



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Standing Committee
on
Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Bill 207, Traffic Safety (Tow Truck Warning Lamps)
Amendment Act, 2022

Monday, May 9, 2022
8:15 a.m.

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Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

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Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

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Ministry of Transportation

Emily Holmwood, Manager, Legislative Services, Legislative Planning

Tom Loo, Assistant Deputy Minister, Construction and Maintenance

Kim Mah, Executive Director, Transportation Policy

8:15 a.m.

Monday, May 9, 2022

[Mr. Jeremy Nixon in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: All right. Good morning. I'd like to call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills to order and welcome everyone in attendance.

My name is Jeremy Nixon, MLA for Calgary-Klein and deputy chair of this committee. I'd ask that members and those joining the committee at the table introduce themselves for the record, starting to my right.

Mr. Singh: Good morning, everyone. Peter Singh, MLA for Calgary-East.

Mr. Long: Martin Long, MLA for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rutherford: Brad Rutherford, MLA, Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Dach: Good morning. Lorne Dach, MLA for Edmonton-McClung.

Ms Sigurdson: Good morning. Lori Sigurdson, Edmonton-River-view.

Ms Govindarajan: Vani Govindarajan with the Parliamentary Counsel office.

Ms Robert: Good morning. Nancy Robert, clerk of *Journals* and committees.

Mr. Huffman: Warren Huffman, committee clerk.

The Deputy Chair: Excellent. Now we will go online, and we'll start with MLA Sweet.

Ms Sweet: Good morning. Heather Sweet, MLA, Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Nielsen: Good morning, everyone. Chris Nielsen, MLA for Edmonton-Decore.

Ms Rosin: Good morning. Miranda Rosin, MLA for Banff-Kananaskis.

Mr. Amery: Good morning, Chair, and good morning, colleagues. Mickey Amery, MLA, Calgary-Cross.

The Deputy Chair: Excellent. I'd like to introduce for the record the following substitution: MLA Dach for MLA Irwin.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee meetings are live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audio- and videostream and transcripts of the meetings can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website.

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Now we will move to approval of agenda. Are there any changes or additions to the draft agenda? Excellent. Seeing or hearing none, would anybody like to make a motion to approve the agenda? Excellent. MLA Singh has moved that the agenda for the May 9,

2022, meeting of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills be adopted as distributed. All in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. All online in favour, please say aye. Any opposed online? All right. That is carried.

Hon. members, we have the minutes from the May 4, 2022, meeting for approval. Are there any errors or omissions to note?

All right. Seeing none, would a member like to make a motion to approve the minutes? Excellent. MLA Long moves that the minutes for the May 4, 2022, of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills be approved as distributed. All in favour online and in the room, please say aye. Any opposed online and in the room, please say no. Excellent. That is carried.

All right. That brings us to item 4, review of Bill 207, Traffic Safety (Tow Truck Warning Lamps) Amendment Act, 2022. We will now move to a presentation by Mr. Brad Rutherford, MLA for Leduc-Beaumont.

Hon. members, Bill 207, Traffic Safety (Tow Truck Warning Lamps) Amendment Act, 2022, was referred to the committee on Thursday, April 28, 2022, in accordance with Standing Order 74.11.

I would like now to invite Mr. Rutherford to present to the group. Mr. Rutherford, you have five minutes.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Chair and committee members, for joining me this morning. I'm here to present on Bill 207, Traffic Safety (Tow Truck Warning Lamps) Amendment Act, 2022. I believe that the changes in Bill 207, although simple and straightforward, will have a significant impact on the safety of tow truck operators and anyone else who is present and needing the help of a tow truck operator while roadside.

The bill will allow for a colour combination of blue and amber lights on tow trucks, with the goal of increasing visibility, to indicate to drivers in Alberta that not only should you slow down but also recognize that there will be at least one or maybe many people out of their vehicles working around those vehicles and they need space and they need drivers to be cautious and aware. This is broadly about increasing safety by increasing visibility and communicating what's ahead with the colour combination of blue and amber.

The inspiration for this bill came directly from local stakeholders who run tow truck operations in my riding and have asked for these changes to be brought forward. I can go even further back to my nomination, when I had tow truck operators coming up to me at discussions, basically sharing the amount of near misses that they had and accidents that they had seen. There was a real sense of an impending fatality or serious injury and that efforts need to be made to minimize this.

I further consulted with the Alberta Motor Association, the Alberta Motor Transport Association, the Ministry of Transportation, and the chief of the Edmonton Police Service. This includes broadly, as well, the support of the Alberta Chiefs of Police.

Transport Canada has studied this and reported that a two-colour combination will make vehicles more visible, also that blue is the most conspicuous colour during the day or night. In other words, it is the easiest to see during the day or night. Studies from the Texas and Indiana departments of Transportation found that colour combinations were more effective to get drivers' attentions and to get them to slow down.

Snowplows are currently allowed to use a red and amber combination to increase visibility, with recent changes allowing for a white strobe light. There needs to be a balance between visibility and glare. White can be seen at a distance but can also cause the

most glare, which changes the risk as drivers approach a vehicle that is using it.

