've had no representations from the Minister to look into it? I ask because my colleague has on numerous occasions requested the Minister to look into it and has received no response. I'm wondering where the breakdown is occurring in terms of communication.

MATT FULLER: We will certainly check with our western region, and I'm sure they will be able to provide us with a quick response. We can perhaps get back to you through the course of the day.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I would just like to continue, if I can, in relation to Fixing Country Rail. Thank you for much for taking on notice and providing details of the successful projects. Can you tell me why didn't the program run again in 2021?

MATT FULLER: Would you like some information on the 26 successful projects now, because we do have those on hand?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Yes. I would be very happy if you would like to provide or table them.

MATT FULLER: We can certainly potentially table the list fully so that you can—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Yes, if you just table the list, that would be useful and we could go through them.

MATT FULLER: Basically—I will get this just maybe emailed across with the list that we have of the 26 projects. There are a number of projects. They range in the order of about \$60 million in magnitude, down to about 60,000. They include the 174 kilometres between Junee and Griffith, the main line allowing 25-tonne axle load carrying capacity on that rail line. They include the important link for the new Wagga intermodal and special activation precinct in the Riverina. They include the upgrade of the rail corridor in Berry to Bomaderry—a 13-kilometre corridor and the Apex tunnels through a class one track. As I say, there are 26 projects here of varying size and scale, all meeting the objectives of the program and having been completed in the recent past.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: And they were included in the \$17 million allocation for 2020?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: No. There is information available on the previous rounds on the website and, if not, we can make sure that you've got the full information. This isn't an annual program. It is actually a program that is essentially, through Transport for NSW delivery, looking at the New South Wales regional lines. A lot of what you'll see around previous projects have actually been around development and business cases. So last year we were doing development and business case activities, which have informed future rounds. And if you look—and we can demonstrate in the previous rounds—a lot of the development activities resulted in delivery of projects in the future rounds or further rounds after that. So essentially a lot of the earlier rounds were development and design. We concentrate on that and then we progress and request delivery funding.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Thank you. What has been the actual expenditure since the 2020 round?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: Under the full program we have got committed for this year \$42.5 million. I'll have to go back and just double-check the full commitment of what was spent in the previous years. But overall we've got \$42.5 million this financial year and \$58.2 million the next year as well, and then all funds prior to that. Give me one moment and I'll just come back and confirm the commitments that have been made.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: If it's easier, a lot of my questions—the next few—relate to expenditure and it probably would be of assistance, and you may wish to take it on notice too. What I'm interested in is, for each financial year, what has been the allocation and how much has been expended since the program began, basically. My understanding is that there has been about \$400 million allocated.

CYNTHIA HEYDON: There has been \$400 million for the whole program. We have not allocated \$400 million. We've allocated \$229 million, and we can provide you with a breakdown of each of the rounds and the expenditure.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: That would be useful, please. I don't expect you to have that at hand.

CYNTHIA HEYDON: We'll take that on notice. But, yes, we can break down each round and expenditure.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I'm asking all of these questions through the secretary, and please put them to whoever you think is appropriate. In *Infrastructure Magazine*, the Minister recently announced Riverina rail was going to be delivering a series of projects totalling over \$70 million in funding. How much of this was new funding and how much of it was projects that have been announced in previous rounds?

ROB SHARP: We'd have to take that on notice.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Very happy to. Again, in *The Land* on 19 August, it was reported that Mr Murray Henderson from Wilga Park in Tullibigeal said that the Lake Cargelligo to Ungarie line, which is more than 100 years old and in need of an upgrade, fits right under the Fixing Country Rail umbrella but can't get a look in. Can you comment on why that might be the case?

ROB SHARP: The program does have an assessment criteria, and that includes productivity and safety benefits. It also looks at growth and the economic benefits that flow. So it would have to meet those hurdles. From my perspective it would appear it hasn't. Have you got a comment?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: No. We can come back with any detail around Cargelligo, but I'll say from an assessment perspective, it's probably not meeting the requirements of the freight benefit. This is also under Restart funding, so it does need to meet a BCR above one. So that may also be why it's not in the—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Could you come back, because that would help us assess those criteria. Another one you may wish to take on notice too is, given the significant flood damage on the Tullamore Road between Cargelligo and Dubbo, which is still being used for freight, can you explain whether a connection from Lake Cargelligo to West Wyalong might be included and might be of interest?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: We'll have to look and assess that. I can't answer that right now.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I've got questions here from regional primary producers who are trying to get regional freight infrastructure updated but they can't see what happened since 2019. Essentially, the concerns that people have are that there's insufficient transparency. In part that may be related to the fact that, as indicated, the actual website hasn't been updated. Rather than go through each of those, you've already undertaken to update the website.

MATT FULLER: Mr Primrose, if you've got contacts there and primary producers, we'd be very happy to get in contact with them, understand what their issues are, consult with them further and see if we can assist.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I appreciate that. Thank you for that. Is any of the money under this program going towards level crossing safety to do with Inland Rail?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: No, this is a separate funding and program.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Ms Heydon, I was just going to ask about any update on those financial figures.

CYNTHIA HEYDON: No, I don't have those. If we could take it on notice and we can give you the detail.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Okay. If you can keep trying over the session, that would be welcome. I might turn, then, to an issue about the road maintenance backlog or the transport backlog in regional New South Wales. Mr Sharp, I might just ask you to direct me where appropriate.

ROB SHARP: I will pass to Mr Fuller to comment.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Great. The NRMA before the last election put out a report dealing with the local roads backlog. It was the *Funding Local Roads* report addressing the infrastructure backlog in New South Wales regional and local roads. It was published in January 2019. It identified a \$2.2 billion funding backlog in 2016-17. They said—these are their figures, not my figures—that was an increase of almost 30 per cent from 2014-15. And I believe they also said regional councils were responsible for \$1.7 billion of that. I'm interested, really, in how that compares to the assets and services plans and the agency's assessment of what the backlog is now. I might just first ask you to give us any information you regard as useful.

MATT FULLER: Sure. Thank you, Mr Graham. I think from memory the NRMA's assessment dealt with roads in totality.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Correct.

MATT FULLER: So I'm pretty confident it picked up local roads and regional roads. Obviously, our asset and services plan picks up the State road network. And within that plan at the moment—what that highlights is that asset maintenance backlog of about 5 per cent of the asset value. That has been fairly consistent with, really, the greatest influencing factor in the recent time—the events that have taken place in the last couple of years. As you will appreciate, it has been a challenging couple of years for anybody dealing in the regions but specifically for our teams and our partners that are managing the regional network.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Absolutely.

MATT FULLER: We have taken steps, though, to ensure that we can address that and start to bring that down. One of the things that we've done just recently is reallocate and prioritise funding to our road maintenance budget in this next 12 months of an additional \$90 million, which will help us deal with things like pavement condition, vegetation management—some of the obvious things that have come up after the events of the recent months.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So it's additional \$90 million in the 2022-23 financial year compared to the 2021-22 financial year.

MATT FULLER: Specific to that category that we re-prioritised within the division budget, obviously identifying that our road network has been under duress, I think it's probably fair to say. Our team, I should say at this point and acknowledge, has done an amazing job of keeping the network available to people.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think we can join you in making that acknowledgement. I think that's welcomed.

MATT FULLER: Thank you. I am sure they would appreciate that. As it stands right now, there's one State road that remains closed—that is the section of the Jenolan Caves Road that is Five Mile—and will remain closed for some time due to the complexity of the work that's required there. Our teams have done an amazing job of getting connections back for communities to—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm glad you mentioned it. I was going to ask about it later.

MATT FULLER: Just to clarify, because I thought you might ask about that one, Two Mile has been reopened. It does have some traffic control, so there is single-lane access down there, given the recent slips that we have had on Jenolan Caves Road. But we've been working very closely with the Caves House and the management of the caves, and the team has been able to reinstate that—I think pretty quickly. They have done an amazing job there. We do have some other roads that are under controlled access. Some of the challenges we have had through the State, particularly in relation to some of those east-west corridors—we've been working very closely with communities to maintain those connections and to give them access.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: As of today, how many roads are under controlled access?

MATT FULLER: I'd have to get back with that exact figure. But to give you a couple of live examples, we have single-lane access on some of those corridors like Cambewarra Mountain, Moss Vale into Kangaroo Valley and Waterfall Way on the North Coast. There are a number of sections where we still have controlled access, just to ensure that those corridors are kept safe.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. Acknowledging that and acknowledging the \$90 million that has been allocated now, an increase over the last financial year, the regional and outer metropolitan division assets and services plan 2021-22 to 2030-31 had the overall 10-year funding shortfall—I think these would have been June 2019 figures—at \$805 million. That was pavement repair, bridges, roadside assets, traffic facilities—as you observed, State roads, not local roads. What is the updated figure that is comparable now?

MATT FULLER: Are you talking in terms of a maintenance backlog figure?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm talking here about what was identified in the earlier version of the assets and services plan at that point. I understand for 30 June 2019 it was a figure of \$805 million. What is that figure now?

MATT FULLER: I don't want to misquote a figure, so perhaps I'll take that on notice and come back as to how that has moved.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. I might indicate that it's on page 69 of that report, if that is helpful.

MATT FULLER: Okay.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We should have a more up-to-date figure, acknowledging all the pressures. I take your point that we are asking now about a subset of State roads. Really, the questions we were asking the Minister were about road damage across the State—the most important question—because it doesn't matter whether councils are in control or the State is.

MATT FULLER: The network as a whole.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Fixing those things is the real challenge for the State. This is a subset, but we just want an updated figure for that 10-year funding shortfall.

MATT FULLER: Perhaps if I can add—and Ms Heydon could jump in here as well—our overall programs in terms of how they support local government, to your point, Mr Graham, in terms of the statewide network of local and regional roads, have expanded enormously in the last couple of years. If I go back to 2019, our overall investment in the local and regional road network in conjunction with council through those programs—they include things like Fixing Local Roads, Fixing Country Roads, natural disaster funding and a range of initiatives—was about \$400 million. That has more than doubled in the last couple of years, and we're on track to have that getting close to about \$1.2 billion this year. So we've certainly increased our capability and capacity to deliver in partnership with local government to support that response that's required to the statewide network.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you. I want to ask about one final figure before I hand to my colleague. That same assets and services plan, this is 2021-22 to 2030-31, identified on the page before that, page 68, that the maintenance backlog overall had jumped to \$2.955 billion by 30 June 2019. That's a matter of fact. I'd like an update on that figure, firstly, which I presume you can either give us or—

MATT FULLER: As I say, that's about 4.9 per cent of the asset base as it stands at the moment.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And what is that in actual terms?

