

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, October 5, 1993**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 93/10/05

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would the committee please come to order. Because we don't have any strangers in the gallery – we just have good folk from the department – I will dispense with all of the explanations of why you're in your shirtsleeves. I would say at the outset: could we please have those people wishing to engage in conversation go outside into the lounges? We don't object to it; we just object to it in here. As long as we keep a quorum of 20 here, we're fine.

head: **Main Estimates 1993-94**

Transportation and Utilities

MR. CHAIRMAN: A reminder, then, to members of the committee that we're here tonight on our second evening of looking at the estimates in Committee of Supply of the Department of Transportation and Utilities. With that, we'll ask the Minister of Transportation and Utilities to make a few remarks.

MR. TRYNCHY: Go ahead.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. He made his remarks the last time, so we'll go to Fort McMurray.

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. [some applause] I thought you had asked for the noise to be kept down.

Mr. Chairman, you'll recall that the last time we debated the transportation issue, we got into several points of order and learned a little about parliamentary law as we went. I'd like to focus my comments tonight on road and transportation and utility issues.

The first point that I want to pick up is from the private member's statement that was made earlier today by the government Member for Lethbridge-West. He talked about the economic corridor between Edmonton and Coutts and Montana. I know that he only had two minutes to make his speech or he would have expanded that economic corridor all the way down from Fort McMurray to Coutts, Montana.

The major artery of economic commerce in the northeast Alberta area, as you will appreciate, Mr. Chairman, is Highway 63. Now, the minister in his commentaries the last time we were here, on the evening of September 15, acknowledged that there was a segment of Highway 63 that was in trouble. It is a narrow segment, a potentially dangerous segment of the highway, and it also contains a large traffic volume now being added by the logging trucks servicing the Al-Pac mill in Athabasca. When the Premier was in Fort McMurray on September 22 last, he made a commitment to the citizens of Fort McMurray that the remaining 20 kilometres of Highway 63 would go ahead next construction season, next summer. In light of that, I would ask the minister to advise the House of the budgetary planning for that expansion and whether in fact preliminary work for that expansion and improvement is now in the planning stage.

In northeast Alberta there is another troubling road issue, Mr. Chairman, and that is the isolation that is felt by the northern community of Fort Chipewyan, the isolation that is felt by the northern community of Chipewyan Lake, and the isolation that is felt by the Albertans that live immediately south of the Northwest

Territories border and call Fort Smith their trading centre. Wednesday last I had the advantage to attend a meeting of the Northern Alberta Development Council, chaired by the Member of the Legislative Assembly for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, and he attended in Fort Chipewyan when there were several emotionally delivered and heart-wrenching commentaries about the sense of isolation that they have in that Fort Chipewyan area and how that isolation has been ameliorated slightly with the winter road that does go up into the Fort Chip area once a year.

There is, of course, the reality that those citizens of northeastern Alberta – and we're talking about truly our northeastern Albertan citizens living in the shadow of Wood Buffalo national park – are striving for an all-weather road to the best that they are able. I was surprised to note that there are some difficulties in the transportation link from Fort Chipewyan to Fort Smith. Within the isolation of these two communities, they find it very useful to be able to go, Mr. Chairman, between Fort Smith and Fort Chipewyan. Although it would not be akin to driving up from Calgary to Red Deer to have supper, the ability to go from Fort Smith to Fort Chip does assist in the struggle with isolation that those residents have.

Now, the minister's department, Mr. Chairman, has made a generous offer to a three-part agreement between the federal government that looks after the roads in Wood Buffalo national park, the Northwest Territories government in Fort Smith, and the Alberta government that looks after the Alberta roads. If everybody would throw in equally, would in fact that winter road be kept open from Fort Smith to Fort Chipewyan, and would they in fact work on an all-weather road for the summer as well? I get the impression that there may be a little foot-dragging on the part of the federal government through the Wood Buffalo national park because they have no real vested interest in a road system through that park in the winter. I'm hoping that the minister will be able to assure the House and allow the message to go back to Fort Chipewyan and back to Fort Smith that the Alberta government will do what it can to keep that particular winter road open.

When we listen in the House and we hear people talk about a four-lane highway and we hear people talk about wide shoulders, it reminds me of the adage that my father used to try and instill in me that you can always find somebody who is worse off. Here are these people in northeast Alberta begging for a winter road where others of us are begging for two- and four-lane highways. I hope the minister will hear their pleas and do what he can to assist them with that winter road.

I want to now direct the minister, if I might, to the Transportation Revolving Fund budget material, which is found on page 285 of the large flex-coil bound book. My questions to the minister in this area are questions driven by curiosity, and I'm hoping that he will be able to assist in answering some of that curiosity.

I notice that in the 1992 estimates the department of transportation was carrying forward a \$7 million deficit, and then they had an existing additional deficit which brought it up to \$9 million, but that \$9 million never seemed to be carried forward anywhere. It just seemed to be dropped there. Now, I don't know enough about accounting to know if dropping \$9 million is circumstantially permitted or whether it's a typo or what has happened there, and I'd be grateful for the minister's explanation on that.

I also notice on that same page that in the 1993-94 estimates the department plans, if I've read it right, to spend nearly \$9 million on equipment. Because we have literally seen the agony of fiscal restraint in this province and more apparently coming, my question to the minister is whether there is any co-ordinated effort around the province to create an equipment availability registry, where heavy equipment operators who might have dozers and earth-

moving equipment and graders that are sitting idle in the winter months could line in to a registry to perhaps fill some of these needs on a short-term lease basis instead of the government always buying at that capital cost.

I want to turn the minister's attention as well to the Gas Alberta Operating Fund, which is also found on page 287 of those estimates. Now, I understand from the commentaries the minister made in this House before that basically the ministry is simply a gas broker. They are a conduit. They purchase the gas, they add on their operating costs, and they resell the gas to try and provide gas services to those people who live outside of major markets where they can be handled on a commercial basis. I'm curious, then, for the minister's comment on whether in fact it was intended or simply an aberration that the spread between the sale and purchase price of the gas last year is 2 percentage points less than the spread in the purchase and sale price of the gas this year or whether it was intended that there would in fact be an additional 2 percent profit made in this particular year.

8:10

On that page I'm also curious if the minister could comment as to why a refund of \$1.5 million was made to gas participants, the so-called distributors, and in the very next budget year it looks like there will be an operating loss of \$900,000 and some. I'm hopeful that the minister could educate me in that area.

The next point that I want to raise is an issue that is of interest to northeast Albertans again and of all Albertans because of how much we have heard and talked and seen about the Al-Pac paper plant in the Athabasca-Wabasca area near Athabasca. I notice that in the capital budgets under the economic development infrastructure, \$14.6 million is allotted to be spent in 1992-93 on capital projects and grants relating to that particular project. That will bring over the two-year period approximately \$30 million of expenditure, give or take any discrepancies in my own sloppy math, Mr. Chairman. [interjection] No. I appreciate your kind suggestion, but I won't defer it to my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud. I may not get the floor back. I want to ask the minister, if I might, if the \$32 million is the end of the line or whether in fact there is some projection of more cost in this area. Infrastructure is expensive, but that is a good wallop over two years.

In the narrative that goes with that commentary it indicates that some of it is for bridges and roads and some of it is for an outright grant to Al-Pac. I wonder if the minister could direct my attention if I've missed it in the materials, or if I haven't missed it, could he provide what percentage of that \$14 million is in fact an Al-Pac grant and what percentage is in fact going to roads and bridges.

Then given the scrutiny that roads and bridges are coming under in this province, I wonder if the minister has some commentary, Mr. Chairman, or can dig up the information and assist us as to how much of that \$14 million will be spent on isolated, dedicated projects that will only service the pulp mill and how much of it improves the general living conditions of all of the people in that area in terms of access to recreational facilities and access between cities and commercial spots.