During my time in policing I have been on many busy roads. I have been out of my vehicle working in dangerous situations, with many factors to take into consideration. The risk is never eliminated, but it can be reduced. During my time in patrol I could close down one lane. I could close down entire roadways. I could stop traffic in all directions. Frankly, if there was a fire truck there, that's the best coverage because of the size of the vehicle. However, for tow truck operators the benefit of having one or numerous emergency vehicles with them is most often not the case. They are helping people roadside in poor weather conditions, doing important work to help stranded drivers, to clear roadways for traffic, and it is important that we are giving them the best chance to do this safely.

The AMA, AMTA, and others provided information to me, and I wanted to sum up their findings and conclusions about the effectiveness and durability of that effectiveness. Retrospective studies in Texas showed that motorists can differentiate different colour combinations to understand what they mean. From years following blue and amber changes, they still produced better motorist responses than amber alone. The change remained effective. They found that the best responses from drivers were blue-red combinations, which are exclusively for police, followed by blue- or red-amber combinations, which were also effective.

The AMA also noted that there has not been any reported reduction in the effectiveness of the blue-red combination for police vehicles – and this has been reported out of Saskatchewan, which made the change several years ago after a fatality – and that more U.S. states and provinces are adopting colour combinations for tow trucks and for snowplows.

Again, this is about visibility for all times of day and weather. This is about getting people to slow down and to have a better understanding of what is ahead and to increase safety for tow truck operators and for anyone with them. There are already examples across the country and in U.S. states where colour combinations are being adopted, frankly, just for the increased visibility that I had discussed. You'll find that not only is it red and amber for snowplows here, but you'll find blue-amber combinations for snowplows and other vehicles across this country.

It has already started to change, but from the examples that we have, I don't see a reduction in the effectiveness of a blue-red combination for police vehicles and the identification of what that means. Allowing for a colour combination, I think, is going to have a positive effect, with really just the hope of being able to increase safety and make sure that tow truck operators can get home safely as well as the people who are with them. There's probably going to be a motorist roadside with them as well.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will hand it back to you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rutherford.

Before we dive into questions with members, I'm just going to get Member Rehn – Mr. Rehn, can you introduce yourself for the record?

Mr. Rehn: Yes. This is Pat Rehn, MLA for Lesser Slave Lake.

The Deputy Chair: Excellent. Thank you.

We'll now open up for questions, starting with Member Sigurdson.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to talk about this important issue and ask the member a few questions. Obviously, this is about safety, and we know that, you know, tow truck operators talk about: every 14 minutes they're put at risk. Those are some of the stats certainly

from the Alberta Motor Association and the association of tow truck owners. Between 2019 and 2020 there were at least five collisions in Alberta with a tow truck working at the roadside, and as you've already articulated very well, those combinations of colours, not just one colour or the other – previously we know that there were some concerns by police associations because they felt like that maybe should be the exclusive authority of the police to have, and I know the Association of Chiefs of Police has come out publicly and said that they're in support. What about the big cities? Did you talk specifically to Edmonton and Calgary chiefs of police?

8:25

Mr. Rutherford: I talked with Chief McFee, and we had a discussion about this. Then that's where we discussed broadly the decision of the Alberta Chiefs of Police. I didn't talk to the Calgary chief directly, but it was important to make sure that there were no objections there as well, and they didn't have any.

Saskatchewan has led this as well. They've made this change, and there's nothing being reported out of Saskatchewan that would suggest to me that people are not being able to differentiate between police vehicles and tow trucks.

Ms Sigurdson: Okay.

The Deputy Chair: Supplemental?

Ms Sigurdson: Yes, please. You just brought up Saskatchewan, so I appreciate that. I mean, that's still a fairly recent change, and I'm just wondering: have you talked with them about what the results have been? Have they noticed a diminishment in sort of any kind of risky situations, or are people able to recognize those, you know, blue and amber lights better? Just any kind of findings they have out of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Rutherford: Not directly out of Saskatchewan other than that there was a report that there was no issue between police and tow truck operators in having different colour combinations.

Some of the other studies I referenced showed sort of that long-term effectiveness of the colour combination and that it still produced a response from motorists. That was mostly coming out of the U.S. when they looked back and specifically in Texas, where they, in a retrospective study, showed that people weren't making mistakes between the colour combinations and that it was still getting a response, so they weren't becoming sort of numb to it. They were still recognizing what was ahead and then taking an appropriate action.

Ms Sigurdson: Okay. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Excellent. Thank you.

Next we have up Member Singh.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Firstly, I would like to thank MLA Rutherford for presenting this private member's bill, Bill 207, the Traffic Safety (Tow Truck Warning Lamps) Amendment Act, 2022. As you mentioned, this bill will provide more roadside safety and enhanced visibility for tow trucks, and I understand that every Albertan deserves to be protected and safe, including those who work at the roadside.