MATT FULLER: I'll get that actual figure for you.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So you'll get that shortly?

MATT FULLER: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Great, thank you. I'm clear on what you've put to me to date, but I want to understand what is the difference between that figure and the NRMA figure. The NRMA figure only applies to roads. This is regional transport generally, as I understand it.

MATT FULLER: This is the State road network in our figure. Sorry, I do have that figure. It is \$3.778 billion, which is 4.9 per cent of the asset base.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: At what date? As at today or as at 30 June?

MATT FULLER: I would have to check the exact date for you, but that is what I understand is in the current plan.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, okay. So it's the most recent figure, it's fair to say.

MATT FULLER: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But if you could get me the date, that would be welcome.

MATT FULLER: Can do.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So more than \$700 million—closer to \$800 million—from 2019?

ROB SHARP: Correct. I'd also point out that that same plan does show a 24 per cent reduction in that number over the life of the plan, so we are looking at clawing it back.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, so you're looking to drop it down?

ROB SHARP: Yes, by \$929 million is the goal or the forecast in that 10-year plan.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: At the end of the 10 years?

ROB SHARP: Correct.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Well, Mr Sharp, that's a confronting view you're putting to us because what you're saying is that it will take us 10 years to pay down virtually the leap in the maintenance backlog just from the last two years. If we're up \$800 million and dropping it by \$929 million, that's really the story you're telling.

ROB SHARP: To bring it back to that standard, yes, and that does reflect the two years of heavy impact from the weather patterns. In addition, though, what I would flag is that the overall percentage increase in assets has been substantial because we have been investing heavily in infrastructure. When you look at the mix of new versus old, there is a bigger percentage of newer assets. That's a backdrop or a context to the number.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: True.

ROB SHARP: There's also a pull forward in the next year or two around expenditure. I think there's \$100 million that's being pulled forward to effectively accelerate some of those works as well. I do like to emphasise this: Safety is not impacted here. All the critical safety-related items are invested in, and we do have target road conditions that we would like to achieve. That's what that work plan is geared towards.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Well, that wasn't the conclusion that the assets and services plan reached in the earlier report—this is 2021-22—for the decade. It said the funding shortfall put at risk, I'm now quoting, "The 2056 target of zero fatalities and serious trauma is at risk of not being met without significant infrastructure investment to reduce the safety risk."

ROB SHARP: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So there is safety at risk here. You're making the point that, well, we are investing.

ROB SHARP: They're referencing specifically investments in safety-related infrastructure. We have a 2026 safety plan, and that plan does have quite substantial investments in new infrastructure. If you want to talk specifically to that program, we do have Ms McCarthy who can talk to it. But we've got substantial investments specifically in those safety-related items, which is geared towards our Net Zero Strategy.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I just want to come back to the question I started out with, Mr Fuller, because it may become important down the track. I presume the NRMA is going to put out another report. I want to understand the difference between what's included in the assets and services plan calculations and what the NRMA is talking about. I think the difference, Mr Fuller, is that the NRMA is talking about State and local roads—roads only. This figure that's in the plan—the bigger figure, the \$2.9 billion now up to \$3.8 billion—is actually State roads and other transport assets in the region. Is that correct?

MATT FULLER: That would be my understanding, but we'll take the question away and we'll do an analysis of what's in the NRMA report and just make sure that we line it up against it. We're happy to do that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I appreciate it. I think that would be helpful, presuming they're going to then put out another set of figures.

MATT FULLER: Yes. But, as you've outlined, that is my understanding also.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I've just got one line of questioning and then I'll throw back to the Opposition. Hopefully this will close the loop on my earlier questions around the intermodal. Notwithstanding the Minister's comments about how most of this is to do with the council and notwithstanding your comments that you didn't fund the project but you administered it—you essentially built it—I am grappling with the concept that any agency that has been fiscally responsible would spend \$35 million on enabling works for a project when that project doesn't have a business case and has questionable financial benefits. I still don't believe we have a public-facing business case for that. Is this common practice for your agency, Mr Sharp, where you would spend or budget for a significant amount of money to enable a project that hasn't been properly assessed in terms of its benefits to cost?

ROB SHARP: The short answer is no, but in this case the business case, I'm presuming, is sitting with another agency. We would provide the input and the costs into that and there would be a BCR and, obviously, criteria in there for that sum of money to be approved. We took on notice to go back and obtain that information. I don't have it. I'm not privy to it. But anything of this size I can assure the Committee that we do actually go through a formal approval process. There have to be benefits in there and we also revert, if it's our business case, on benefit realisation subsequently to see where we landed. Did we exceed it? If we didn't, are there things we can do to close the gap? That process is part of what we do for all our projects. But for the large projects in particular, that's formalised through the Infrastructure NSW gateway review process, including the benefit realisation at the end. But in this particular case, I am suspecting we provided input. We were asked to actually build the rail, but it's probably a similar business case and will come back to you.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Yes. Thank you.

MATT FULLER: I can actually add, Mr Banasiak, we did seek from the team during the break: The business case was prepared by the Tamworth city council and submitted to the Regional—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: It still hasn't surfaced publicly.

MATT FULLER: Well, what we understand is that it was prepared by the Tamworth city council and submitted to Regional NSW, who had provided the funds. As I said earlier, we were tasked with undertaking the rail improvements with our contracted partner on the country rail network and those rail improvements have now been completed.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Thank you. Back to the Opposition.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: In relation to Inland Rail grade separations, is the plan still to have no new level crossings on the Inland Rail throughout New South Wales?

MATT FULLER: Thank you for your question, Mr Primrose. Essentially, our position has always been to avoid increasing the number of level crossings on the Inland Rail corridor, yes. Whether that is what eventuates, that's obviously still a decision to be taken by the Inland Rail through ARTC and the Federal Government project. We continue to advise and support Inland Rail with recommendations and reviews, particularly in relation to safety as I talked about this morning when the question came up about Wagga and the Albury to Illabo section. We are often there as, I guess, an adviser and supporting community at some of the community events. We often make submissions on the EIS's that occur from the Inland Rail, which talk to our thoughts about relevant safety matters, and we use the nationally recognised process to review the safety of those proposed level crossings and that helps inform those that have been prioritised for the grade separation.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Am I correct in saying there are 22 crossings?

MATT FULLER: On the State road network there are 26. At the moment there is funding to prioritise four of those.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Okay. You see, my understanding—and you've already alluded to one council—is that several councils have interpreted earlier discussions and announcements in relation to Inland Rail that basically there was going to be some sort of funding to eliminate those. But they're concerned now that they're not high on a priority list. There seems to be a bit of confusion and you've already alluded to that. It would probably be of interest to us if we could just get a list of those 26, which are currently proposed to be funded, and some idea of when, or if, and how the remainder may be eliminated so we can at least zero in on which ones people are concerned about and which ones they shouldn't be.

MATT FULLER: Sure. We'd be happy to do that. Just to be clear, the 26 aren't currently funded. There are certainly four priority crossings that are funded.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: So, we're talking 30?

MATT FULLER: Sorry?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Is it 26 plus four?

ROB SHARP: Less four.

MATT FULLER: Less four.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: So that's 22.

MATT FULLER: There are 22 that are not funded so, my apologies; I should have clarified that.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Okay.

MATT FULLER: But of the 26, four have been prioritised for funding.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Okay.

MATT FULLER: But we'd be happy to take that away and provide some more information about the list as it currently stands.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: It would be valuable too, as I said, as part of that list to get some idea of the priority ordering. I accept there will be ongoing discussions but there is confusion out there.

ROB SHARP: There are. Those 22 are in early planning phases at the moment so we wouldn't have a prioritisation until the planning's completed and we can understand the risk profiles associated with them. There would then be communication and discussions with, obviously, the Federal Government around what funding might be allocated. Typically, that's when that prioritisation of funding would take place.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Okay. I totally understand. I mean, maybe then, you can give us some comments about what factors will be taken into account when you're assessing what the priority would be. It just helps to understand what we're doing.

ROB SHARP: Thank you.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I might just come back to that set of questions we were asking and check firstly, Mr Fuller: Do we know yet which year or what date that \$3.778 billion figure is from?

MATT FULLER: It's from the current plan, which is the 2022-23 to 2031-32 assets and services plan, as we've submitted to Treasury.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Does that make it June 2021 then?

MATT FULLER: Cynthia, could I just ask: Do you have an actual date, or is that just—it's our current plan. I'm just clarifying when we would have submitted that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: They're often sort of backcast a little bit. So, I'm asking about 2021-22. You're giving me now 2022-23, so it might even just be June 2020. Could that be right?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: It's effective as of—so, we develop the plan in the prior financial year, so while we developed it in 2021, it is live and effective as of 2022-23.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. So when was the backlog of \$3.778 billion? At what point in time?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: I'll have to confirm that it was earlier this calendar year that we finalised the plan.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That's not my question. The question is: When was the backlog—

CYNTHIA HEYDON: Which will be when that backlog date was effective.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Right.

CYNTHIA HEYDON: Because that would be live information when we finalised the plan.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Okay. All right. Fantastic. So, that would be really helpful, that date. I do just want to ask Mr Fuller, in talking about the difference between those figures—one much smaller dealing with State roads, one much bigger dealing with the general regional backlog—what are the biggest assets that would be in that general regional backlog? Just give us an idea. One figure's a lot bigger than the other.

MATT FULLER: Sorry: The NRMA's figure, you mean, versus—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No. I'm asking about the assets and services plan for your division.

MATT FULLER: Well, our assets incorporate, obviously, road and rail infrastructure. They incorporate fleet. They incorporate a range of things.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So what would be the biggest contributor to that much bigger figure when you look right across your asset base to the maintenance backlog?

MATT FULLER: I could come back to you with the exact detail on that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yeah, presuming it's not the roads. Thank you.

MATT FULLER: It would largely be the network infrastructure, I suspect, in terms of road and rail.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. Okay. That makes sense.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Just going back to grade separations, I note that in estimates last year then Minister Toole said that there'd be funding for five, not four. Is that correct?