From the actual expenditure sides I want to take some of the line items now, if I might, Mr. Chairman. In the general expenditure side I want to have the minister assist the House, if he can, by explaining some of the items found on page 73 of the supplementary information, the element details of the 1993-94 government estimates. The minor items that I want to raise will flow along in numerical order.

There is a \$45,000 item attributed to Legal Services. I recognize that in a budget of \$650 million that is really peanuts, but I'm wondering if the minister is being charged by other government departments for the use of government in-house legal services, as a bookkeeping entry, or whether the department from time to time does have an obligation to hire outside or external lawyers. If so, what steps are taken to ensure that wherever possible in-house staff lawyers are utilized as a cost-saving mechanism?

On item 1.1.4 there is \$526,000 spent on communications services. I would suspect that from the minister's point of view certainly the contractors that want to find out about projects will know where the minister posts the bid information on projects. I wonder if the minister could explain why a department such as this, which is basically a bread-and-butter department that goes out in the field and gets the job done, needs that kind of dollar for what appears to be Public Communications. Perhaps it's simply a definition problem and I don't understand fully the concept of what flows within there, but I would suggest that that Public Communications probably did not lead to one single kilometre of paving in the province. I'm wondering if there is some possibility for shrinkage in that area.

Under program 2, the department in addition to its numerous engineering services – engineering for bridges, engineering for roads, engineering for materials, engineering for contracts – the government in addition to all of those highly sophisticated engineering services also plans to spend \$1.658 million on policy development. I recognize that the department has a 20-year policy plan, a document that they refer to in their literature as an internal working document, but that seems like a large wallop to spend on policy if we take the usual plain English meaning of "policy." I would have thought that the minister would have set the policy for his department, and I know that his remuneration is substantially less than that \$1.658 million figure.

The minister has commented in this House and elsewhere that when a road is worn out and it needs upgrading to prevent further destruction, it is done automatically, it is done as a matter of course, and there is little or no attention to the geography of where that road might happen to be. I notice that in the budget there appears to be under the heading Pavement Rehabilitation \$40 million. That's \$40 million of \$650 million, \$40 million devoted to that project. I wonder if that is the item in cost value that the minister referred to when he was talking about the recapping. Or are recapping costs found and placed elsewhere in this budget as well?

I want, if I might, to also direct the minister's attention to the Motor Transport Services, one of the programs in 2.8. It's my information that Motor Transport Services is going through some consolidation, restructuring, and their job description is being redescribed. I'm wondering if the minister can tell us a little bit about the throwaway costs, if any, in consolidation of those departments, throwaway costs such as repainting government vehicles, new uniforms, and those types of costs. If there are those kinds of throwaway costs being incurred, then I would ask the minister to consider keeping the old identities if it will save the government some money, at least in the short term.

The minister has also received, Mr. Chairman, some commentaries on water and sewer grants to various cities and municipalities. The minister very graciously supplied a breakdown of the 1992 figures and the 1993 figures. I'm wondering if we could receive some further and additional information from the minister as to whether those grants are on an individually approved basis or whether the amount of the allotments to the various communities in that segment of spending is simply based on so many dollars per head so that there is universal application of a set

formula. If there is universal application of a set formula, I wonder if the minister could comment on how the formula is calculated.

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

The next issue that I want to raise has as well been touched on previously. It was raised by the Member for Redwater the last time this issue was debated. That is the handling of the purple gas tax rebate, the so-called farm fuel exemption. Now, I get the impression that the regulations related to the use of farm fuel, particularly diesel fuel, stop at some very odd points in the road of applicability. I understand, for example, that if a farmer grows his produce and hauls it to his field down the road, he can use the purple diesel. If he can't haul the hay, for example, or his produce down the road because his vehicle happens to be in the garage and he gets his neighbour to haul his hay to his field, but the hauler is not the grower, then they can't use the purple gas, and all of a sudden we have potential law enforcement in an area where the farm community is simply struggling to make a living. I know that the minister is concerned about the use of purple fuel. I believe the department is troubled by the regulations, and I wonder what comments the minister has on how the use of purple fuel in the farm community could perhaps be streamlined to create a level playing field for all who come in contact with that problem.

8:20

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm tempted to start by replying to the challenge from the Member for Fort McMurray opposite, but I'll come back to that a bit later.

I wanted to start first by congratulating the minister on his reappointment as the minister of transportation and to thank him for traveling to Lethbridge in the early part of August. He was able to do a little tour throughout our region, and we were able to discuss with him some of the concerns that we had. More importantly, I want to thank him personally for meeting with some of our constituents. A couple of them had a couple of real burrs under their saddle, and I want to thank the minister for coming down and helping me out in that particular area.

Now, I of course want to start my comments this evening about the export highway. I have a map in front of me. The Member for Fort McMurray opposite has enticed me somewhat to talk about the expansion of the export highway. I'm going to resist that temptation but clearly indicate to him and especially to others that are in the northern part of our province that when you look at the configuration of the infrastructure we've set up in this province by way of highways, it is very clear to see that northern Alberta funnels into the city of Edmonton. Now, if we then just extend that idea further, we're looking at the export highway: number 2 traveling south to Fort Macleod and then, of course, 3 east to Lethbridge and 4 down to Coutts, Alberta.

There might have been a reference made earlier this evening about Coutts, Montana. Coutts and Sweetgrass, as a matter of fact, are border towns, and I would invite any member of the Assembly and certainly the Member for Fort McMurray opposite to join me in the south. We will go down to Coutts, Alberta. We will have traveled on what hopefully soon will be the export highway, but I shall treat him to an excellent time in Sweetgrass, Montana. No Lethbridgite worth their weight would miss a Sunday in Sweetgrass.

AN HON. MEMBER: Is that where you smoke it?

MR. DUNFORD: No, no. We drink it. Just so I can clear this up, Mr. Chairman: we drink in Sweetgrass.

The export highway is not a new concept. This is something that has been around for some time, but I think clearly the pressure is starting to build both within Alberta and within the northern States that this piece of road should be completed. I happened to be visiting Great Falls on a brief business trip in my real life and picked up a copy of the Great Falls *Tribune* and read a story that appeared on the front page. The whole story had to do with Alberta. The story there was the economic advantages to the state of Montana by being in proximity to the province of Alberta. The story went on to discuss the concept of the Rocky Mountain corridor as an economic region, and one of the mainstays within the concept of that as an economic region is certainly, then, the idea of the export highway. Indicated within that article was some frustration of officials from the state of Montana, some of Wyoming, but then also over into Idaho that perhaps the government of Canada and in turn the government of Alberta weren't as serious about the Rocky Mountain corridor as otherwise might be expected. I think a real test, then, of our commitment to that particular area would be a planned and concise statement of the construction pattern for the export highway and to have it arrive at its completion.

Lethbridge recently has had the rather unfortunate news of a shutdown of a major plant. Dresser-Rand, which has attained a world reputation in the manufacture of gas and air compressors, is closing down. This plant when it came into Lethbridge was considered quite a coup, because I think most Albertans and certainly most Canadians would see Lethbridge as a very isolated situation. Of course, that's what makes us so great. It's because we've had to rely on ourselves for all of these years. Still, we think the time has come when Lethbridge should be in a position to fully join in both the economic and the social fabric that is present here within our province.

I and many of the people in this Assembly I think grew up with the understanding that the Canadian Pacific Railway, while it may have been considered as a major enterprise certainly by eastern Canadians and perhaps by some western Canadians, in my experience was always considered somewhat of a villain. I think I'll make the same argument tonight, because in that sense, because of how this country developed along the lines of the railways, we have had a mentality in this country of always east and west. When you look at the situation as it was developing in the late 19th century and throughout the 20th century, there probably were good economic and perhaps even political reasons why it did develop this way.