My question is: was there any stakeholder consultation conducted before tabling this bill, and if there was, what were their recommendations and common ideas about it?

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you for that question, MLA Singh. I spoke with the Alberta Motor Association and the Alberta Motor

Transport Association. There was the opinion from the Alberta Chiefs of Police as well. There were local tow truck operators within my own riding, where we had this discussion.

Besides having a conversation, I think AMTA had also looked at the white light and then determined that it was just too much glare. As you get close to it, it actually gets harder to see and it becomes distracting. At the time when you need to be the most focused and have the most visibility, a white light close to a scene can actually cause problems. There was consensus that adding the blue option was the best one. Blue has the best visibility, as I mentioned, during the day and night. It needs the least intensity to be able to produce that as well, so it doesn't have to be overly bright to be visible.

We're also trying to make sure that the visibility aspect is during, you know, really adverse weather conditions as well so that you're able to see through fog or snow and pick up that there's something ahead and then start making decisions about how you're driving your own vehicle, with enough time to be able to slow down, move over, and do all the other things that you're supposed to do. This will hopefully give drivers, one, the extra care and attention that they need. It'll show them what's ahead, and it'll do so sooner with being a more visible light.

Mr. Singh: Thanks for answering.

As Saskatchewan allowed the usage of blue lights for tow trucks in 2017, and I believe that there are some states in the U.S. permitting the use of blue lights for tow trucks, did the use of blue lights for tow trucks improve roadside safety in their areas? Could you elaborate further on the need for tow trucks to use the blue and amber lights?

Thank you.

Mr. Rutherford: Blue is being added more and more. It is included on snowplows in several provinces in the country already, so Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Yukon use that combination on snowplows. Here we have amber-red. The other studies that I referenced also talk about amber-red being highly visible as well, and snowplows have had the added option of being able to use a white strobe as well to increase visibility, which will help at a distance. But Saskatchewan made the change after, of course, a fatality happened roadside.

I'll just add that even as I e-mailed some of the local stakeholders, I mean, they were reporting back collisions that had happened in between our conversations as well, so this has happened frequently. As MLA Sigurdson had pointed out, the volume of calls – AMA, which handles the majority of tow truck operations just under their own umbrella and contractors: there are about 37,500 high-risk calls that they attend every year. About every 14 minutes, as was mentioned, they are going to one of those calls, so this is just an effort to increase visibility.

I can't eliminate the risk, frankly. There's going to need to, I think, be an education campaign that comes in conjunction with these changes or regardless, depending on how this works out, to ensure that drivers have an understanding of what happens roadside. I've seen it just in policing, especially when you're dealing with other motorists who aren't as used to being out. Where you stand, how far away from the cars you should stand: these are all things that an education campaign can take care of. Like, you don't want to stand in between vehicles on a highway, but if we can improve some of that with visibility, then I think the blue light will achieve that.

Mr. Singh: Thank you for answering my question.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

MLA Dach.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Chair. A few questions for Mr. Rutherford. As the critic for Transportation for the Official Opposition this issue interests me a lot. I did take the opportunity in debate in the Legislature earlier in the session when the minister brought forward a piece of legislation on behalf of the government – it was the “slow down, pull over” legislation that was recently passed – and I did briefly ask in the House about perhaps considering other elements that could have been brought forward in that same bill. One of them was this question of adding the blue lights in combination with other colours. I got no real response from the minister, and it seems as though the government at that time wasn't interested in this issue, yet it's coming forward now as a private member's bill, so I guess we'll see whether or not the government is supportive with this measure once we deal with it here in committee and if it is brought forward to the House. However, I found that element curious.

But I know that I wanted to get a bit more of a detailed answer from you, Mr. Rutherford, on the question of police buy-in. You as a former police officer would be very familiar with the various different agencies throughout the province. You did indicate that you had a conversation with Chief McFee here of EPS, but you did also say that you did not consult with the chief of police in Calgary. I'm wondering: notwithstanding that the Association of Chiefs of Police or police association, I should say, has come forward in support, what specific conversations have you had with other chiefs throughout the province to get a real good personal understanding of whether there'll be total buy-in by police officers and their executives throughout the province, not only the individual police organizations within the cities and municipalities but also, of course, from the provincial sheriffs and also the RCMP?

I'd be very interested in hearing if indeed there is still some resistance to it, because certainly there's lots of adoption happening of the blue lights in combination with others on tow trucks. It seems to be that the momentum for carrying this forward in other jurisdictions is quite large but really is something that I think the police right across the board would appreciate a serious conversation about before it actually moves forward. I really would like you to put on record the details of conversations you've had with the various police organizations and associations across the province.

8:35

Mr. Rutherford: Sure. Thank you for that question. As you noted and I spoke about before, I had a direct conversation with Chief McFee about this, and then I took the opinion that was put out by the Alberta Chiefs of Police as their consensus on the issue. I didn't go to all chiefs of police. I took the consensus that they were supportive of this from their own communication that they were ready to see this adopted and that they didn't have any objections to it.