MATT FULLER: I would have to go back and check the records as to what then Minister Toole said at that point. But, at the moment, what we've confirmed definitely is that there are four funded. Whether something's changed in terms of further assessment and development of those projects that's helped firm up those project costs—

ANTHONY HAYES: If I may, that's exactly what's happened. The Minister did say five last year and that was based on initial costs. We've now done much more detailed costings and we believe the funding would cover four.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Thank you. In answer to a question on notice from the shadow Minister, the current Minister indicated that just under \$9.9 million, or about half of the School Drive Subsidy

allocation of \$18 million per annum, had been spent for the 2021-22 financial year. Can you tell us why only half has been spent?

JOOST DE KOCK: Could you just repeat the years again?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I am looking at point 12 of the Minister's answer: 2021-22 financial year, as at 17 June, \$9.891 million had been spent on the subsidy out of the \$18 million.

JOOST DE KOCK: The budget numbers that I have here for 2021-22 was \$30.6 million and I don't actually have the actual expenditure here at the moment. Over the last few years, of course, COVID has significantly impacted the patronage as well, so I have to take on notice what the exact expenditure was for the different years.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: As I said, I am just quoting from the Minister's figures, which presumably are worked out by you guys and the Minister's office signed off on them: \$9.891 million, and \$520,000.28 as of 17 June out of a total subsidy program of \$18 million.

JOOST DE KOCK: This was the School Student Transport Scheme?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Yes, School Drive Subsidy.

JOOST DE KOCK: It is the drive subsidy? There are two schemes. There is the school subsidy and there is also the drive subsidy scheme as well.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Yes, but the budget for the School Drive Subsidy is \$18 million per annum, according to the Minister.

JOOST DE KOCK: I will have to confirm that. But you are right, there are two types of scheme. One is the school transport scheme and there is also the School Drive Subsidy.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: And the Preschool Drive Subsidy. The question that the shadow Minister asked was about the School Drive Subsidy. They did talk about both projects but the specific response was, correctly, in relation to the question asked by the shadow Minister, which was in relation to the School Drive Subsidy.

JOOST DE KOCK: I am very happy to take that detail on notice, how those two subsidy schemes are split up and what the budget versus expenditure has been.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: The question then is why was only half the program money spent? The Minister's indicated that the total program is \$18 million and there is only \$9.8 million subsidy.

JOOST DE KOCK: I will also take that on notice. But I also notice that during the last few years, obviously, COVID—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: The question then is what has happened to the rest of the funding and is there any scope for any excess in the program to be used to enhance school bus services? Could that be taken on notice as well?

JOOST DE KOCK: Yes. Happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Do we have any of those financials for the classification at the moment?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: No. Apologies, we don't have that available yet.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: If we can keep trying on that, that would be helpful. Mr Sharp, I want to come back on that headline question to you. I think it is appropriate to ask you this, as the secretary. It is on that question I put to the Minister and he was very uncomfortable answering. I don't expect you to comment on this. He gave the answer he did just about the number of roads that have been transferred to date under what I put to him was a signature commitment by his government. He can give whatever answer he gives. I am not asking you to comment on that. But I do think it is fair to ask you, as the secretary of the agency. I thought it was clear that as of today no roads have been transferred. I understand some have been dealt with in the other part of the program, but no roads have yet. That is, some have been reclassified in that tranche one of the priority round. But it is correct, isn't it, that no roads have yet been transferred?

ROB SHARP: As you rightly point out, it is a program. The program has a large number of activities, including various tranches, a panel that is reviewing. In respect to an actual physical transfer, I would have to take that on notice. I don't know. If you could comment?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: I can comment that of the regional roads transfers that were recommended, we are in the process of actually arranging transfers. We are expecting some this financial year. The key thing is that

we are working with councils to make sure that the timing allows them to complete works that are currently underway, any sort of contracts they have in place. It is a very collaborative process with the councils to make sure that the timing for the transfer aligns with their needs.

ROB SHARP: In progress, sounds the status.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is a commonsense description of where we are up to. I am making the simple, additional observation that these are in progress; they are yet to happen. As of today none have happened.

ROB SHARP: No.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is just common sense.

ROB SHARP: Ultimately, it is an interesting question. Because if you look at the process, even if there was an agreement to transfer, there is a number of criteria that need to be met before that occurs, including collaborative discussions around the ongoing funding. So I am fully expecting this to be an initiative program over an extended period because of the complexities. But we do have them underway.

CYNTHIA HEYDON: And it is very active, I will say. What we have got going on working with councils is actually on the assessment of the road and identification of any remediation works and truly getting to understand the condition of the asset.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I know. I understand the points you both made. I am going to press it, though, Mr Sharp. You are left in this position—and don't comment on this, please—because the Minister was ducking and diving. I am going to press this question: You agree, based on the commonsense comments of your agency official just then, that no road transfers have taken place as of today?

ROB SHARP: I think why this conversation is challenging is what do you define as a transfer? Is it the ultimate end position where everything is agreed? Or is it that there is an agreement to transfer and the process is underway? So it is like a contractual—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Mr Sharp, you are really going to get yourself into trouble putting that case.

ROB SHARP: No, no. I am happy to say that the ultimate transfer hasn't happened, but the transfer itself is a process. I want to be very clear—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We can agree on that.

ROB SHARP: —on the definition that you are using. It is a bit like a contract. I agree that we have got the contractual terms, but then there is the actual process of writing the contract. At the moment, the end position where all of those items have been locked in—the answer is no. We are in various stages of the transfer process.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. But 16—

ROB SHARP: That's the delineation, I would suggest.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Of the priority round in tranche one, 16 reclassifications have taken place?

ROB SHARP: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And zero transfers. Is that correct?

ROB SHARP: The transfers that are underway have not finished that transfer process, correct.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That's right.

ROB SHARP: That's right.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: As of today, zero have concluded?

ROB SHARP: Correct. We are still in progress, which is what we said, yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am sorry to press it, but I just don't want any confusion here.

ROB SHARP: No.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But I accept what you say.

ROB SHARP: But as I indicated, there is a process. I think that is what is causing the challenge in terms of the descriptions you are trying to land.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I will finish up on the School Drive Subsidy. The Minister's answer indicated that there were 12,322 children covered by the Schools Drive Subsidy, but I would like to focus on the Preschool Drive Subsidy pilot. The Minister indicated back in July there were 81 children covered by that and that \$2 million had been allocated for the Preschool Drive Subsidy pilot, including implementation and administration costs. Can you tell us how long that pilot will continue?

JOOST DE KOCK: The Preschool Drive Subsidy is a pilot, and it's a joint Transport for NSW and Department of Education initiative. It started in the 2022 school year. This pilot will provide a subsidy for families living in remote and very remote areas in New South Wales so their children can access preschool services by offsetting part of the transport costs of driving children to participate in preschool. This is for preschool children.

The pilot is voluntary for both the preschools and the families. As part of the pilot, 91 preschools were identified to be eligible for the pilot. To date 29 preschools have agreed to participate. We have received 102 applications for semester 1, covering travel for terms 1 and 2, and they're now being processed for the payments. The subsidy is paid at the same rate as the School Drive Subsidy. The main difference for the pilot is that the payment for journeys is capped at a maximum distance of 50 kilometres between home and preschool. Attendance is also capped at 86 days per annum. The pilot is being evaluated by the Department of Education. The pilot is underway at the moment.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Thank you. That's all very valuable information and I appreciate it. When is the pilot due to expire?

JOOST DE KOCK: I'll have to check how long the pilot will actually last for. As I mentioned before, it will be evaluated by the Department of Education. But I will get back to you with the duration and the exact budget for the pilot.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: If it's really valuable and people are finding it of value, I'm interested as to whether people suddenly find they really value it and then find it has stopped. That is the obvious question. There is a whole lot of questions I'd like to ask in relation to its operation. For instance, do bus operators have to accept preschool students who are aged over four years of age? What are the guidelines in relation to assessing independent travel readiness? For example, do the students have to be toilet trained? There is a whole range of those operational things I'm interested in. But let's begin by asking—and I'll come back to it if you can find out for me before we finish today—when the pilot is due to finish, and is there an expectation that it will then continue?

JOOST DE KOCK: I will try to find out as soon as I can how long the pilot will last. But the School Drive Subsidy is available for New South Wales residents in areas where there is no public transport available for part or all the way to the school, hence people being driven to school.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Mr Sharp, I want to return to some of those costings issues. I might ask about a different one while we're waiting for those other figures. I refer now to the budget papers, and the transport section of page 19 of the regional budget statement. I think it is the larger, A4 version where you might find that regional statement. You can see there that under transport, that second from bottom paragraph, \$201.2 million—have you got that one?

ROB SHARP: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is a rolled-up figure for Fixing Country Bridges, the 16 Cities program and the Fixing Local Roads Program. It doesn't say whether that is a two-year, three-year or four-year figure. I'm interested in what is the allocation to Fixing Local Roads that the budget refers to?

ROB SHARP: We'll take that on notice and break that out.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: How much has been spent on Fixing Local Roads to date?

ROB SHARP: Round one was \$243 million. That was allocated across 253 projects. Round two was \$150 million allocated across 108 projects. Round three is \$153 million with an estimated 138 projects. Across all three rounds, 248 projects have been delivered. Presumably it's the total of those three numbers.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Okay. I'm happy to do the maths on that. That has all been allocated and spent to date? That should all be pre-30 June 2022?

ROB SHARP: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And we don't know—or feel free to tell me that we do know—how much is allocated this financial year?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: We'll take that on notice. Just for clarity, the rounds reflect the total allocation for that round. The projects do have a two-year delivery window so the expenditure will be slightly different to the allocation. If we can take that on notice, we can come back with the distinction between the expenditure.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Accepted. That's a good point. Of course, some of this might have slipped or may have been just ordinary program delivery, but what is the allocation this year and what is the allocation in the rest of the forward estimates?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: With regards to this year, this will be influenced predominantly by round four and we are going through the process at the moment. We'll be looking, hopefully, to announcements around round four towards the end of this year. That will then inform what the funding cashflow requirement is for this financial year and beyond.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, I am asking—there is a budget figure here of \$201.2 million. I'm really asking what the budgeted figure is that has been allocated. That's my specific question, not what you might change it to.

CYNTHIA HEYDON: We can come back and confirm what the funding allocation is for this financial year for that program.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Great. Could you come back on notice and tell me what is then in the rest of the forward estimates for that?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: For Fixing Local Roads?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes.