I say to all of the people in the Assembly this evening that we are now in the '90s. When we look at the '90s, we look at a world where barriers are coming down, where free trade is the topic of the day. We see trading blocs being developed in Europe. We see a trade agreement between Canada, the United States, and Mexico that's trying to get off the ground. Even if this particular treaty doesn't get off the ground at this particular time, it clearly indicates that this is the wave of the future. So we have to look south, and in looking south, then of course the members of this Assembly are going to look at Lethbridge. Now with our perspective running as it truly should, north and south, we find that Lethbridge is right in the middle of the highway and certainly now can start to play its proper role in the economic development of this province. So, Mr. Minister, in my comments this evening I want to make sure that in my own quiet and humble way we

have made you aware of the importance of the export highway to the people in Lethbridge.

8:30

There's one other highway project I would like to address, and I'm a little hesitant to do this because it's not in my constituency. It's actually more in the constituency of the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat and also my colleague from Taber-Warner's as well. I want to refer specifically to the Red Coat Trail. Now, in speaking about the Red Coat Trail this evening, perhaps I'm in danger of taking some credit where credit isn't due, but I'll go ahead. The situation with the Red Coat Trail and how this fits into concerns for Lethbridge is that the trail is more than just a piece of highway across some fantastic prairie regions in south-eastern Alberta. What the Red Coat Trail in fact means for Lethbridge is that it would now be possible that as people move out of central Canada westward, if they make a decision when they arrive in the wonderful city of Winnipeg to take the scenic route of the Red Coat Trail, then they are going to end up in the vicinity of Lethbridge and, of course, historic Fort Macleod.

I think it's at that particular point that we have to continue to urge the completion of the Red Coat Trail. My understanding is that there are about 15 miles left to be paved. Seven of these are in the county of Foremost and eight miles, I believe, are in the MD of Cypress. I would urge the minister to talk to these particular folks and work with them in getting this highway project on the construction list for 1994.

The last concern I would raise with the minister this evening is one of planning. I know we're expecting three-year plans to come from the departments shortly, and a desire on the part of Lethbridge city council that has been expressed to me is that they need more lead time in their budgeting process. So if there's some way to incorporate what we will be determining through the three-year plans in order to give municipalities and, specifically in this case, Lethbridge city council more advanced notice, that would be greatly appreciated on their part and certainly on mine.

With those comments, Mr. Minister, I thank you for the opportunity and thank you for your support.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KIRKLAND: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Several questions of the minister, if I might. I will belabour one in particular that he was kind enough to sit down and attempt to explain to me, but in contemplating it, I still have difficulty grasping exactly why. That is really the administration aspect of it. We're looking in terms such as downsizing or rightsizing or privatizing. I think the department has done a commendable job as far as privatizing such things as the chip seal program and the guardrail installation program and grass cutting and highway painting.

When I look at the budget in going back a few years, '85-'86, in the report of the deputy minister Mr. Harvey Alton in one of the books I researched, I think there's a 40 percent reduction in budget in the last 10 years. Yet when I look at administration and manpower, for example, in '86-'87, we had 48 senior staff. In '91-'92 we had 64, as one best can determine through the RITE directory. Likewise, in '85-'86 I think we had 64 executive directors and 100 in '91-'92. Reducing a budget by 10 percent but not having the manpower go down a relative amount I think deserves more of an explanation. The other anomaly I run into there that again doesn't fit is the increase in the cost of running the minister's office since '86-'87. Our figures show there's about a \$90,000 increase over that time period, which equates to about

a 50 percent increase. Again, the relativity to reduction of budget is not there. I have a concern with that. I would suggest I've seen it in some of the other departments we've reviewed as well.

I'm going to pick up on a point the Member for Fort McMurray addressed briefly. I'll put it in different terms. When we talk about the philosophy of user pay or privatizing and the likes of that, when you deal with a municipality and there's development such as a residential development, generally speaking the developer picks up the costs of building roads and sewers and those sorts of activities and recovers his costs when, in fact, the development is complete. The hon. Member for Fort McMurray chatted about Al-Pac, Daishowa, and pulp and paper and lumbering aspects in the province. I know there are a lot of dollars designated for those particular programs. He asked if they could be separated to find exactly what specifics are attached to each one. My question to the minister would be: have we moved along the same line and the same philosophy that is handed down to the municipalities, and that is cost-recovery through the user? Certainly these companies are profitable more so than even municipalities, and we have the opportunity to probably recover some of those costs. I think it would be important that we move along that particular way. After all, they are using our natural resources and getting a heck of a deal when they purchase them to sell them.

The other aspect I would like to touch base with is again on airports. When we look at airports – I was going through the *Hansard*, and I forget what page it was – the minister indicated there were some airports where we had to extend the runways. I would ask if he could share which airports we are dealing with in that particular aspect, whether there's a criteria that is met and whether that criteria is applied to all airports throughout the province. I find it a bit of an anomaly in the sense that most airplanes today have improved performance and we're shortening runways in more instances than lengthening them. So it would be desirable for my understanding to determine exactly why we have to lengthen them at this particular point and the criteria used for that.

There was a small item in airports that I was a little perplexed by, and that was an operational increase from \$30,000 to \$48,000. It's not a large amount, but it would be interesting to know exactly why we're encountering that at this particular time.

A little bit of a different twist here that hasn't been touched on. I know we're all striving to generate revenues, and I know the highway signage policy in the province of Alberta has not been revamped or rethought for many years. I think of the program that's in place in Washington or B.C. where the business available at each exit is clearly depicted by a multinational logo or a restaurant name. I would ask the minister if there's some thought to moving into a different highway signage. I see that as potential to raise revenues for the department. Certainly there's a management cost associated with it. I think if it's done efficiently, we can come out in the better end of that particular undertaking.

Well, I think most of the points have been covered up to this particular aspect. I would ask the minister to forward answers to me, and I'll turn the floor over to somebody from the side opposite for their questions.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I want to congratulate the minister not only on his reappointment but on the tremendous job he is doing. I must admit that I haven't dealt with the minister on any transportation matters yet, but during his long

and distinguished career I had the opportunity of dealing with him when he was minister responsible for the WCB. His response was quick and quite efficient, and I was very pleased.

8:40

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to thank the minister again for the information supplied today on the cost-shared projects. Three of these very important projects are directly and indirectly connected to my constituency. I'm sure my constituents will be very pleased to know that these projects are proceeding in light of the budget cuts and in light of the efforts being made to eliminate the deficit and balance the budget.

The projects I just mentioned are the roadway twinning of 52nd Street southeast from the Peigan Trail to 68th Avenue southeast, the construction of the WID canal bridge and approach roads at 68th Street southeast, and the design of 36th Street from McKnight Boulevard to 64th Avenue southeast. These are very badly needed roadways in my constituency. However, Mr. Chairman, a suggestion was made by my constituents that a connector road be established between 16th Avenue northeast and the Glenmore Trail southeast using 72nd Street as a connector. That would eliminate heavy trucks going through the residential area. Perhaps the minister could take the suggestion under advisement.

The other issue I want to talk about, Mr. Chairman, is seat belt legislation. As you may recall, Mr. Minister, the legislation wasn't received well by the public when it was introduced in the late '80s. As a matter of fact, petitions were signed against it, and it was challenged in court. So my question to the minister is: does the minister have any statistics as to the rate of Alberta drivers wearing seat belts, and is there any indication that the use of seat belts has resulted in a significant decrease in the rate of fatalities since the legislation came into effect?

Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My questions, a number of questions, are to the hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities. First, I'm curious as to the number of studies and the extent to which studies have been undertaken by his department, perhaps economic development and trade, perhaps agriculture in conjunction with Transportation and Utilities with regard to the impact of changes to the Western Grain Transportation Act. Were we to shift from a payment to railways and pay it directly to shippers, I think that would lead to a far more competitive trucking industry in the province and have general positive benefits for the agricultural sector as a whole, but it certainly would have a number of implications for the demands for rural roads and the usage of those roads. I know some studies have been undertaken and some have been released, but I would appreciate it very much if the minister could tell us: what is the state of play in terms of research in this issue as this becomes a policy debate once again? As I say, I think overall there would be significant benefits to Alberta from that shift, but I am concerned that some of the consequences would fall adversely on his department and he might be left holding the bag for costs that are essentially in the interests of the province as a whole. So I would like an idea of what the state of research is on that and anticipated costs and their magnitude were we to pay the subsidy directly to farmers and move away from payments to railways.

The second question relates to an issue that was broached by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat and touched upon by my colleague from Fort McMurray, and that concerns the issue of road

rehabilitation and the notion that there is a roster or a sequence of roads that come due. Since it's considered that in transportation roads are sometimes paved at the discretion of the minister rather than as a consequence of need, it would be very useful if such a roster were available. That would depoliticize this issue. To the extent that there is rehabilitation that is an ongoing process and to the extent, then, that such road undertakings are anticipated in the next year, two years, three years, were such a roster be made public, that would allow people in each of the constituencies to know what the sequence of paving rehabilitation would be and would remove this from the area of partisan politics. So I would appreciate (a) if there is such a roster, and (b) if such a roster does exist, why is it not made public? I think it would be in everybody's best interests to see that there is a logical progression by which road underlay is rehabilitated in the province.

Another issue that I would like to pose concerns the issue of earmarking. Presently there is a 2 cent a litre tax that the province collects on gasoline. That tax goes directly into general revenue. The province is now moving to net budgeting, and right now if you look at the . . . [interjections] Pardon me. My glasses aren't that good. Out of what?

AN HON. MEMBER: That's a hundred.

DR. PERCY: Since the province is now moving to net budgeting, the issue arises as to whether or not the Department of Transportation and Utilities would want to consider, then, the gasoline taxes that are presently collected and presently levied being earmarked directly for the construction and rehabilitation of roads. Right now there is a bit of a saw-off between the revenues that are collected from these gasoline tax revenues and the expenditures by the minister's department. Were the cutbacks to go ahead as projected by the minister, that would suggest, then, that these taxes will be levied, flow into general revenues, and to a large extent these are, in a sense, user fees for the uses of the roadway. So if we are moving down this route of net budgeting, this may be one area that the minister would consider in terms of earmarking. I'm not talking about extra taxes. I'm talking about the revenues that are presently collected and viewing them as a user fee for the financing of road construction and road rehabilitation. Because as the department does cut back, there may be a surplus, then, that will arise and will go directly into general revenues when there may be high-priority roads out there that may need paving. So I am curious to what extent, then, this issue of earmarking and the dedication of the existing gasoline taxes being collected has been considered as the province now moves down the route for net budgeting. I would appreciate the minister's response on that issue, whether or not it is being considered or contemplated.

The other issue I'd like to broach with the minister concerns cost recovery, and again my colleague from Leduc has discussed the issue of cost recovery with respect to some of the resource firms. The reason I broach this topic is that if you look at a number of the trade disputes between Canada and the United States and you look in particular at the softwood lumber dispute, in this second-to-last round of the softwood lumber dispute the U.S. department of communications looked at road construction and a variety of other undertakings by provincial governments as being an implicit subsidy, and they thereby levied a countervailing duty on Canadian softwood lumber exports to the United States. They viewed, then, these investments in roadbed and construction as being a subsidy that is countervailable. So it might be in the best interests in the second-to-last one they did . . . [interjection] Yeah, I know. I wrote the book on that, hon. minister, and I was involved in that in Washington, so I might quibble with you on

that. There is the potential there, and this is a valuable export industry to Alberta. I think, then, investing in these on a cost-recovery basis across the board makes very good sense. It's good for Alberta taxpayers, it's good for the government, and it also signals very clearly to firms that are contemplating investments that there is no free lunch, that they have to face the full cost of their operations, particularly in a period of budget restraint.

Those, Mr. Minister, are my questions. Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There are a number of things that an individual can gain from sitting in this Legislature. I find it very interesting in the short time that I've been here how one tends to broaden one's perspective on this province. I think all of us have been confined to our own relatively small regional area, and just in this room this evening you listen to the comments and when you get into something such as highway construction, it all comes home. There are a lot of things that people talk about that have a good deal of meaning and significance to them. I listened to the Member for Fort McMurray talking about northern roads in northeastern Alberta. The Member for Calgary-West was discussing the southern roads. I come from southeastern Alberta, so I would like to address roads in southeastern Alberta. In particular, Mr. Minister, I would like to talk about Highway 41 south to the U.S. border. We've heard about north-south traffic already here this evening, and this is a relatively minor route into Alberta, but it's very, very important to those of us living in southeastern Alberta. Historically this road has been a road that saw the predominance of traffic being north to south, Canadians crossing the border.

8:50

We have in southeastern Alberta developed our infrastructure from a tourism point of view, from an accommodation point of view, from a shopping point of view to the point where we are now attracting a good deal of Montana and other Americans to come visit us in southeastern Alberta. We have developed the Cypress Hills provincial park with terrific facilities, and people from Montana come up to take advantage of the facilities that we provide. We have snowmaking equipment and a ski hill in Cypress Hills so that there is now 12-month tourism traffic coming on that road. The shopping accommodations in Medicine Hat, which would be the closest major shopping centre in southeastern Alberta, have just mushroomed in the last few years. We have a tremendous growth in the retail sector in Medicine Hat, and it's predominately due to people coming from Saskatchewan and Montana to shop in southeastern Alberta.

We have seen almost completion of Highway 1 east to the Saskatchewan border, Mr. Minister. There's still some work going on this year, and I hope that you might update us on Highway 1 to the Saskatchewan border and the expected completion date.

In recent years we've seen construction take place on Highway 41 south to the Montana border. This road is a - I'm not sure what the exact term is. The minister would probably be able to inform the House, but it's like a cold tar treatment. It's not a hot asphalt; it's not a paved road; it's rolled on. It needs a fair amount of maintenance, and the last 14 miles or so to the border are in very rough shape. I wonder if the minister could enlighten the House on when he expects that last portion of the road to be completed.

I'd also just like to talk a little bit about roads. I have had conversations with acquaintances of mine who are rural residents.

I've mentioned in this House before that I represent an urban riding, but certainly when you live in a relatively small city such as Medicine Hat, there is the interchange involved between the rural and the urban, and I don't consider myself to be totally without knowledge on rural applications. I've had discussions with a number of people who are involved in rural areas, and they have raised to me the idea that historically the province and governments in general are always keying in on paving. We're always talking about which roads are paved and which roads are not paved, and quite frankly, for someone who is accustomed to driving on gravel roads all the time, it really isn't that tough to drive on gravel roads. As a matter of fact, in winter conditions gravel roads are probably safer than paved roads.

However, there are different qualities of gravel roads. There is the gravel road that's a narrow little trail, and there is a gravel road that's got a good base built up, a good wide gravel road. I wonder if the minister would care to comment on whether his department has analyzed the cost-effectiveness of upgrading roads to a good gravel standard as opposed to upgrading them and paving them. The feeling is that there would be more roads upgraded if we didn't worry so much about paving them, especially in the more remote areas, and upgraded them to a top-quality gravel road. Could the minister enlighten us a little bit on what the difference in cost would be? Of course, one would have to acknowledge that gravel roads require more maintenance because they have to be graded on a regular basis, so there's probably an offsetting cost-saving when you go to pavement as opposed to gravel. Certainly major arteries need pavement. If we're going to attract our urban friends out into the country, we need pavement, because for some reason they don't want to travel on gravel roads. There is room to have a good deal of road upgrading in the country without having to go to the extent of paving if we can just upgrade the roadbed and leave it in its state as gravel. I think there would be an opportunity to have a good deal of upgrading going on in that way.