In terms of buy-in from patrol or from other officers, I would like to think that the number one concern is traffic safety for those officers. They're going to want to see less collisions, of course, and they're going to want to make sure that everybody gets home safely. It's what patrol officers talk about frequently, you know, wanting to make sure we get home at the end of the day and that we can go back to our families. Everybody else, I think, has that same right to have as much safety as possible.

It's never eliminated, unfortunately. There will still be accidents. If this can help prevent a few of those, then it's a good step, and it's one that, really, I don't think is going to cause confusion, personally and from what I've read, that there will be confusion between blue and red, blue and amber. I think it'll be a clear distinction, and people will have an understanding of what it means if you're approaching a tow truck. It should frankly be the same level of

safety if you're approaching a police vehicle or a tow truck. It shouldn't matter. You should still be slowing down. You should be trying to be aware of what's ahead on the road, and I think these colour combinations that exist will help inform a motorist, especially in poor weather, if all they can see is the lights, that there is something up ahead that they need to be aware of. Blue is just found to be the most effective light to be put in there.

The Deputy Chair: Supplemental?

Mr. Dach: Thanks for that. If indeed the measure does go before the House and is adopted ultimately, do you believe that there'll be adequate sort of attention paid to the police culture element of this? Historically, the blue lights have been the exclusive preserve of police departments, and there's been some protectiveness around that. I have police officers in my family as well, and I know that the blue was seen to be the exclusive preserve of police, and they're losing that. Even conversationally or colloquially in your talks with fellow officers is there some resistance and some hesitancy to accept this, or is it really a buy-in? What's your sense, gut feeling?

Mr. Rutherford: My sense from people that I know who are still in patrol is that they wouldn't really have a strong opinion either way. They're not going to be – and this is a smaller group. I'm not going to try to speak on behalf of all officers. Frankly, they are concerned about traffic safety. They want to make sure that our roadways are clear and that there are less accidents, but they're not going to take offence to this. In my 10 years I never felt an ownership over a blue light. That was never something I concerned myself with. If the change happened while I was still on patrol, I just would have said: okay; tow trucks have blue lights on them now. I wouldn't get upset or concerned about it. You know, there are going to be different opinions on that, and I can appreciate it, but I think, from the information that we have, people are going to be able to differentiate between blue and red and blue and amber.

Mr. Dach: Okay. I have one quick follow-up if I may.

The Deputy Chair: Real quick.

Mr. Dach: Okay. With respect to location of lights on the actual tow trucks we've seen fire trucks as well as police vehicles have lights sprinkled throughout them, in the grill and various different locations, and I'm just wondering. Given that tow trucks are quite often private vehicles, private companies, will there be – in the regulations do you anticipate that there'll be specific areas where these lights can be located so that, as you say, visibility is enhanced to the maximum and there is no confusion as to what that vehicle is? You could have them all over the place in various different manners on private tow trucks unless they are given specific guidelines. What thoughts have you given to that?

Mr. Rutherford: When I read the regulations, I didn't see any need to change those. They are still required to have visibility surrounding the vehicle for their lights. At this point the change, for me, wasn't about location or prescribing that; it was just about adding the blue and amber combination to increase visibility.

The Deputy Chair: Excellent.

MLA Long.

Mr. Long: Thank you, MLA Rutherford, for bringing this forward. I'll try to be very quick to get this in. I'm just wondering, in your stakeholder conversations, if there've been any other suggestions beyond this for how to make things safer for tow truck drivers

specifically. On that, like, "What if this doesn't improve safety enough?" I guess, is why I'm asking that.

Mr. Rutherford: That's a fair point. If the trends continue as is, then you're going to need to start looking at different approaches. I'm not going to say that this is the be-all and end-all. To the question of – yeah. Do you want to rephrase, remind me of the question here quickly?

Mr. Long: Yeah. If this doesn't improve things enough, like, were there other measures that stakeholders . . .

Mr. Rutherford: That's right. Sorry. Yes. I did specifically ask that in my conversation with AMA. There were no other legislative changes that they made me aware of that they were looking for in combination with this. I think the other aspect that just needs to be reinforced over time is education campaigns that go with these changes and then, however those go, periodically to just remind people of the colour combinations and what the rules are. Just to reinforce that would be, I think, effective.

The Deputy Chair: Supplemental?

Mr. Long: Yeah. Actually, MLA Dach sort of grabbed my attention on something. Yeah. Like you pointed out, the majority – I'm assuming that all, actually, major companies doing this are private. I am sort of curious about your thought around this. Number one, does it become mandatory that these operators have to have a blue-amber combination? You know, how does that impact smaller companies, that maybe don't have large budgets to be able to put into redoing all of their maintenance vehicles? Then to expand on that, should something like this, if it's effective, also extend to all vehicles doing maintenance work and regular, frequent stops on highways, to grab attention?