CYNTHIA HEYDON: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I presume it will be less than the \$201.2 million allocated for the range of projects here that is referred to in the budget paper?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: Yes. The reference that you've taken from that on page 19 refers to several programs.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Do you know if that is a two-year allocation, as the one below it is, or a four-year allocation, as the one above it is? The budget is silent on this.

CYNTHIA HEYDON: I'll have to come back and confirm that, if we could take that on notice?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Great. That would be helpful. But we still don't know about the roads reclassification funding?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: I'd request if we could take that on notice, mainly because I want to make sure that we're giving accurate information—particularly because we have had some expenditure that is just our day-to-day work—and make sure that we are providing accurate information of expenditure against the various tranches as well.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Look, I preface this by saying I have generally found the Transport officials excellent at giving information. This is a signature Government commitment so I'm a bit frustrated to have to take this year's allocation on notice. I would have thought that is just something that we could ask about and is easily hand. Having said that, if you could take that on notice, understood. What I would like to ensure, though, is that we have that breakdown: what's been spent to date, what is in this financial year and, for each of the years ahead, what is the allocation?

CYNTHIA HEYDON: The forward estimates?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We just need that information to be able to do our jobs.

ROB SHARP: Your point is noted.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Can I ask briefly about an old topic: compliant speed cameras. I remember the then Minister, along with the Deputy Premier, announcing that motorists are supposed to be advised that their speed is being checked with signs on the roof of mobile speed camera vehicles across the State. But there are many reports—and there have been photographs, particularly on rural and regional roads—that the signs just aren't up. There has been a lot of concern. Have you received many reports of speed camera vehicles operating without appropriate signage?

ROB SHARP: I will pass the question to Ms McCarthy, but just to give you a sense, this is something that is actually very important: bringing the community along with these enforcement measures. They do save lives but, by the same token, we do want to be balanced and we've taken community feedback. The criteria is that if the signs are down, there are no photos taken and there are certainly no fines issued. We are aware of various photographs that have emerged and we have investigated every single one of those. I will pass those across to Ms McCarthy to talk to some specific examples and what we've been doing about it.

TARA McCARTHY: Yes, thank you. The Government gave a commitment that from 1 April of this year all vehicles undertaking enforcement of mobile speed cameras would have signs installed. Those vehicles can only be in operation if the sign is in the upright position. We have received a number of reports, not that the sign was in the upright position but, because of growth of foliage, for example, or parking of vehicles in front or behind, at times those signs were not visible at a distance to motorists.

In response to those issues that have been raised, we have been working very closely with the two vendors and we have developed a number of protocols that are now very clear that they are to ensure that those vehicles are parked in a manner where the sign is visible. So we have worked with them. They need to look at the foliage, for example; they need to look at any signs that might obscure them; they need to consider the distance that they park in front of or behind vehicles; and a number of other protocols. They need to report that back to their base as a verification check that the vehicle is correctly positioned. If the site that we have allocated to them is unsuitable because, for example, the foliage has become overgrown, they are not to operate from that site and they are to report that to us and we then undertake maintenance of those sites.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: If a motorist was able to show that that wasn't the case, you have indicated that the fine would be waived because if the signage wasn't there, then they shouldn't be taking photos. Is that correct?

TARA McCARTHY: No, that's not correct. I said if the sign was in the upright position, then that was the commitment that the Government gave, and that was the case as of 1 April. The signs were installed on all vehicles and also there was livery on all the vehicles—the 143 vehicles. If they didn't have that, they were not to operate. What occurred over a period of time is the community raised concerns about how far ahead they could see those signs and we have responded in an iterative manner to those concerns that were raised. However, at the end of the day, if a person commits an offence, then they have committed an offence. They always have the ability to ask for that offence to be reviewed and individual cases will be considered. But, as I said, the initial commitment was that the sign would be installed and be in the upright position, and it's an iterative process to respond to concerns.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Could you tell me, what hours do these vehicles operate?

TARA McCARTHY: They could operate 24/7.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: So they could be operating in a dark street?

TARA McCARTHY: They could, but the signs that are installed on the top of the vehicles are retro-reflective, so they are as visible as any sign would be at night to a driver. They are very visible. Some people would say they are more visible at night than they are during the day.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I can assure you that that's not the case, particularly from a number of people who I have spoken to. Having a vehicle parked in a metropolitan street, in a darkened street full of trees, doesn't exactly open them to be entirely visible. But that is something for another occasion. I think common sense would suggest that having a sign in a darkened street in the middle of the night doesn't exactly live up to the Government's undertaking, but I won't ask you to comment on that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I might follow up on that just with a couple of additional questions. Thank you for that information. I just want to clarify a little bit of the evidence you have given. I am clear on the commitment that the sign should be in the upright position. Can the cameras operate if it's not, or are you just saying that the protocol requires that they should not?

TARA McCARTHY: The cameras could operate if it is not. However, there are a number of checks and mechanisms. The signs are raised electronically by the operator whilst they are inside the vehicle. They are then required to take a photo of a light on the dashboard that indicates that the sign is in the raised position. That light goes green, they are required to take a photo of that light to show that it is green and to transmit that photo in real time before they are given the go-ahead to commence enforcement activity. Equally, they are required to take a photo of that light when the sign is lowered and, again, transmit that photo in real time.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And they transmit it to their operator—that is, either of the operators transmit it essentially back to base?

TARA McCARTHY: That is correct.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And they are given the go-ahead—

TARA McCARTHY: Both operators have an operations centre that operates 24/7.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And they are given the go-ahead by that operations centre to proceed?

TARA McCARTHY: That's one of the things that is checked. There are obviously other things that are checked, as I said, in relation to foliage, in relation to how far they are from vehicles in front and behind them. There are numerous things that are checked before that vehicle can operate.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Take us through those things. So, foliage, distance from the vehicles—what other things?

TARA McCARTHY: They've got to confirm that they are in the right location. So we select the locations ahead of time. We have undertaken a process where people have gone out and assessed those sites for their suitability. There are considerations—for example, we look at how far a vehicle's position is from a change in speed zone.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes.

TARA McCARTHY: The gradient of the road, foliage et cetera and whether the vehicle can be safely parked in that location. One of the checks is that they are actually in the right location.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: How far from a change in speed zone could a vehicle be parked?

TARA McCARTHY: I would have to take that on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you. If you could—

TARA McCARTHY: Mr Carlon may know that. No.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you. If you could take that on notice. How far from another vehicle could a mobile speed camera vehicle be parked?

TARA McCARTHY: As part of our changing protocols, we are advising them to be—well, I shouldn't say "advise". The protocol says that they should be about 10 to 15 metres from the vehicle.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So 10 to 15 metres.

TARA McCARTHY: It's important to understand that that is a protocol that has been iterative. It wasn't in place on 1 April. We have responded to community concerns.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That's why I'm asking that, because it has changed. And that is 10 to 15 metres presumably in front and 10 to 15 metres behind?

TARA McCARTHY: That's correct.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And are these written protocols?

TARA McCARTHY: They are.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Can you supply the protocol to the Committee?

TARA McCARTHY: Yes, I believe so, on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: How many reports have you had? Obviously this has come about as a result of reports made where motorists felt these vehicles were not appropriately positioned. How many reports has Transport for NSW had?

TARA McCARTHY: I would have to take the exact number on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: If you could, that would be welcome.

ROB SHARP: Mr Graham, just to clarify on that, there are two ways we receive information. Some of it is very public, through radio stations and others just ringing in. We obviously follow those up. But we do have a hotline specifically for this. We have been promoting it. If someone has a concern, they can ring that hotline, and we track that. That data will be available and we are happy to share that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you. I really appreciate it. I was interested in specifically, also, just this idea of foliage maintenance. On how many occasions will you have had to respond to a report, go out and deal with the foliage issue?

TARA McCARTHY: Again, I'd have to take that on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think that would be fair to ask you to take that on notice rather than have that here. Then to return, if we could, to the evidence in the Minister's session about the cost of these upright signs, I just wanted to return to that evidence, Ms McCarthy, that you gave there. I think, without going back to my notes, you said \$2.6 million was the—

TARA McCARTHY: That's correct, yes, and that was within the existing contract, so there was—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I wasn't clear on what you meant by that.

TARA McCARTHY: So the contracts have been awarded over a period of three years. They are for a fixed amount, which I have somewhere here. The \$2.6 million is part of that contract allocation. It is not expected that it would cause the contract to go over the allocated amount. But that is partly because of times where the cameras have not been able to operate for the 21,000 hours that the contract was drawn up for, in response to the timing it took to get the vehicles with livery and with signage. So, as we said, we gave an undertaking that those vehicles would not do enforcement until they had signs on them, and they had livery from 1 April. There have been variations in the delivery of the 21,000 hours per month, and that has allowed that expenditure of \$2.6 million to be maintained within the contract allocation.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I might clarify one thing first. You said there are 143 vehicles operating at the moment?

TARA McCARTHY: That's correct.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Essentially, what you are telling us there is that these signs cost \$2.6 million to install. How much was that for each operator?

TARA McCARTHY: I would have to take that on notice. It would be based, obviously, on the split of the fleet.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: On the number of vehicles operating, correct. The Minister in the House—this is Minister Ward now—has said, "Look, the State is happily paying for those." But you are saying that in the course of negotiations, as I understood it, the penalties that might apply for these two operators not meeting the hours that they had contracted to have been offset in some way. Is that the view you are putting? They should have paid a penalty but we—

TARA McCARTHY: They only get paid for the hours that they deliver. Because they were unable to deliver the 21,000 hours at the commencement of the contract, there was money available within the contract to pay the \$2.6 million.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Was that by way of a penalty or by way of a withheld payment?

TARA McCARTHY: It's a withheld payment.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: How many hours have been delivered in each month of this program?

TARA McCARTHY: I would have to take that on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, could you just take it on notice? This was the subject of discussion earlier and Mr Carlon gave us some excellent information at the time. But I think it would be an appropriate point to ask for each month looking backwards.

TARA McCARTHY: I would say, both operators have the capacity to operate 21,000 hours per month now. There have been other factors that have impacted that—for example, the floods and areas that were heavily impacted by floods. It was not safe nor was it appropriate to deploy mobile speed camera vehicles into those communities that were suffering. That has reduced the hours that they delivered so the numbers that we give you are not necessarily reflective of their capacity. They have now got enough fleet and capacity to deliver those 21,000 hours.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think that's an important distinction. There was a time when the capacity was not there. It had been promised and contracted and it was not there. You are making the point that we are now past that. But, if we could ask: What is the number of hours that have been delivered for each of the operators—that is, separating them out—over each month looking back perhaps over the last 12 months?