I'd also like to discuss very briefly something that was brought up by the Member for Leduc. It's been on my mind for quite some time, since we reviewed the estimates last time. I was quite surprised, Mr. Minister, to notice the amount of money that is in your budget for airports. Again reverting back to my small little world, in Medicine Hat we have a municipal airport. The city of Medicine Hat is responsible for the upkeep of the airport. The city of Medicine Hat is responsible for the paving of the airport runways. The terminal was built by the taxpayers of Medicine Hat. I was wondering if the minister might enlighten the House on what the criteria is. Why do some municipalities have an airport provided to them by the province and have all the upkeep and related expenses paid by the province and other municipalities such as Medicine Hat provide a municipal airport? Was this a decision that was made by the city council? It was their decision that they wanted to maintain the airport? Or is this a decision that's made on another basis? I would be interested in hearing what the minister has to say on that matter.

I mentioned earlier, when I spoke the last time we were addressing the estimates for transportation, that I had appreciated the minister coming to my constituency and discussing constituency concerns. I would like to thank the minister again for coming. That meeting was dealing primarily with rural needs. I was there more or less as an observer, because we were dealing with the administration from the county and from the MD. We really didn't have opportunity at that meeting to address the concerns of the urban part of southeastern Alberta and the city of Medicine Hat in particular. I would encourage the minister, if he has the time, to make arrangements to come down and discuss

some of the cost-sharing projects that his department has with the city of Medicine Hat, especially as it relates to some long-term planning. I think for the most part the municipalities around the province of Alberta are doing a much better job of long-term planning, and it would make their job that much easier if they could have some indication from your department and from all government departments what the long-term plans are. I'm encouraged to see the discussion that's been taking place in this House, that the government will be developing some long-term plans. I was wondering, Mr. Minister, if you would be willing to come into my constituency at some point in the next little while and have a discussion with the city officials much on the same grounds as what you were able to do with the municipal officials from the rural area.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That's all I have for this evening. Thank you very much.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I had the opportunity on the first go-around to speak briefly on the Transportation and Utilities budget. I do have some additional questions that are directly related to the budget and directly related to the department.

One of the things that I notice when I go through the budget is a reference to what they call the transportation revolving fund. I have to assume that that works on the same principle as central supply and services did in the city of Edmonton, where other departments use this equipment and it's charged out against their department. In other words, it's sort of a recovery-type program. I imagine if you look through all parts of the province, there are probably warehouses full of cars and trucks and airplanes and boats and who knows what. There must be a very, very extensive inventory of equipment that is controlled by this particular department. I would assume that there is a great deal. I'm aware there's a great deal of contracting going out, but still in the possession of this department the amounts of vehicles and equipment have to be tremendous.

[Mr. Sohal in the Chair]

I wonder as to whether there's ever been an efficiency audit done on that transportation revolving program. When we had an efficiency audit done under the excellent leadership of the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry when he was in charge of the city, we were able to reduce our fleet of vehicles by 400 – by 400. By doing that, the cost was just tremendous in terms of no need to replace those, in terms of the storage facilities. Also, it was found that there were staff on in areas simply to drive vehicles where it was questionable as to whether those vehicles were really needed. That could be a method of reducing the amounts of money involved in the transportation revolving program and making the system just that much more efficient and that much more expert.

9:00

I believe it would tend to be difficult for government members to look at the opposition and look at somebody like the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry and acknowledge that he did some very, very fine things while he was mayor of the city. If one can learn from that experience, one should learn from that experience and try to use some similar approaches. We are into some very difficult economic times, and we see a great deal of hurt happen-

ing throughout this province. These are the types of areas where the impact on the well-being of people is much less than in, say, social services, health care, or education, so these are the areas that we've really got to tackle and make sure that we're getting as big a bang for the buck as possible.

Last time when I went through the specific programming, I made reference to what I felt was a glaring discrepancy in terms of the reductions between the urban and the rural transportation assistance programs. The minister chose not to answer that particular question, at least that evening. Possibly he was embarrassed to answer it. It is very, very clear that the impact in terms of the rural program is very, very marginal, whereas the urban, places like the city of Edmonton, get hit to a much, much greater degree. I believe that the minister owes this Legislative Assembly an explanation that is recorded in *Hansard* as to why this is so. Possibly there is a reasonable explanation there, and possibly I and Albertans would be satisfied with that explanation, but first I guess we need it on the record.

Also, I notice the special transit assistance program that's referred to. That's the program, Mr. Chairman, where municipalities are given money, given grants that assist them in providing transportation for the disadvantaged, for persons with mobility problems, with disabilities and such; for example, DATS in Edmonton or the handicap bus system in Calgary. Throughout many, many parts of Alberta now we see municipalities that have put into place those types of transportation systems. Also, it's earmarked to assist to some degree the public transit cost of the seniors within our population.

I'm not sure exactly what year this happened and how the two departments are linked in terms of the financial responsibility, but in this particular budget it states very, very clearly that the special transit assistance grant is part of the Alberta partnership transfer program. In other words, that program that the Minister of Municipal Affairs announced was going to be reduced next year by 20 percent now is going to, of course, have impact as well on these types of programs, such as those public transit needs for persons with mobility problems and disadvantages and so on and so forth. I'm not sure how the minister rationalizes that or justifies it or what type of communication went on between his department and the Department of Municipal Affairs or whether this minister agrees with the Minister of Municipal Affairs that this cut was needed. Again it's an example of off-loading to a level of government that is in the front lines, that provides that direct service to taxpayers. They're the ones that are going to feel the heat as a result of these types of cutbacks.

Those are three questions. Now, there are a couple more. The Member for Calgary-East that spoke formerly – I'm trying to draw his attention, Mr. Chairman – raised a question. It's a very valid question he raised on seat belts, because even though that seat belt legislation was put in many, many years ago, there are still many people out there that are not convinced that the seat belt legislation was the proper thing to do, in the sense that it's a reflection of a mentality as to whether this type of thing should be forced upon people or whether there should be educational programs to encourage people to use seat belts. Then there are those people that are convinced that seat belts in fact have not reduced the number of deaths, reduced the number of serious injuries on the highway. I'm not in a position to dispute those types of arguments.

In my own situation, going back to the early '60s, I had a brother 23 years of age at that time who was thrown out of the car he was driving when it went over an embankment. As a result, he died in that crash. The speculation at that time was that had that car been equipped with seat belts, it probably would not have

had such tragic circumstances. So from a personal point of view, I always think of that when I rationalize why seat belt legislation is good, but one should not just take a personal incident and use that as rationalization. I would like to see those kinds of studies, those kinds of stats that the Member for Calgary-East requested as well, because I think it would be very, very useful for all members of this House. I would venture to say that in this caucus and in that caucus on a free vote there would be members who would stand up and oppose the seat belt legislation on principle and also those who possibly would not believe that it does in fact save lives. If I had to bet, I would say that seat belt legislation is good, but legislation should not be put in place on bets.

Mr. Chairman, a couple more questions and then I'll allow somebody else to speak.

The Vegreville situation: I believe that was corrected. That's where we had the doubling of - what is that? - Highway 16 except for Vegreville. There was sort of a - well, it didn't bypass Vegreville. I recall that the former member representing Vegreville raised that on a couple of occasions. From the other point of view, truckers and such at that time had also raised the inconvenience. I'm not sure if that problem was ever corrected.