Mr. Rutherford: To the first question, about cost, it's very fair. There's no timeline within this, and it allows for the colour combination. It doesn't say that you have to have the colour combination. I think they will all get to that. AMA is, for instance, ready to go the next day and start making changes, and they represent a majority of tow truck operators in this province, so you'll see a very quick change. For the smaller companies it might take a little bit of time to make that changeover. They have that time as well so that it's not a cost that they have to take on the next day or they can't operate. It's not how it's worded. They can continue going, and then when they're ready to make that switch, which I think will just – you know, it'll come over time, I think. For, as I said, the majority of them it'll be quite quick, and then the other, smaller ones can do it over time if they need to as well. Yeah. I think that'll sum that up.

The Deputy Chair: Excellent.

Mr. Long: Sorry. Just that last part of my question?

The Deputy Chair: Yep.

Mr. Long: Should it extend to other maintenance vehicles on highways as well? I think about certain highway contractors where all they have is amber, and I know that they would have similar occurrences for safety. Like, should this be extended to them as well?

Mr. Rutherford: Yeah. So for, like, our snowplows right now, as I mentioned, we're red and amber with a strobe light as well, so the different combinations are coming. With that, you do an education

campaign so that people are aware of what's ahead and what they should be looking for.

The Deputy Chair: Excellent. That concludes our time. Thank you, Mr. Rutherford, for your presentation and members for the questions.

We will now move forward to the technical briefing by the ministry who's joined us here today. The committee invited the Ministry of Transportation to provide the technical briefing on Bill 207. Joining us today are representatives from the ministry: Mr. Tom Loo, assistant deputy minister, construction and maintenance; Ms Kim Mahi, executive director of transportation policy branch; and Ms Emily Holmwood, manager, legislative planning, transportation policy branch. Thank you all for attending this morning. The process allows for five minutes of technical briefing, which is followed up by 20 minutes of questions with the members. Please introduce yourself for the record, and I'll let you dive into your presentation.

8:45

Mr. Loo: Good morning. As mentioned, I'm Tom Loo. I'm the assistant deputy minister of construction and maintenance for Alberta Transportation.

Ms Mah: Good morning. Kim Mah, executive director, transportation policy.

Ms Holmwood: Good morning. Emily Holmwood, manager of legislative planning, transportation policy.

Mr. Loo: Okay. I believe we have a presentation that we'll put up. Thank you, Warren.

The purpose of this presentation is just to provide some technical information, a bit of background regarding the use of blue lights on tow trucks. Based on the previous 20 minutes, I think some of this information has already come out.

Next slide, please. As you heard earlier, currently only police vehicles are permitted to be equipped with blue flashing lights, and that's in combination with the red. Other emergency vehicles such as fire trucks and ambulances currently are only permitted to use a combination of red and white flashing lights. Currently tow trucks are required to have amber flashing lights only, and that's consistent with other highway maintenance vehicles that were discussed earlier. All of our highway maintenance contractors that are operating on our highways, that are pulling over on the side of roads to do their work, also have flashing amber lights.

Next slide, please. With respect to the legislation, changes to the vehicle lighting configurations can be made without pursuing amendments to the Traffic Safety Act. All lighting configuration requirements, including flashing lamps, are set out in the vehicle equipment regulation, or the VER. Currently the Minister of Transportation has the authority to make regulations with regard to equipping and use of flashing lights in vehicles. Changes to vehicle lighting configurations can also be made through a registrar's exemption. While this can be done quickly and expediently, it is felt from a policy point of view that the exemption would not be the ideal way to go. An exemption can be implemented, but it can also be removed on very short notice. So if a material change was made, it is recommended that we go forward with legislative changes to the act.

Next slide, please. There is a lack of, I would say, overwhelming consensus in literature on what lighting combination is most effective for improving vehicle visibility. Lighting colours are regulated in order to provide consistent visual warnings for road users, and I think there was some good discussion on that earlier. Currently Alberta Transportation is pursuing research with the University of Alberta to better understand optimal lighting

configurations for improving snowplow visibility, and this would be for snowplows while they're doing their work in motion. As many of you are aware, driving on provincial highways when we have our snowplows in operation: there is a considerable plume that's created as they do their work. As you heard from MLA Rutherford, there are different configurations being used throughout the country in terms of blue lights, but it is not currently universally adopted across all provinces.

Next slide, please. Then with respect to jurisdictional information the department did do a bit of a scan of various jurisdictions, particularly across Canada. A majority of jurisdictions in North America only allow amber lights on tow trucks. Saskatchewan implemented the use of blue and amber lights on tow trucks in 2017, and currently they're the only province that has implemented blue lights on tow trucks. One additional bit of information I can provide there – I think it was asked in the Q and A earlier – department staff did reach out to Saskatchewan's ministry of transportation and also the Saskatchewan government's insurance group to inquire about results on the effectiveness of the blue lights. Unfortunately, they are not tracking data specifically related to the use of blue lights on tow trucks since their implementation in 2017.

With that, that concludes our technical briefing.

The Deputy Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much for your presentation this morning. You are more than welcome to stay with us for the rest of the meeting. We will open up for questions with the members – oh. Sorry. Of course you've got to stay here; we need to ask you some questions.