TARA McCARTHY: Yes, we can do that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: It being 3.30 p.m., we will now break for 15 minutes and return at 3.45 p.m.

(Short adjournment)

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Welcome back. In the break, the Committee resolved that we can release Mr Carlon and Ms McCarthy. Thank you for your time.

(Tara McCarthy and Bernard Carlon withdrew.)

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Mr Sharp, I might turn back to those questions about the regional seniors travel card and the issue of the low balance. If your account balance falls below \$5 and you don't use it within 30 days, then the funds are forfeited to Transport for NSW. Those are the operational practices. The agency is quite up-front about that with the public. Can you tell us: Where does this money go and how often has this been the case?

ROB SHARP: Yes, it would be part of the treatment of any card that has ultimately a low balance. If you got down to a dollar, what do you do with that dollar? I will just pass over to Mr de Kock who has an update on that question.

JOOST DE KOCK: Yes, sure. The regional seniors travel card, customers are awarded that to the tune of \$250 to assist in offsetting that travel cost in the regions. Most of the customers actually use that amount. In terms of the demand of expenditure that people have used already, it is about \$184 million that has already been injected back into the regional community. About 96 per cent or so of the expenditure actually goes on to fuel, followed by taxicabs and then followed by TrainLink services. The vast majority of customers use that. But when the card balance reaches \$5 or less, people are encouraged to use that in the next 30 days. If the balance stays below \$5 for 30 days, the card is discontinued. That is consistent with the terms and conditions of the cards that are provided to the customers.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Understood. Where does the money go?

JOOST DE KOCK: I will have to take that on notice and how that fits into the overall envelope of the program. I will have to take that on notice. I will take on notice how much that was and how that is used.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I appreciate that. If you could take on notice perhaps the following things: Where does the money go? You suggest—but perhaps on notice if you could confirm—that the money is then quarantined within this program. Feel free to confirm that now.

JOOST DE KOCK: I will have to take on notice how the exact treatment of that works.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think that's fair. For how many individuals has this occurred? That is, for how many cards has the balance fallen below \$5 and been reclaimed?

JOOST DE KOCK: We will get those numbers on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And, perhaps, if there is a distinction between—I would have thought the number of low balances and the number of expired cards should be equal. You really have to satisfy both of those conditions for the money to be reclaimed by Transport. If that is not the case, could you confirm separately for each of those?

JOOST DE KOCK: Are you asking the question are there some cards where people—because they have got a year, 14 months to use it—still just let it expire? Is that the question?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes.

JOOST DE KOCK: I'll try to take it on notice to see whether we have those funds.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So perhaps I might have \$100 left and I just haven't used it in time—I have tucked it in the back of the drawer or perhaps lost it in the washing machine. All those things certainly happen at our place; I'm not sure if they happen at yours. Is it the case at that point that the funds are forfeited?

JOOST DE KOCK: I will try to take that on notice. I don't have the detail. I don't have it in my notes how much that is and what actually happens to those funds.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Finally, what is the total quantum of funds which have been reclaimed in this way either from expired or from low balance cards?

JOOST DE KOCK: I will take that on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Great. We have talked about this before, and I apologise because I can't recall the answer. The cards are provided by Westpac. What was the quantum of fees or charges or money that Westpac was earning as a result of this program? Was it anything?

JOOST DE KOCK: Can you repeat the last part of the question again?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Is Westpac, the provider of these cards, earning any fees or charges?

JOOST DE KOCK: I can't answer the question in a specific piece for Westpac, but the overall administration of this scheme is about 16 per cent of the overall scheme. That includes both the cost of Service NSW doing the customer service, as well arrangements with Westpac, but also the production and distribution of these cards.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Perhaps you can tell us in the last financial year what has Westpac earned out of this, either by way of fees, charges or the contract payment from the State?

JOOST DE KOCK: I don't have that detail so I will take that on notice what we can provide in that space.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: My recollection is that that was not particularly significant. Where there potentially was an issue was the data. It is potentially very valuable to have access to this data. We asked some questions about this, possibly years ago now. What I really want to know now is have there been any changes to the management of that data in the way this program is dealt with since the program began? I am asking about—I mean, we are providing the names and addresses of seniors across the State. There is some significant benefit to a financial institution in getting that information. Have there been any changes? What are the current protocols around what they are allowed or not allowed to use that data for?

JOOST DE KOCK: Obviously, we take any customer information and data very seriously. But I will have to take that on notice what the specific arrangements are with third-party providers.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Can I briefly just ask you about regional rail overbridges. If I can quote from the TAHE strategic asset management plan version 1.0, issued in December 2021, page 22, "Management of overbridges on the country rail network, including ARTC corridors, continues to be one of the many challenges. Severe corrosion to structural members and fastenings is the primary concern for the steel overbridges. The load rating investigation projects are underway and there is an increase in overbridges with load restrictions." My question is can you tell us briefly what is being done to address this concern?

ROB SHARP: Those assets are owned by TAHE. They are an asset holding company and the activities for maintaining those assets sits across TAHE and Transport. Transport does manage maintenance and the asset management plan is there to ensure that the safety parameters are maintained. As you can imagine, there is literally tens of thousands of kilometres of rail. There is also disused rail. Often these overpass bridges are actually on rail that is no longer operating as a corridor. You also have facilities that are an older facility, some of them are heritage, so there is a full program underway looking across all those assets. What I can confirm is that safety critical are looked at. The management plan does highlight that clearly if you are putting lower tonnage on a bridge, for example, it could have implications for freight or other users of the road, and so there is definitely a benefit for the community in reviewing these assets and ensuring that we are minimising the impact, and that they are safe. But it is a very extensive exercise given this covers all of regional New South Wales.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: One thing that came to my attention was the quote—the June 2021 slopes audit by Deloitte "assessed the standard strategies and approaches in place to manage slopes, cuttings and embankments as requiring major improvement. Common condition profile and asset class strategies will be developed in the following order." It states "1. Slopes. 2. Bridges 3. Culverts". Given the concerns that have been expressed in relation to steel bridges with corrosion being high risk, why would they be put number two?

ROB SHARP: It would suggest that we are not just looking at slopes to the detriment of everything else. Slope risk is actually a here-and-now risk, particularly given the wet weather over the last two years. Slopes is a priority area. It is one of the safety elements that keeps me awake at night. In respect to bridges, I can confirm we are aware that they need increased maintenance. Slopes are a here-and-now safety issue of slope slides. But it is not that we are going to do all slopes before we start doing bridges. There are criteria there in terms of safety.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Turning to the regional apprentice and uni travel cards, the questions I was asking about that—I have some detailed questions. I presume that these cards will have the same low balance or non-use and forfeited funds conditions. Is that the intention?

JOOST DE KOCK: Are you referring to the regional students and apprentice card?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, correct.

JOOST DE KOCK: As the Minister said this morning, we are still in the process of designing the exact eligibility and also working out what the cards are and who does the supply of them. It is too early really to talk about that at this stage.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: There is not a banking partner yet that has been selected for the card?

JOOST DE KOCK: As I said before, we are still working our way through eligibility and how we actually do that. It is too early to really comment on that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Does that mean there will be a tender issued for this service provision? Is that your expectation?

JOOST DE KOCK: Again, it is a bit too early to talk about how we actually do that. We are still working on all of that and ultimately it is up for a Government decision to work out what the exact arrangement is.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Is there a reason why a tender wouldn't be issued for this service?

JOOST DE KOCK: There are of course existing banking arrangements at a whole-of-government level already there, but that is really a matter for Treasury to answer questions on that front.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Who made the decision about the service provider last time? Was that a Treasury or a Transport decision? I am now referring to the regional seniors card.

JOOST DE KOCK: I would have to take on notice who actually made that decision. Actually, I may have something on that. Actually, yes, so Westpac was selected as the banking provider for the regional seniors travel card after we engaged with NSW Treasury to ensure it aligned with the State's banking provider.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Because Westpac provides services to the State, it was effectively in the box seat?

JOOST DE KOCK: And also in that same space, of all the State's banking providers, Westpac was the only one that had a product available that supports the requirements of the regional seniors travel card, and that contract was managed by Treasury for the regional seniors travel card.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But were other people offered the chance to offer that product? Not according to that note

JOOST DE KOCK: As I said, there is a Treasury-headed panel of banking providers but there was only one provider who could actually support the specific requirements of the regional seniors travel card.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I appreciate that information.

JOOST DE KOCK: Those contracts were managed through NSW Treasury, so they could perhaps answer more detailed questions on that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think that's fair.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Bikes and boards on NSW TrainLink regional trains: Why are bicycle and board riders forced to pay a fee of \$12.10 to transport their bikes and boards on NSW TrainLink regional trains when passengers on the Sydney and intercity trains can take theirs for free?

DALE MERRICK: For context, the two types of trains or the two environments you're talking about are very different in the way they operate. For the suburban network, obviously high levels of patronage in the Opal network and where bikes are more problematic because of the density of loading within the trains. In the regional network where you're referring to, with the current regional fleet, it's part of the business rules that that is how bikes are managed within our operations or our customer service delivery. That's the current business rules. It is under review and under review as a reflection of the procurement of the new regional fleet.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Who is reviewing it?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: If it even gets on the tracks.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: If it even gets here.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Can I ask who's reviewing it?

DALE MERRICK: NSW TrainLink will do that as part of our operating model.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: When do you expect the review to be finished?

DALE MERRICK: It's hard to put a date on. It would be, obviously, a reflection of the delivery of the new regional fleet and the lead-up to that fleet coming into service.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: You think it could be problematic; you are reviewing it, but you don't know when it's going to be reviewed?

DALE MERRICK: Correct, yes.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Well, it's complicated to ask questions about something when you say it's going to be reviewed at some point in the future.

DALE MERRICK: It is. Thanks again for the—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: What factors will you take into account in the review?