Two more areas I want to touch on. One is when we talk about urban transportation. Now, we've seen urban grants cut back - I believe they were at a high at one time of \$70 per capita - to where they're what? Twenty-five dollars per capita? I'm not sure if we're going to see next year a reduction of 20 percent, similar to what we saw in Municipal Affairs, but it is getting to the point that urban Alberta is having difficulties dealing with their transportation requirements. We can look at the city of Edmonton. LRT of course has come to a halt in terms of construction, beyond what's being done at the present time, because the dollars aren't there. That ring-road system that we once talked about years and years and years ago in Edmonton and also in Calgary basically has come to a halt because the dollars aren't there. There are improvements that continue to go on, such as the completion of the Whitemud drive, the Capilano, and so on and so forth, but those are dollars that have been advanced against future years, against future commitments.

So I guess the question that I have here specifically is: exactly what is in place? If the minister were talking to the municipalities, and probably this week at the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association he'll have the opportunity - I believe he's part of the bear pit session. If he were to tell the municipalities, "Look, this is what's going to happen in the next three years; this is what I want you to be prepared for," like the Minister for Municipal Affairs . . . I disagreed with what he had done, as brutal as it was, but I have to give him credit for having had the guts to at least six months in advance tell the municipalities the bad news so they could start to adjust. So I'd like the minister to stand up and to address in this Legislative Assembly what he foresees for the municipalities during the next three years in terms of transportation grants so they can do their planning accordingly.

9:10

My last question relates to the secondary roads. I've never been fully satisfied that we've had a proper explanation or an analysis as to this commitment that was made in 1989 about the paving of every secondary road in Alberta and speculation of a cost of \$2 billion, whatever, over that period of time. Of course, we've seen cutbacks there. What has happened? How many of those roadways have been paved? How many more roadways are going to be paved? What criteria are used to determine which projects get the go-ahead and which projects don't? We see members from different parts of Alberta stand up saying, "I want my roads paved;

I want my roads completed." Well, it can't happen on the basis of an MLA standing up and putting in a wish list. If it happens that way, then I guess I'd have to hand in my wish list too, but it shouldn't happen that way. It should happen just on the basis of need, on the basis of priority, but only if it is really, really needed. If it can be deferred, then it's deferred, because we are in these tough economic times, and until we can address the deficit, health care, education, and social services, some other things are just going to have to wait.

So if the minister also, in addition to visualizing himself talking to the AUMA, could visualize himself talking to the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties and telling them that in the next three years this is what you can anticipate, this is what you can expect, it would be to our benefit, all Members of this Legislative Assembly, to be aware of that so we could go back to our constituencies and tell them: "Look, this is what we're up against. Get used to it, because this is the way it's going to be."

On that basis, Mr. Chairman, I'll conclude, and I look forward to the remarks from the minister when he stands fairly soon to respond.

Thank you.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Pincher Creek-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My congratulations to you on your appointment to the Chair and my congratulations also to the minister on his reappointment as minister of highways.

Being an individual who's been in the tourist business pretty well all of my life, it's really satisfying to find that when people come into your restaurant and sit down, they can really compliment you as an Albertan on the roads that they found when they arrived in this country as soon as they crossed the border from the United States into Canada. That's truly a credit to your department. I believe that good highways project a good image when people come, and it makes them come back and people feel comfortable here.

The other thing that I would like to do is to compliment your staff. Just as early as this morning, sir, I had a reason to call your office. I wanted to review some plans regarding an interchange that's going in at the junction of highways 2 and 3, and they were very accommodating. I hope you will pass that on to them.

The other area in my constituency that deserves complimenting your department on is the very famous Highway 22, which was finally completed this year with a base coat. It was done under tremendously adverse conditions with the rain that we've had this year in that particular area. The last 12 or 14 miles was just done here a few weeks ago, and that highway is an excellent highway now. I hope we can see if within our future budgets, we can take that highway and upgrade it as traffic counts depict. The problem in that particular area is that it's so close to the mountains, they get heavy snowfall and lots of frost, and with the chinooks that come through our area, there's lots of heaving. I hope we can keep a close eye on the traffic that goes over Highway 22 and preserve it, because it has been a long time in coming.

As I've said, tourism is one of the things in the small southern Alberta towns that somewhat keeps them going, particularly the town of Claresholm, which is just 24 miles north of the new junction being put in at highways 2 and 3. The highway goes right through the town, and I notice that your department is putting in some overlay and some new curbs and gutters within the town itself. Due to our fiscal restraints here, I'm wondering if there is a cost sharing going on with the town of Claresholm in that particular overlay and work that's being done there. Driving

through the town each week when I go home, I notice that the rutting is getting very, very deep, and with the rain we've had this year, we've had little creeks going down the middle of the highway there in Claresholm. I know that particular project is coming up, and I hope it can be done soon.

As we head farther south towards the Crowsnest Highway 3 and we hit that junction, I'm very pleased. There have been a number of years of planning, a number of years of working with the archaeological groups that have been taking buffalo bones and that type of thing out of the area where the new highways 2 and 3 junction is being put in. Having had a business on that corner for about 18 years, it's really gratifying to see this finally come to fruition. I'm sure it's an expensive project. I see you're building an overpass on top of a hill, and I was so pleased this weekend to see them digging into the side of the hill and just putting a bridge over that gully that's going to be created. I think that's got to be pretty cost-effective, and I'm sure that's saving us some money.

Now, I understand this particular interchange is part of the export highway, and I'd like to know the federal and provincial splits on that and how much that has saved us on that particular junction. The people of Fort Macleod are very pleased that once the junction is done, the twinning will go right through the town of Fort Macleod. Although there are a couple of small problems getting access to one of the streets there, which I will be discussing with your staff in the future, the people of Fort Macleod are very pleased with that particular addition to their community.

I really believe that this highways 2 and 3 interchange, the export highway, will eventually alleviate some of the traffic that's going across secondary roads 520 and 519 from Claresholm and Granum respectively across to Highway 23, which takes them on to Lethbridge. Those particular roads, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford suggested, being secondary roads take a tremendous amount of pounding when the springtime comes. The upkeep and the maintenance on them is very heavy. So we do look forward to that export highway being done.

When it comes to secondary roads, there is a particular road that involves a tremendous amount of traffic, and most of it is tourist traffic. It goes through the Porcupine Hills. It's a road that goes from Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump over to the Oldman River reservoir. It's definitely in need of some attention. I understand from your department, sir, that that's secondary road 785. Because of the tourism potential of Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, which is the United Nations world historic area, and that particular road going past the dam and the reservoir and then on to the Frank Slide Interpretive Centre, it definitely needs some attention. I know that you'll be looking at a situation with the MD there and cost sharing. If you could just help me with that, I would certainly appreciate that as I go and talk to the MD.

9:20

Highway 3 from the British Columbia border right straight through to Monarch is in very good shape – and I'm sure that as soon as the export highway from Highway 2 right to Monarch gets done, that whole highway is going to be well used – with the exception of a small area right around the Oldman reservoir at the Cowley bridge. We have a little fault happening there, and I'm sure it's when the water in the dam and the reservoir rises creating a little bit of falling in that particular area. I notice a large dip, and it seems to be getting worse as time goes on. I hope that we can mention that to your department and see if we can look at the future for that particular piece of road, because it would be a shame to see that fall right through and into the reservoir. It's potentially that dangerous.

The future of the export highway. I'm not sure about the timing of that in the future. We've got an interchange planned for Monarch that goes through the Oldman River valley at highways 3 and 23. The plans have been done for that for a number of years. Although I don't really need that information today or in the near future, I'd just like to get an idea of the time frame that we are looking at in putting that particular interchange into effect, because that will definitely be part of that export highway.