We're going to open up for MLA Sigurdson to start with the questions.

Ms Sigurdson: Yeah. Thank you so much for your presentation. You said one pretty important thing, I thought, in your presentation. Well, more than one. The vehicle equipment regulation can be changed by the minister, so the minister could at this moment include the blue lights with the amber on tow trucks. Did I understand that correctly?

Mr. Loo: That's correct. Maybe I'll have Kim address this. This was specific to the legislation.

Ms Mah: That's right. Currently the minister does have the authority, through the vehicle equipment regulation, to make a change on the colour of lighting.

Ms Sigurdson: Okay. Great.
A supplemental?

The Deputy Chair: A supplemental. Yeah.

Ms Sigurdson: Yeah. This is something he – well, we know it's Minister McIver, so I'm saying "he." He can at this point just, independent of Executive Council and independent of bringing it to the Assembly as a whole, make that change if the government wanted to make that decision. Just to confirm that?

Mr. Loo: Yeah. I believe Minister Sawhney is our . . .

Ms Sigurdson: Yeah. My apologies. She . . . Yes.

Mr. Loo: Yes. That's correct.

Ms Sigurdson: Okay. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Excellent.
MLA Long.

Mr. Long: Yeah. Thanks for the presentation. You noted that Saskatchewan had this implemented in 2017, and I'm just curious if you've had crossjurisdictional conversations with them in regard to the improvement or not of what they've seen for safety for tow truck drivers since then. If you have had those conversations, you know, what has that been like?

Mr. Loo: We did reach out to our representatives, our counterparts, at Saskatchewan's ministry of transportation and also the Saskatchewan Government Insurance. We were seeking information specifically, as to your question, to see if they had been keeping statistics to see if there was a reduction in incidents with tow trucks, reduction of near misses, and unfortunately they advised that they have not been tracking incidents with respect to tow trucks with blue lights.

The Deputy Chair: A supplemental?

Mr. Long: Yes, please.

Again, I come into a lot of these conversations blissfully unaware of what's happening currently. With that, I'm not sure if there is a mandatory course currently for tow truck drivers specifically as far as highway safety and how to, for example, best place their vehicle to maintain safety for persons involved in an accident or the highway cleanup. But if there is or isn't, I guess that one thing that I was curious about is: would there be concern that simply by allowing a blue light to be put on their vehicles, it might give the sense of, "Hey, this is okay; I don't have to do anything else that is safe; like, the blue light basically protects me, the vehicle, and the people around us on its own" and sort of allows a sense of complacency?

8:55

Mr. Loo: That's a very fair question; very difficult for me to answer. I think it would, you know, depend on the mindset of each operator. We all know that on major highways like the QE II where you have a speed limit of 110 kilometres an hour and many motorists even travelling a little bit beyond that, it's always a dangerous situation to be working on the side of the highway. So, again, difficult for me to answer in terms of the mindset of a tow truck operator.

I know that there was discussion earlier with respect to Bill 5. The introduction of Bill 5 and the requirement for vehicles in all lanes to slow down to 60 kilometres an hour or the posted speed limit, whichever is lower, we believe is going to provide some additional safety to all roadside workers, whether they be tow truck drivers, maintenance workers, first responders. Also, on undivided highways where you have a lane in each direction, Bill 5 will also introduce the requirement that vehicles in all directions slow down to 60 kilometres an hour or the posted speed limit.

The Deputy Chair: Excellent.

We now have Member Dach up.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Mr. Loo, Madam Mah, and Emily – sorry; I can't remember your last name, but thanks for appearing. I had questions regarding crossjurisdictional analysis that may have been done or you might be aware of with respect to standardization of colour combinations across the country for tow trucks, if you're aware if there is an attempt to collaborate between jurisdictions so that we don't have any confusion between motorists who may be travelling across the country as to what vehicle is actually ahead of them with a blue and amber light on it. Is there a standardization or attempt to standardize

between jurisdictions what colour combinations are allowed on what vehicles?

Mr. Loo: Currently I'm not aware of any standardization for tow trucks or any discussions on that. I know with respect to configurations on snowplows, I think, the TAC, the Transportation Association of Canada, had led some collaboration amongst all the provinces and then also proceeded to develop a guideline document that some provinces have adopted; not all. That was specifically for snowplows, so the implementation of blue lights on snowplows. I am not aware of any work with respect to tow trucks.

Mr. Dach: Okay. Thank you for that.

A quick follow-up. If indeed you know it, I'd like to know whether or not past changes in Alberta specifically to lighting combinations on not only tow trucks but other public-servant-operated vehicles or emergency vehicles, first responder vehicles, if these changes to light combinations or colours have been made by way of regulation in the past or if they have all been legislated or some legislated and some regulated.

Mr. Loo: I can speak to the white strobe light. It was something that was introduced a couple of winters ago where the minister allowed, almost as a pilot project or trial, the introduction of a white strobe light in combination with amber lights on snowplows. So that was an exemption that was introduced by the minister through an exemption.