DALE MERRICK: There will be a number of factors. That would be how stowage of the cycle is made safe within the train, the locations within the train. So currently, bikes, as part of our operating model and business rule, would be in a box within a particular part of the train. There are opportunities through the design of the new regional fleet that would give us some flexibility around different locations. But, like I said, that would be part of the review in the lead-up to the deployment of the new train.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Rather than pursue this one, so we have some idea of what we're talking about, can you provide—probably on notice—what the quantum is of bicycle and board luggage fees that have been paid by commuters travelling on NSW TrainLink regional trains in the last financial year? I want to know how much was actually paid by people to take their boards and bikes on.

DALE MERRICK: I will take that on notice.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: That would give us an idea of the demand that we're talking about. Details on the Transport for NSW website advise that the new XPLOER service will have only three spaces available for bicycles. Is that true?

DALE MERRICK: Sorry, could you just repeat the question?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: The new XPLOER service will have only three spaces available for bicycles.

DALE MERRICK: Which document are you referring to, just for clarity?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: The Transport for NSW website.

DALE MERRICK: I will take that on notice. Ms Drover is here as well, as well as Ms Heydon. But my understanding is that offering the ability to have bikes, as I said before, on our new regional fleet—I think what's being referred to here is the trains that will replace the existing XPLOER fleet and it takes part of that review that I just referred to before, in that they are part of fleet that is being procured.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Could you also take on notice does the new fleet have the capacity to expand the number of spaces if it turns out that there's a demand by consumers?

DALE MERRICK: We can take on that board. As I said, as Ms Drover and Ms Heydon would know, the train is still in the design phase—early design phase.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: That's excellent because, presumably, then you could take account of consumer demand if they are being designed. I don't expect you to answer that straightaway, but if you would take it on notice. I have absolutely no idea what the demand would be, but if, as everyone expects, the demand for this does increase in the future, it would be good to have it, particularly if some future government decides to bring equity to the whole system and allow people in regional New South Wales to actually have bikes and boards on for free as their city cousins do.

CYNTHIA HEYDON: Yes, we will take that on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I might turn to the matter that the Minister referred to, and that was what he called—and I was glad he did this because I wasn't sure how to pronounce it—the PBLIS review. The options paper that has gone out—23 options in four sets—a number of those options really look at the sale or third-party administration of this scheme. I might just ask for the public rationale for those options to be put on the record. I might just first give an opportunity for that.

ROB SHARP: I don't have the specifics on that either.

MATT FULLER: Thanks for the question, Mr Graham. Sorry, if I could just clarify what you are asking about the PBLIS review? Obviously I can speak broadly about the fact that Mr Willett is currently in the process of undertaking the review.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I might put these to you in a different order. One of the concerns that has been raised with us is really the freight industry's concerns about where this is heading. What they're saying is

they would like to see the existing scheme, with some improvements, remain in place. Firstly, I might ask are you aware of those concerns? Is the agency aware of those concerns?

MATT FULLER: I think it's fair to say that both in the initial stages when Mr Willett was forming his views in terms of the options and then again more recently there has been extensive consultation across the industry. There have been a number of sessions. I've attended a couple of those sessions with Mr Willett in the recent couple of months with all corners of the industry, including a briefing that was provided through to the new freight and transport advisory committee that the Minister has formed.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Right.

MATT FULLER: All sectors have had quite a lot of exposure to Mr Willett's options paper, and he's in the process of deliberating, clarifying some of those issues. Between now and the end of the year, he will be making recommendations back to Government on next steps.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That Freight Transport Advisory Council is the one chaired by former Minister Duncan Gay; is that correct?

MATT FULLER: That is correct, yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: A very good roads Minister, in my assessment.

MATT FULLER: I'm sure he would be pleased to hear you say that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: They have reviewed it and they have had the chance to have their input?

MATT FULLER: There was an open session with Mr Willett from that freight transport advisory committee, where we had a number of the members participate and provide feedback, but there have been a number of other both open sessions and also requested targeted sessions with—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: What's the timing of that final report, then, to the Minister?

MATT FULLER: I would have to get back to you, but I know it's between now and the end of the year. I think the expectation is—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The suggestion was perhaps at the end of September. Does that sound accurate?

MATT FULLER: I think potentially there might be some early recommendations made and then, I suppose, some consultation with Government to form Mr Willett's final recommendations.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: One of the key considerations here is how do we drive productivity? Do you want to give us a view about where that issue is addressed? Where are the productivity incentives in the options paper, from the agency's point of view?

MATT FULLER: I think there are a number of options that he has put forward. Some of those are very minor in their context, in terms of improvements. Some of those are more major, in terms of the sorts of things that you might propose to regulate. Until we get those options back and then Government will take a position on those, I think the things that we're focusing on right now are, I suppose, the quick wins that have been more broadly assessed by industry. Particularly, one of the things we've been very focused on in the last few months is increased transparency about what is happening in the network, how we are communicating with the industry, what some of those objectives are. We've had some considerable discussions—particularly with the rail freight industry—around creating a new expectation. Specifically, we are formulating a freight level of service for the metropolitan passenger network that is obviously run and managed by Sydney Trains. I think that has been well received. Some of the early conversations we've had with Sydney Trains, with operators, have been very positive. So we want to set some clear KPIs that help us in terms of productivity measures.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: One of the things that's referred to here is the abolition of the Minister's power to regulate surcharges. I just wanted to be clear about precisely what we're talking about there. This relates to the same powers that Minister Constance threatened to use previously to regulate some of the charges. Are we talking about the same power to regulate surcharges?

MATT FULLER: I'd have to clarify the direct comparison. I wouldn't like to comment on the overarching position and what will be put forward until we see the recommendations from Mr Willett. He's obviously created a broad net of options.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Feel free to not buy into this inflammatory language; however, my real question is are these the powers that Minister Constance threatened to use to keep prices down and then did absolutely nothing about, leaving these freight operators totally exposed to significant price rises?

MATT FULLER: I'll take on notice just to verify, but I think, broadly speaking, your assumption is correct.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I've deliberately avoided asking any of the questions that I've been receiving from people who've been watching this today. But this is from a person who actually rides a bike in regional New South Wales, unlike me. They say, "How do you carry a bike box around when travelling on a train?" How does it actually work under the new project? Do you physically have a bike and you put it into the train as happens in Sydney or do you need to bring something with you?

MATT FULLER: Perhaps if I can start the response to that question and then I'll hand to Mr Merrick. The context at the moment is that in the existing regional fleet, effectively bikes and surfboards are checked like they are on an aircraft. So they are kind of oversized luggage. So when Mr Merrick refers to the boxing of the bike, that's ensuring that it's safe, that it won't be damaged in transit and so on. In relation to the new regional fleet, what has been requested and as part of the design specification is for bikes to be actually taken on board in whole and stowed through a racking-type arrangement so that they'll be able to be utilised in a more modern context, if you like. I don't know if Mr Merrick would like to add anything to that?

DALE MERRICK: Thanks again for the question and thanks, Mr Fuller. A bike is considered part of the luggage consideration when booking a regional ticket.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: So you won't actually have to have a bike box on your bike rack when you arrive anymore? You will simply be able to bring the bike in and it will go up onto the rack?

DALE MERRICK: Yes. As I mentioned before, the train being in the early design phases of the project, bikes were one of the key considerations in the customer feedback among many, many customer offerings. And it is being considered as part of the design how we can best accommodate bikes in a different way and in a way that's much more user friendly.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Thank you. I hope that satisfies one of the thousands of people watching estimates this afternoon.

CYNTHIA HEYDON: Just for complete clarity, it's the intercity new regional fleet that will have bike racks. It essentially doesn't require that additional process. But the long and short regional is where we're looking at and exploring ways to improve the storage of bikes.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: That's excellent. Thank you very much. Can I ask about the transport asset custodian platform. When will that platform be completed?

ROB SHARP: Can you just repeat that? The asset—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: The TAHE strategic asset management plan says, "As an element of asset information strategy, Transport for NSW is developing an asset register, the transport asset custodian platform, or TACP, which will become a single platform for existing and future asset data by communicating with operator and maintainer asset information systems." Can you just tell me when that might be ready, please?

ROB SHARP: Yes. Thank you for that. As part of our asset management strategy, we're on a journey to improve how we manage this across Transport. As you can imagine, with evolving transport, we've pulled a number of businesses and operating businesses together. A lot of the mechanisms and the ways that we were managing our assets varied. So what we're looking at doing is having a consistent platform—or an IT system, if you like—that enables us all to be talking the same language, having the same mechanisms of recording this information. We have an area that's working on that. It's quite important for TAHE because obviously we maintain a lot of assets, so the document you would have read there is referring to the work that we're doing within Transport. There's basically a Treasury budgeting function as well where the life and efficient management of assets does drive economic value to the community. And so we're on a journey within Transport—it was a five-year journey—to get us to a mature state of managing assets. We're probably about halfway on that journey at the moment.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Before I get inundated by questions from the viewing audience, can you give us some idea of maybe a rough estimate completion date?

ROB SHARP: I would say in about two years' time. It's a five-year program.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: You've already mentioned what agencies will be able to gather information from the TACP. Can I ask you what will be the interaction with the Rail Industry Safety and Standards Board, please?

ROB SHARP: From a safety perspective, we have quite specific accountabilities under the safety regulations. The CEOs of Sydney Trains and NSW Trains are the accountable managers from a safety perspective. The interactions we have with the safety board will vary depending on the nature. So if we're doing an investigation, there may be some elements that we consult with them on. But also, just generally, we have mechanisms to keep across safety processes. Ms McCarthy has left, but she could have talked to that in some detail. What I would say is we've got one of the representatives right here, and I'll pass to them just to give a rail and heavy view of it.

DALE MERRICK: And the particulars of the question again?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: What will be the interaction between the TACP and the RISSB, the Rail Industry Safety and Standards Board?

DALE MERRICK: Thanks again for the question. I'm not that familiar with the platform that's being referred to, but what I would say is that as a rail agency within the sector—within Transport—the relationship with the Rail Industry Safety and Standards Board is ongoing and we are participating in many of their safety programs.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Please take this on notice because I'm not being silly about it. In the development of all of these things, there's obviously a concern about duplication and if something goes wrong, who's actually responsible. My question is simply what will be done to ensure there's no duplication? Please take that on notice, if you would.

DALE MERRICK: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I might turn to the \$4.6 million report that was commenced in December 2018. It has been sitting with the Government since at least March 2020. And that's the McNaughton report into faster rail. An answer on notice after we asked about this at a previous estimates said:

Transport for NSW is currently finalising the fast rail strategy, which will be publicly released once completed.