I think the last thing I really must mention to you and your department is – two things actually. We have three well-maintained airports in our constituency: one in Claresholm, one in Fort Macleod, and an excellent one in Pincher Creek. They're maintained by the department and in excellent shape, and our constituency thanks your department for that.

There's been talk of closure of the department of highway shops right in the town of Fort Macleod. Just in case the Assembly doesn't know this, it would be a shame to see these shops closed because these government shops in Fort Macleod were Alberta's first government shops. Due to the history of the town and the mere fact that there's no other industry other than the tourism industry for our town, it would be a shame to see those closed. They do have a number of employees. It's probably one of the major employers in the town. So it would be my hope that we could have a discussion on that at your leisure.

With that, the people of Pincher Creek-Macleod thank you for all the effort that you're putting into making that export highway. It's certainly going to help our situation as far as tourism and as far as the future goes for the trucking industry and the products that will go through our area and give us an opportunity to provide an industry that is service based. Thank you very much for your help there, sir.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Before I commence my questions, I'll preface those questions with a couple of observations. The first one is that by my calculation I think the minister is perhaps the longest serving minister in the same portfolio in the current cabinet. I'm mindful of the fact that having grown up in Drumheller, the hon. Gordon Taylor had been the minister of highways for it seemed to me at the time close to all, if not all, of the 35 years that Social Credit was in power in this province. Certainly I appreciated living in Drumheller and appreciating the role that Mr. Taylor played in the early days of the development of this province and just how important this portfolio is.

The second observation I would make, Mr. Chairman, is that I represent a constituency where perhaps the concerns are somewhat different than those of many of the other constituencies represented here in the Chamber. Certainly I've listened with interest to comments from the Member for Medicine Hat and my colleague from Fort McMurray and many other members. In fact, there are different times when I thought it might have been useful if we had a large relief map hanging over the clock with little lights that could go on as each member stood up to sort of focus on particular transportation corridors and highway systems and airports, as each of the members talked about those aspects of the transportation system that were of particular importance to their constituency.

Indeed in Calgary-*Buffalo*, Mr. Minister, I think that most of my constituents are able to walk to work. Their principal transportation concern in terms of their own constituency is avoiding the at-surface light rail transit system, which presents a particular hazard

to people in downtown Calgary. Even people in Calgary-Buffalo travel on Alberta's highways, and whether they are unpaved roads en route or in the areas of Elkwater and Cypress Hills or some other part of the province, they also have an interest in a safe and efficient transportation system. I think of particular concern to my constituents in Calgary-Buffalo would be concerns of safety. I also wanted to address the area of access to information.

With respect to safety I note in the estimates booklet at page 276 that the objective of the program is, and I quote, "to develop, construct and maintain safe, efficient and effective transportation systems in the province." I think there can be no question that public safety is an enormous concern of Albertans. I think that if there are issues of safety in this province, there's a good chance they will focus at some point on one of the 52 airports or the 70 rural gas co-ops or the very large, large distances covered by roadways in this province, Mr. Minister. I think it's clear that whenever you talk about transportation systems, public safety is involved in a major way, and that's why it is a big concern of Albertans.

It's no doubt within the knowledge of the hon. minister that in a number of provinces that have strong, effective access-to-information legislation, there's often a provision for what's called a public interest override. This is a kind of duty imposed on a minister to disclose information about significant risk to either an element of the public or the general public or any particular group of people. Now, we don't have that kind of legislation in Alberta yet, but I'm interested in what policies are currently in place. If an employee of your department, Mr. Minister, is aware of a significant safety hazard, I'd like to know what the in-house departmental policy is. Is this employee enabled to make sure that this is publicized in some way that the members of the public who would be at risk are given some notice of this hazard? I'd like to know whether there are policies in place to promote, encourage, reward employees who identify public safety hazards, different elements of this incredibly large and comprehensive transportation system that you have overall responsibility for. I don't have that information, and I'd certainly like some indication from you in terms of what would apply there.

9:30

I think one cannot help but have some concerns when we see that there has been almost a 22 percent decrease in the Specialized Transportation Services program. My understanding is that that particular program would be charged with the overall responsibility to co-ordinate safety programs. I'd like to know how we're able to make that kind of a cut without compromising public safety on our roadways, at our airports for really all Albertans that use or are exposed to our transportation systems.

We have Vehicle Inspection Stations. I see that stations have been cut back. Once again, I think that all Albertans, not just residents in Calgary-Buffalo, have a large and a significant interest in whether their safety has been compromised in some fashion. We'd like some indication from the minister, and I'm hoping for something more specific than simply a general assurance. I'd like to know what the senior people in this department have done to ensure that the public safety isn't compromised when we cut back in those areas.

I'd mentioned before the advent of access-to-information law - whether it's Bill 1 or something closer to 201 or something completely different - that it's clear that it's going to cover and deal with the multifaceted department that you're responsible for, Mr. Minister. Yet I see your Information System Services, vote 1.2.5; there's a decrease from \$2.8 million to \$2.4 million. That could indicate, I guess, a couple of things. One, it could indicate

that the information management systems in your department are so well co-ordinated and to a such a sophisticated degree of development that you're already ready to go with the freedom-of-information regime, or it may mean that this is something that hasn't been addressed at all yet. I'd like some indication from you in terms of what your departmental advisers and officials have done to prepare your department for access to information in this province. When we look at 2.1.3, Transportation Policy Development, this is the sort of thing that I think Albertans want information on. I expect that many aspects of your department would be the subject of a good number of inquiries under an effective access-to-information law. So I'm interested in knowing how ready your department is, Mr. Minister, for the application of this kind of legislation.

I think the other thing that is of importance to Albertans: you have extremely large projects under your responsibility, and I think it's in these kinds of projects that Albertans have in some cases curiosity, in other cases a more intense interest in determining how those projects are awarded, how those decisions come about. I think because there's such a large expenditure of tax dollars, it's not unreasonable to expect that Albertans are going to be looking for that kind of information. That I think just gives some added credence to the need to address access to information.

Those are the particular questions I wanted to address to the minister.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I would like to congratulate you on the way that you have taken charge of this department again and for the new initiatives that you have shown with the low-floor buses, or sometimes called the kneeling buses. These buses provide safe access to transportation for citizens in both Calgary and Edmonton. I had the privilege of attending the introduction of the pilot project and also the launch of the first 50 buses in Calgary. Not only the disabled but frail seniors and mothers with babies in strollers find these buses a great asset, improving their ability to be mobile around the city. At the launch several persons in wheelchairs went on a trial ride, and they were delighted with the ease and the accessibility of this more flexible mode of transport.

One of our members reminded us this afternoon of the need to have access for all persons in our ordinary everyday activities. With these buses, no longer will people who are sitting in wheelchairs have to wait for the handibus to pick them up as many of them have done in the past, sometimes for an hour. It's very inconvenient and not very comfortable for them. Many of the places that they would like to visit are now on one of these bus routes, so they will find greater mobility and much more flexibility in getting around.

The Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities has commended the department for the access effort that they have made and gave them a very high mark on the report card.

Mr. Minister, I'd like to ask you what the funding arrangement is on these buses. Do the low-floor buses cost significantly more than the others? Are these buses manufactured out of the country so that there is an added export cost as part of the package? What are the plans for increasing the number of these low-floor buses in the next short while in the two cities?

I would also like to congratulate the members of the minister's staff, whom I've found always to be very accessible and very

eager to help and to explain situations and help me find out information. I'd like to thank them for their efforts as well.