Mr. Dach: What about the white strobe lights on school buses? That same process was used?

Mr. Loo: Kim can answer that. I believe the white strobe light on school buses may have been legislated. That's something that's been in effect for some period of time, but I'll defer to my colleagues.

Ms Mah: I don't actually have a history on the school buses, but perhaps Emily does.

Ms Holmwood: Sorry. Yes. That's right. Those are legislated in the regulations.

The Deputy Chair: Excellent.

Are there any other members that have questions? MLA Dach.

Mr. Dach: I just had a quick final question if I may. Member Rutherford indicated that in his thinking, I believe, the prohibition on operating without a blue and amber combination would not be something that he contemplates in this bill. Now, I'm thinking that it would be possibly opening up confusion if indeed the legislation did not demand that on a certain date all operators of tow trucks must actually use the blue and amber combination, not continue to use just the amber, for conformity's sake and for uniformity's sake. Would that be something that you've had any input on or you care to share your comments about, regarding the wisdom of not having a prohibition for tow truck operators with a drop-dead date of compliance for the new colour combination?

Mr. Loo: Kim, I think I'll defer back to you if I may.

Ms Mah: I'll comment on that and then pass it over to Emily as well. I believe the legislation is enabling legislation, so it permits the use of these lights. There is no specific date with respect to when these lights are used, and that's how the regulation is structured at the moment.

Emily, do you have anything to supplement with?

Ms Holmwood: I don't. That's correct, Kim. The proposed amendment in the bill would be discretionary.

The Deputy Chair: Excellent.
Did you have a supplemental?

Mr. Dach: No. I think that answered the question. It kind of leaves it open and begs more questions, but I'm wondering if indeed the colour combination that has been contemplated here is something that any other vehicles have asked about. I know that gas companies in emergencies wanted to have some higher degree of visibility to notify a severe public danger if there was a gas leak, and there was some discussion about blue lights, I believe, on emergency gas company vehicles. Is that something that's still a thing?

Mr. Loo: That's correct, and I think it was your question that also was asked earlier. We have from time to time received requests from other industries and other roadside workers requesting blue lights. I know that the bill deals specifically with tow trucks, but we would expect that there would be some other desire from other industries to also be equipped with blue lights.

The Deputy Chair: Next up we have MLA Long.

Mr. Long: Coincidentally, I actually used to do traffic control years ago. Thankfully, it was before texting was available on phones, but even still I got to see the – like, my life was put in danger standing on a highway trying to stop vehicles. You know, just through different distractions, people wouldn't even see the four signs that you had put out before they got to the danger zone. Now we're obviously living in a different time with that. There are lots more distractions for drivers. Obviously, we have regulation and legislation around those distractions, but inevitably they still exist.

I'm curious if the department – obviously road safety is important to the Transportation ministry, so outside of blue lights on tow trucks or other emergency vehicles, are there other initiatives that the ministry is working on or other thoughts that the ministry has for increasing safety for vehicles doing emergency work on the side of a highway outside of police vehicles?

Mr. Loo: Yes. It was referred to earlier. The implementation or the introduction of Bill 5 is moving towards that. As many of you are aware, the current legislation has that for multilanes – for instance, the QE II – if you're in the lane immediately adjacent to the first responder, tow truck, fire truck, you're required to slow down to 60 kilometres per hour or the posted speed limit, whichever is lower. The vehicle to the left: if you create that one-lane buffer, you're allowed to go the speed limit, the posted speed limit, so on the QE II that would allow you to continue to travel at 110 kilometres an hour.

Bill 5 is a requirement that all lanes travelling in the same direction must slow down to 60 kilometres an hour and also, if possible, to create that buffer by moving left. We expect that Bill 5 will lead to increased safety of all those that work on the side of the road, and this includes tow truck drivers, first responders, highway maintenance vehicles. That bill is on its way to implementation, which, following an education campaign, is expected to be fully implemented in the spring of 2023.

9:05

We also have a traffic accommodation manual for construction zones. This was a document that was recently updated and also just a much stronger vigilance among department staff, our engineering consultants that manage our projects, and also our contractors that deliver the work. There is a much stronger focus to ensure that

signage is appropriate, in place, covered when not required with respect to credibility. So there is a much stronger focus on overall highway safety.

The Deputy Chair: Excellent.
A supplemental?

Mr. Long: Yeah. If I can keep on the same tone because, again, I support the initiative. It's just that I'm curious if we're doing enough outside of this initiative with the blue light. Is it mandatory already in Alberta, through OH and S or through Transportation, for people who are doing emergency work on the side of highways to do training as such?

Mr. Loo: I can't speak specifically to tow truck operators. I know that on the highway maintenance, through highway maintenance contractors, they have safety programs. They go through a process of training all of their workers. They have protocols for when they're doing work, and that's a combination of signing or else even having buffer vehicles that may be in front or behind the work. As MLA Rutherford mentioned, that may not be as easily done with tow truck drivers, to have multiple vehicles out there, but I can speak to highway maintenance, where they do have full safety programs or require training for all their workers in implementation of their safety programs.