Mr Sharp, why hasn't the fast rail strategy been released?

ROB SHARP: It is an exciting project and we have been talking about it for a while. There has been a lot of work going on with independent parties providing advice. We've also been developing the concept papers. They are with Government and that question in terms of when they will make an announcement is one for Government.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So this report has been with Government since March 2020. How long have those concept papers been with Government?

ROB SHARP: We've still been continuing work. We have a program in place and those teams continue to work on this. As you're aware, the Federal Government has also been very interested in this space. In fact, both colours of parties have been interested in this space. So we have been working with them as well in terms of what would be the early stages. This would be a long-term concept, but where are you going to get the value in the short term? And the work has been focusing on that. So it's not as though there was a paper prepared 18 months ago and it has just been sitting there. There has actually been a lot of conversation. As you're aware, there have been quite sizeable dollars allocated at the Federal level. We are still waiting to hear whether the \$500 million that the New South Wales Government has put on the table will be matched federally. There is a review underway at the moment on the infrastructure budget. Assuming it is, there are quite detailed plans in terms of how we develop the business case and the technical reviews that would be required, so the planning has been continuing in regards to developing that. I would say it's imminent, because the budget has numbers allocated. They're quite sizeable. We are still waiting to land the Federal Government funding element. I suspect you've probably heard this before, but we'd be nearing release of a strategy.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We certainly have heard it before. However, as you've correctly observed, this has been a priority. It was one of the things in the Governor-General's speech for the new Federal Government on 26 July—

ROB SHARP: Correct.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —so I hope you're correct. Who do you engage with? What discussions does the agency have at a Federal Government level? Is that with the National Faster Rail Agency? Where are you plugging into Federal Government discussion?

ROB SHARP: It's through the infrastructure department, so we have partnership agreements with them. Infrastructure Australia provides reviews. We interact with them and provide information. At the moment, though, the conversations would be also at the Minister level. I know the relative Ministers with New South Wales and

the Federal Government have met and had discussions, so there's clearly an interest from all parties in respect to this. The question is really one of how many dollars are going to be allocated up-front and where those dollars get spent. That's the current conversation.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I think everyone can agree that there's a shortage of people working in a whole range of industries, and obviously one of those is in relation to bus drivers in regional New South Wales. Can I ask you what strategies are in place to assist in the recruitment of bus drivers?

ROB SHARP: Your observation is absolutely correct. In fact, we are seeing it Australia-wide. It's an industry-wide issue. We've been engaging with the industry, quite specifically looking to develop plans. One of the challenges is: Are we just shuffling deck chairs in Australia? In other words, if you recruit bus drivers, are you taking them off another industry and simply creating some issues? From a whole-of-government perspective, I can confirm that this has been a focus. There have been conversations at the Government level, along with the Federal Government, around visas, applications and immigration. At a higher level, those things have been occurring. On the ground, at the grassroots, I'll pass across to get some more detail around particular bus operators. In the regional area, obviously there's a large number of smaller operators right through to larger operators.

BARBARA WISE: Certainly, thank you. In terms of things that are happening on the ground, individual operators—under the contracts that we hold with the operators, it's clearly their responsibility to employ the drivers. They are offering incentive payments to people to join. They're offering incentives such as taking them much earlier in the process in terms of helping them get a heavy-vehicle driver licence and getting through some of the regulatory hoops that you mentioned earlier in terms of—say, for taxi drivers and those kinds of things. Bus industry representatives have put papers to Transport seeking assistance with some of those things, and some of those regulatory options are also being looked at for bus drivers.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Can I ask you, in relation to BusNSW and the range of options to increase driver recruitment, are there any particular options that are currently being positively looked at?

BARBARA WISE: I would say that none of them—well, as far as I'm aware, because I'm not involved in all of the discussions. But in terms of the discussions I've been involved in, certainly we haven't ruled anything out. As Mr Sharp mentioned, a lot of it does go down to—in fact, BusNSW did talk about in that submission, if we're referring to the same one from July, visa categories and those kinds of things as well. We're actually working across the entire agency—so with my colleagues in Greater Sydney as well—on working with bus operators in an on-the-ground kind of way to see what we can do to help speed up processes around driver licensing, for example.

ROB SHARP: There are some interesting examples, though. Hunter Valley Buses has been running a trainee program and they've had 44 new people come through there over the last six months, so each organisation is targeting different initiatives and some are actually being quite successful. I do think there are some really good opportunities in the regional areas to create jobs and bring in traineeships, not just on buses but more generally, even within Transport.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Obviously training heavy-vehicle drivers is also critical, I understand. I'm not going to try to confuse the two issues here at the moment, but they are obviously interrelated. Just on this matter, can I ask you to please take on notice: Since 1 January this year, on how many occasions has Transport for NSW been advised of cancelled bus services due to workforce shortages? How many of these occurrences involved school buses? And how many complaints has Transport for NSW received in relation to this matter over that period of time?

ROB SHARP: We'll take those on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'd like to ask about the issues that have arisen from the relocation of the heritage train complex at North Rothbury. This has been a very strong local community issue, and obviously the heritage rail teams in many parts of the State are very passionate advocates for what they do. The real issue here, as I understand it, is the short-term accommodation for these rail assets while there's a longer discussion that goes on. What is the agency doing to assist?

ROB SHARP: Thank you. We do take our heritage seriously and we've been investing in some of our heritage assets. There's a large facility at Chullora that is being put together. The Sydney Trains organisation is actually making good the facility at the moment. It hadn't been used for a little while, so it's being brought back to a state where the project can actually kick on. My understanding, and I'll have to take on notice the specific details, is that we're talking a period of about 12 months. Clearly those assets need to be relocated. I'm not sure if you're across it? No.

DALE MERRICK: No.

ROB SHARP: I'll have to take it on notice in terms of the detail, Mr Graham.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: One of the immediate questions is whether or not, as Broadmeadow is emptied out to Chullora, which is on track to occur by November 2022—whether that might be a temporary option. That is one of the things that's being canvassed. Perhaps on notice—

ROB SHARP: Yes, I'm not familiar with that. I have spoken personally with the heritage organisation and they were expressing some concerns around the time lines, but we've given them comfort and focus that we'll be supporting them in that endeavour. But I'll come back to you on the interim arrangement.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Just to emphasise the urgency of this, I understand that the repossession which will effectively close the North Rothbury site will be issued on 1 October, so there's obviously a pressing deadline from their point of view.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Testers Hollow and Gillieston Heights, which suddenly became an island during the recent floods—when is the upgrade of Cessnock Road at Testers Hollow expected to be completed, please?

MATT FULLER: Effectively, Testers Hollow is going to be completed between now and the end of the year. We had minor delays due to the weather, but I think it's fair to say that December is what we're targeting at the moment.

ANTHONY HAYES: Yes.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: December? Okay, thanks. Can you tell me how much has been spent on the project to date and what the final expenditure is expected to be?

ANTHONY HAYES: I'm happy to take that question. The total budget for the Testers Hollow project is \$17 million. That's \$15 million from the Federal Government and \$2 million from the New South Wales Government.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: What damage was sustained in the recent flood event and what was the additional cost as a consequence, please?

ANTHONY HAYES: The damage was more to time rather than physical damage. It went underwater and it took additional time. That's what's caused the delay to the project to push it back to the end of the year. But we're still on track to meet that budget.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Okay. Have there been any alternative options considered to ensure that the Gillieston community does not become an island yet again?

ANTHONY HAYES: Yeah. It's obviously been a point of serious discussion within the community over a period of time and we've had numerous conversations with councils involved as well. The project, when it's complete, will take that road from having a one in two-year flood resistance level to one in 20. It raises the road by about one and a half metres, so it's a big step in the right direction. The community has obviously still expressed their concerns about whether that's high enough, but in recent conversations with council we actually stopped and said, "Well, this is the chance to talk about it", and I think we all agreed it's been a long time coming, let's just get it finished. It's due to be finished in the next few months so let's get the project done so that the community can actually enjoy a more reliable piece of road. The conversation has now commenced about: Are there alternative routes for other potential floating situations in the future, if that were to occur?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Okay. I am advised by one of our viewers that there have been three complete isolations since 2007 for the 7,000 people who live there, so obviously it's critical. Is it the case that they've run out of rain days in the contract? What would be the effect of that, if that's the case?

ANTHONY HAYES: Yes. We are getting close to the rain contingency in the contract, but the project is well on its way to completion and we will get it done.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I might turn to an issue at the Point Clare railway station. This station is being upgraded. The issue that has been caused is the recent removal of temporary ramps. The planned accessible lifts are not operational until later this year and that's causing real community concerns. To give you some sense of the community concerns: Recently an 82-year-old woman was struggling to get up the newly installed stairs and she was almost in tears struggling to get to her chemist; Rex Brown, another Point Clare local, who's aged 85, has a mobility scooter and now cannot get to his doctor due to the stairs being put in place; and Angela Tung, a mother of three with a newborn in a pram, is finding it difficult to use two elevators just to get from one station to the other. These are the sorts of issues that are being created at the moment. What is the agency doing to deal with these community concerns?

ANTHONY HAYES: I'm happy to take that as well with Ms Drover. It's not ideal; we agree. There have been a couple of issues with this project, one being that we haven't communicated as effectively with the community as we should've and we have apologised for that. With specific regard to the removal of the old ramps, the old ramps are in exactly the same place where the lift is going to go. This happens, and it has happened with other projects as we've moved through the Transport Access Program. There has been a delay in the amount of time it's going to take us to install the new lifts and get it working. As a result of that, what we're doing is making sure that our team are on hand to assist with helping people get from one side of the station to the other. It's certainly not an ideal situation, but we're now just trying to get it done as quickly as we can.

CAMILLA DROVER: If I can just add: The lifts are planned to be operational by October and then have the rest of the project finished in November. Unfortunately, because of the protected industrial action, we are two months late or further late on that project.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But, Ms Drover, you're not blaming this on the union, are you?

CAMILLA DROVER: No, absolutely. As my colleague said, we will accept that the ramp issue has problematic for the communities, but we are endeavouring to finish the project as quickly as possible.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And I appreciate your giving us date as well. Thank you.

CAMILLA DROVER: Yeah. There is also an operational workaround. Again, it's not ideal but it does exist in terms of people can ring a hotline and get help to access the railway station whilst we finish.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you for that, and I appreciate the fact that you've been up-front about it not being ideal. I think that is welcome. The Minister put out a statement, which I thought was quite unusual in that it said this: "It came to my attention that the final design had deviated from the original designs that went to community consultation and I directed my department to revisit the design to ensure the upgraded station is accessible to all customers." How did this happen that the Minister has to issue a directive like that?

ANTHONY HAYES: We actually took the issue to the Minister when it became apparent to make sure that he was aware of it. We initially put out for consultation an initial design. We received the community feedback. We then made some alterations to that design, working with some disability experts who advised us. We changed the design. Where we went wrong is we didn't go back out to re-communicate those changes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: To let people know, yes.

ANTHONY HAYES: We still believe that the new design is in fact a more suitable design and it's in line with a number of the other projects that we built around the State, but we should have gone back out to communicate and we didn't do that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Right. Thank you both for those answers.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I'm just writing out this name for Hansard. Can I ask you about the Gobbagombalin, or Gobba, bridge at Wagga Wagga, please? My understanding is that there was an investigation a few years ago to duplicate the bridge. That then morphed into a study and then a business case. Then after seven years, the Government produced a transport plan, which once again called for an investigation to be undertaken. Given all the various reports, nothing as far as I can tell from reading through the material has actually happened. There have now been at least two rollover accidents on the approach to the Gobba bridge within the past few weeks. Can someone give us an update on what's actually going to happen there, please?

MATT FULLER: Yes, sure: Happy to start with that and Mr Hayes might be able to add as well because I know he's been acting in the southern district recently. Transport at the moment is working with the council. As you say, there has been a transport plan for Wagga that has been circulated. In relation to that plan and some of the things that are going on at the moment, there was an announcement made by Government for a \$30 million package of work to be undertaken in the Wagga region, which included upgrade works to the inner section of Gobba bridge which, at the moment, the team are working on and coming up with proposals so that, hopefully, we can get some activity happening around the Gobba bridge and get a better resolution for the Wagga community. Mr Hayes, I don't know if there's anything else you can add?

ANTHONY HAYES: There's not a great deal to add to that. The primary focus is on making the bridge safe and fit for purpose. The analysis that we've done suggests that the feedback we've had regarding duplication of the bridge, that's not necessary at this time, so the focus is on making the current bridge safe.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Okay. Can you give us an idea when some action may actually be physically taken?

MATT FULLER: I think detailed design is in the process of being undertaken and I think the expectation is we'll have that wrapped up by the end of October. So, on that basis, we should be in a position to be back out communicating with the community in terms of what a program of work might look like and time frames.

ANTHONY HAYES: And, just to give his own information, we're looking at traffic lights, the road surface, the soil sub-surface, the placement of utilities to make sure that it's effective.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Is any of this information public information? I'm just wondering whether we could receive just a summary of what is actually being proposed at the moment. I don't want to go into details.

MATT FULLER: Sure, no. So, through our southern director in that region, we'd be happy to provide the Committee with an update of where we were at—no problem.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Yes. Can you make that available to us? That would be of use—

MATT FULLER: Certainly.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: So I can say to our thousands of viewers again at the moment—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: They're egging you on, Peter.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: —that we'd expect something will be announced towards the end of the year?

MATT FULLER: We'll provide an update on the work as to where we're at and then we'll come back to the community once we've done the detailed design work further—between now and the end of the year, certainly.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I might turn to the outcome report of the Burrill Lake-Princes Highway co-design process. This has been repeatedly delayed. There were hopes in November 2021. It was then promised for release in early 2022, then mid-2022. When will Transport for NSW release the report on the preferred route?

ANTHONY HAYES: This has been a challenging one. But we believe we are nearly there and we are intending to recommence conversations with the Burrill Lake community in September. The challenge has been to try and find the solution to the Milton-Ulladulla Bypass, which the communities of Milton and Ulladulla are obviously very positive about. But when we set up the co-design committee, they raised a number of very important concerns, and it was important for us to stop and understand or listen to those concerns and then look for appropriate solutions. The community are obviously very concerned about maintaining the feel of their village or the feel of their community, and we agree. Some of the proposed solutions involved bypasses of Burrill to the west, which would have had some fairly significant environmental impacts, so they weren't necessarily great solutions either. We have actually spent quite a bit of time trying to find the right solution that allows us to go ahead with the Milton-Ulladulla Bypass as a priority project, but will helpfully provide an adequate solution for the people of Burrill Lake.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Promising work, hopefully, acknowledging the difficulties. This has been heavily contested. Does that mean that you have reopened the consultation process, or is this all internal work? There is a community view that, on 1 July when the Minister was there, the commitment was there and the consultation process would be recommenced.

ANTHONY HAYES: We intend to go back out now. But there was no point turning up to the community until—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, without a view to put in front of them.

ANTHONY HAYES: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I accept that.

ANTHONY HAYES: And we can present the report from the co-design committee, but if we don't have solutions or an appropriate response it would seem a bit half-hearted.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You will have a new view, but you intend to go back and consult fully on that. When will that occur?

ANTHONY HAYES: In September, so within the next few weeks.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Will you be going back with a preferred route or expanding the scope of the potential routes? Will there be one option on the table here that is really preferred that you think threads the needle, or a few options?

ANTHONY HAYES: Not up to me to be announcing what it is; obviously, that is for the Minister. But, yes, we have landed on what we believe is an appropriate solution.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you for that answer.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Country Passenger Transport Infrastructure Grants Scheme—I understand that these grants provide subsidies to support the construction or upgrade of bus stop infrastructure generally owned and maintained by local councils across country New South Wales. My question is that councils in Newcastle, Wollongong and the Central Coast have been excluded from accessing funds to upgrade public transport infrastructure. What is the policy rationale for that?

ANTHONY HAYES: Can I ask for a little bit more detail on your question?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: The Newcastle, Wollongong and Central Coast councils are not eligible for funding under the Country Passenger Transport Infrastructure Grants Scheme, which provides funding to upgrade local bus stops and facilities. I am trying to understand why that is the case.

ANTHONY HAYES: I would need to go and look at the terms of reference for the CPTIGS program. I don't have that in front of me now, but I would be happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: If you would. For instance, a person with disability living in Port Stephens can catch a bus in Raymond Terrace but can't get off in Newcastle, as there may not be appropriate facilities. The Central Coast has 35 per cent of its population over the age of 65 years. But how can Central Coast Council fund upgrades to bus stops that are necessary for all of these clients? Buses go over the border of Maitland at Woodbury into Newcastle at Beresfield on an hourly basis. Why shouldn't a person with disability from Woodbury, who wants to go to the shops at Beresfield, be able to benefit from funding from the Government to make their trip possible, just because the two suburbs are in different local government areas? I don't think it is unreasonable to ask, not what is the political decision, but what is the policy basis of why one LGA has been included but another hasn't, when there doesn't seem to be any real disparate reason from one location to another. I am not talking about something in the middle of Sydney. I am talking about a regional area. Can you take that on notice? What is the policy basis for that?

ANTHONY HAYES: Yes. Happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I want to ask about the changes that were made to the registration costs, given the changes that were made to the definition of primary producers. This was part of a legislative change. I think it happened in 2021; it would have been October. This was supported by both sides of politics but it tightened, effectively, the definition of primary producers. I have two questions here. Firstly, for people who formerly would have had a vehicle that was within that definition of primary producers but now do not, what is the assessment now about how much extra they are paying for their heavy vehicle registration?

ROB SHARP: I am afraid I will have to take that on notice. Ms McCarthy is the person who is across that one.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We let so few people go.

ROB SHARP: Happy to revert on that. I am aware of it, but I am not across the detail, I'm afraid.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And what is the quantum of funding that will be raised by these changes?

ROB SHARP: We will take that on notice and revert to you specifically.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I want to put that question strongly. I asked about this around the time of the changes—in fact, in the debate—and the Government was putting the view that they had no idea. They were unable to inform the Parliament what this would mean. We supported the changes, but there were obvious concerns that it might be revenue raising. We are now significantly on from that October 2021 debate. What we want to know is, looking back, what has this meant? Has this raised money or not? What is the quantum?

ROB SHARP: I understand the context. Thank you.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I want to ask about the community transport contract negotiations. Where are we up to with these negotiations?

ROB SHARP: I will hand over to Ms Wise.

BARBARA WISE: Certainly. The community transport contracts, we have put them in place from 1 July this year. They are in place until June of next year, which is all we had an indication from the Commonwealth at the time of signing of the contracts, which was actually during the Federal Government caretaker period in May and June of this year. Since then, the Commonwealth has come out and indicated that they would extend the existing funding programs for community transport for a further year in line with the aged care royal commission recommendations. Obviously, we can't extend any further contracts with community transport providers until such time as the Commonwealth gives us something to sign ourselves, assuming they wish to contract with us to do that, rather than going directly to the operators. The contracts are in place until June 2023.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: To the end of June 2023?

BARBARA WISE: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Do you have any sense of when you might get that answer in those discussions with the Commonwealth that would allow you to then extend that support?

BARBARA WISE: I can only go on what has been past practice, and past practice has left it pretty late in the year to be able to do that. It was not until May, for example, of this year that we were able to confirm anything for this year.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And that obviously has a whole lot of knock-on impacts on staffing.

BARBARA WISE: Yes. It does make it quite challenging at that time to get things in place in time.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Is there anything that could be done to improve that dynamic, in your view?

BARBARA WISE: It would be speculative. It would depend to some extent on what decision the new Federal Government wanted to make with the program or if they are going to make any significant policy change or not. I can't really comment on that.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Can I ask some brief questions about community transport contracts. We discussed this briefly this morning. There seems to be a number of differing contracts that all finish in 2024. Are there going to be significant cuts? What's proposed? What changes are proposed to those contracts for 2024, if any?

BARBARA WISE: For community transport?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Yes.

BARBARA WISE: For the majority of the funding, it's actually up to the Commonwealth to make that decision so I can't really comment.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Chair, I think we're in a position to thank the officials for their answers today. That has been very helpful, from our point of view, so I thank you for the answers you've been able to give today.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Are you sure? There's no coming back from sending them all away!

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: We have got a supplementary. Don't worry about that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Do Government members want to use their 15 minutes of time?

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: No, it was a very comprehensive today.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Excellent. That concludes today's session. We thank everyone for their time. In terms of questions on notice, the Committee secretariat will be in contact with you and you'll have 21 days to get back to us. Thank you everyone.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.