The Deputy Chair: Excellent.

Are there any other questions for the ministry at this time?

All right. Hearing and seeing none, we will move on to our next agenda item. Thank you very much for your presentation, and you are more than welcome to join us for the rest of the meeting. Thank you for that.

Now we've reached decisions on the review of Bill 207. Hon. members, the committee must now decide on how to conduct its review of Bill 207. In accordance with our approved process, the committee may choose to invite additional feedback from up to six stakeholders, three for each caucus. Alternatively, the committee may also choose to expedite this review and proceed to deliberations. Does anybody have any thoughts on this?

Mr. Amery: Chair?

The Deputy Chair: Yes, MLA Amery.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much for recognizing me, and I hope you can hear me okay. I want to take this opportunity to thank MLA Rutherford for this private member's proposal because I think that what he has brought forward is incredibly important.

I wanted to share with this committee and MLA Rutherford that I did have an opportunity to meet a number of tow truck drivers in my constituency who have been advocating for initiatives like this since early April 2019 and onwards. I think, having the ability and the fortune to meet with these individuals, that the issues of safety are paramount when it comes to working with people who are stranded on their own. I think tow truck drivers generally have a very difficult and challenging job, and it is incumbent upon this committee and all of us as private members to continue to increase safety in that area.

In my humble view, having heard from everybody, having heard from MLA Rutherford on his presentation, this is about safety, and I think it is incredibly important for us to move forward with this. I'm satisfied that this initiative is supported by both industry and the police organizations. It is, again, incumbent upon this committee to bring forward any and all policy that supports the

types of initiatives that industry needs to perform their services and their job with the utmost safety and integrity.

To that effect, Mr. Chair, I want to put forward a motion, or I want to bring forward a motion that the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills recommend that Bill 207, Traffic Safety (Tow Truck Warning Lamps) Amendment Act, proceed.

The Deputy Chair: Excellent. Hearing the motion, do we want to get that up? Perfect. He read that perfectly. He doesn't need to . . .

Mr. Huffman: I believe so, unless he wants to double-check it.

The Deputy Chair: Excellent. Did you want to just double-check that and make sure that is what you said?

Mr. Amery: I'm most certain, Chair, that is exactly what I said.

The Deputy Chair: Excellent. Oh, it sounds like you missed "2022." Do you mind rereading that into the record with "2022" in it?

Mr. Amery: Certainly. Once again, Mr. Chair, I would like to bring forward a motion that

the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills recommend that Bill 207, Traffic Safety (Tow Truck Warning Lamps) Amendment Act, 2022, proceed.

The Deputy Chair: Excellent.

Hearing the motion, is there any discussion from members? Excellent. Hearing and seeing none – oh, MLA Nielsen.

Mr. Nielsen: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Yeah. I'm happy to support the motion that it go forward to the House. I guess just a couple of comments. I would have liked to have, I guess, gotten sort of a more specific commitment from the RCMP on their position for it, you know, hopefully through the record, should this bill proceed and maybe ultimately be passed in the House.

It was a little bit distressing to hear that Saskatchewan, after implementing this, didn't track any of that data, so hopefully Alberta will not repeat that, should this go through, so that we can tell that this is actually helping, you know, the women and men that work in our tow truck services during times of a motorist's greatest distress, that they are indeed being protected, because if they're not, then we need to move quickly to be able to make sure that we're

doing something else to help them. Otherwise, I look forward to having discussions about this in the House.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, MLA Nielsen. Are there any further comments?

All right. Hearing and seeing none, I will call the question. All in favour of the motion, please say aye, online and in person. Any opposed, please say no, online and in person. Hearing none, that is carried.

All right. Hon. members, that has concluded our deliberations on Bill 207.

Now we should consider directing research services to prepare a draft report, including the committee's recommendations. Would there be a member willing to move a motion to direct research services to prepare the committee's draft report? Excellent. MLA Singh will move. Can you read that out for us?

Mr. Singh: That

the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills direct research services to prepare a draft report on the committee's review of Bill 207, Traffic Safety (Tow Truck Warning Lamps) Amendment Act, 2022, which includes the committee's recommendations, and authorize the deputy chair to approve the committee's final report to the Assembly on or before 3 p.m. on Tuesday May 10, 2022.

The Deputy Chair: Excellent. Thank you, Member.

Any discussion?

All right. I'll call the question. All in favour online and in person, please say aye. Any opposed online and in person, please say no. Hearing none, that is carried.

Just a reminder that a minority report is due by Wednesday, May 11, 2022, at 3 p.m.

That brings us to item 5, other business. Is there any other business for discussion at today's meeting?

Hearing and seeing none, the next meeting will be at the call of the chair, and we will move on to adjournment.

With that, I would like to call for a motion to adjourn. MLA Long moves that the meeting be adjourned. All in favour, please say aye, online and in person. Any opposed? That is carried.

Thank you, everyone. The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 9:14 a.m.]