These are very difficult times, as we know, times of fiscal restraint. It's important to keep a balance. I congratulate the minister for the recognition that he has shown by giving value to the road construction jobs and their spin-off of economic benefits to the economy by continuing the work on the committed projects such as the John Laurie Boulevard and 14th Street northwest interchange. Calgary prides itself on the transportation routes it has developed and maintained. The city appreciates the cost-sharing opportunity with the province, which has helped to keep the high standard of our roads and our LRT stations. Mr. Minister, I'd like to ask you: what are the plans for continuing the cost-sharing arrangement for future roadways such as the Stoney Trail in my constituency?

I'd like to thank you very much and hope that you'll be able to answer my questions.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Chairman. I just want to follow right along there. The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow almost prefaced my comments perfectly. The Stoney Trail is a part of the bypass or ring route around the city of Calgary, if you will. I know that back in May, in the 22nd Legislature, questions were raised during question period about Stoney Trail, so I'd just like to follow up on that. In light of reductions and expenditures and so on, where on the priority list does Stoney Trail reside, or does it still reside? I was wondering if the minister could just update us on any changes in the plan in terms of time lines. The proposal was at one time I think for a five-year project, and I'm wondering if that time line is still part of the plans before the Legislature and before this committee in terms of funding.

I'm wondering also what the total cost will be on this particular project. By cost, just to put some parameters on it, as I'm sure the minister is aware, it's proposed to start in Calgary-Bow constituency on Highway 1, go across the Bow River with construction of a new bridge, and then extend north through Calgary-North West and join up with the old Trans-Canada or Highway 1A. So in total distance it probably spans about 10 kilometres, but because there's a bridge that needs to be built along the way, of course the cost is substantially higher.

9:40

Mr. Chairman, the discussions in the city of Calgary lately have been focusing on the Stoney Trail. I would like to ask the minister a little bit about how funding for these projects is decided, and by that I mean: how does the department decide which projects will be funded and which will not be funded? If one reviews the transportation plans for the city of Calgary, there are at least ideas that have at some time been proposed for new crossings across the Bow River. Currently there is one fairly small crossing that goes across the Bow River on 85th Street. It's called 85th Street in the constituency of Calgary-Bow, and once you cross the river and start heading up the hill, the name changes to Nose Hill Drive. It's the same road. It's a fairly small crossing from the standpoint that it's only a two-lane bridge, but it's a very busy crossing from the standpoint of the volume of traffic that is going by there. The next nearest river crossing to the east is the Crowchild Trail, which is a substantial distance away. To the west you have to go all the way to the town of Cochrane, so clearly there's a need for another crossing.

However, what I'm getting around to here is the one that seems to be getting the green light, and it is my understanding is getting the green light, Stoney Trail. There were other proposals on the deck at some time. The joining of the two Sarcee trails was on the deck at one time. I'm wondering if the department looked at that at all, or does the city prioritize those? There was another one that would join, I guess, part of Sarcee Trail with Shaganappi Trail. That currently ends in a T-intersection down at the bottom of the hill. That one would go through a park and would probably get some heavy opposition. I'm wondering what kind of liaison occurs between the provincial department of transportation and the city in terms of prioritizing these kinds of projects, because other proposals have been made, at least at some time or other.

Mr. Chairman, the Stoney Trail, the part that I've discussed so far, is a section out of the total ring road. The province has, I understand, already purchased the land and restricted development corridors to complete this ring road around the city of Calgary. I'm just wondering if the minister might comment about the continuation north and eastward, I guess. What is the time line on that project? Or is it off the books? Is it shelved? Is it delayed for 10 years? I'm just wondering what the time frame on that is. I know that's a long way down the road because we've got this first section, to at least address that issue.

Mr. Chairman, I have a question pertaining to vote 2.3 in particular. Vote 2.3 talks about maintenance of highways. Part of the cost here, of course, is dealing with pavement. Many of the speakers that have addressed this section before me have talked about pavement. Of course, with the constituency of Calgary-North West being entirely within the city of Calgary, we only have a very small section of primary highway in my constituency of Calgary-North West. One of the, I guess in a sense, curious purchases of the department of transportation in the past has been the use of glass beading for adding a reflective component to paint. At one time there was a concern from many people in the recycling industries that the department of transportation, which, in fact, in the past at least has been a major purchaser of this product, cut back substantially because (a) as my understanding was, a bit of a surplus or stockpile had been created, and (b) of course the cutback in expenditures that was being effected everywhere. The downside of that, of course, is that a lot of glass bottles, as I understand it, were ending up in the landfill site. I wonder if the minister might comment about the use of glass beading in the paint. I think it's certainly a good concept. It works well. I'm wondering, just from an environmental standpoint, where we're headed in that direction, because there is a lot of maintenance going on.

When I drive up from Calgary to Edmonton along Highway 2, I see a lot of construction going on there, which leads me into my next question. A lot of construction is occurring, and it's, as I sense it, two projects at once. One is, I guess, a widening of the central median to move the northbound lanes and the southbound lanes farther apart. There's also a project occurring simultaneously, with the construction of service roads on either side of that. I'm wondering, I guess, when I look at that, what kind of studies the department does to ascertain and make the decision that that kind of expenditure should be in fact followed. I've had a number of phone calls from people that drive that road and say, "Well, it's clearly a busy road; it's clearly a well-used road," but it seems to them and it seems to me to be an awfully big expenditure, first of all, to acquire all that land and then move all the soil and so on that's necessary. In this time and day and age of fiscal restraint, to create new roads for perhaps a very low traffic volume is questionable at best, I guess. So I wonder if the minister could just comment on that. You know, if the studies are done that

show that the safety is necessary and so on and so forth, I guess that would be easier to understand. The number of people that have contacted me have expressed concerns about that project, at least at this time.

I'm jumping around a little bit because I know that many of my colleagues have spoken on different issues already, and I don't want to duplicate anything. I'd like to jump briefly for a moment to program 4, Development and Support of Utilities Services and in particular the rural gasification project to provide natural gas services to individual farm sites. Mr. Chairman, I think that's certainly a good project, but a couple of questions that I would like to put to the minister are: how much is left to be done under this rural gasification project, and what is the cost associated with that final development? The reason I ask that is that it seems that many of the areas that are left to be done are the more remote areas around the province. If you have to put in a lot of pipeline to get to a farmstead, you may never be able to recover the cost of installing that pipeline and getting the natural gas to that farmstead, as opposed to simply continuing to supply that farmer with propane. While it's important to have stability of energy supply for home heating, for barns, and so on, some of these projects, simply because of the distances involved, might not be feasible. So I'm wondering a little bit if the minister could make some comments about that.

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

Finally, Mr. Chairman, in closing, just a question. Of course, I'm sure the minister has heard of the alliance, if you will, or the agreement with respect to the Pacific Northwest Economic Region. Just to refresh the memory of the minister and perhaps other members of the House, a debate occurred in this Legislature some two years ago, and that debate led to a motion, that was unanimously agreed to, that said that we would become involved with the Pacific Northwest Economic Region, which includes the four northwestern states of the United States, British Columbia, and Alberta, as well as Alaska. The most recently identified issues of concern common to all seven of those jurisdictions are transportation concerns. Although I don't see it in the budget anywhere, I'm wondering if there is any kind of liaison that is occurring between the Alberta department of transportation and other departments of transportation or with the Pacific Northwest Economic Region. There are a couple of concerns that have been identified that need to be referred to.

There's just one final note in closing here. I know the minister is responsible for airports as well under Transportation, and the many provincial airports and so on fall under his jurisdiction. The issue that I want to speak to briefly with respect to airports deals with something called the airport vicinity protection areas. Mr. Chairman, I'm sure the minister recalls many years ago when the city of Edmonton decided to build their International Airport out Leduc way. The town of Leduc at that time was quite a small town, and there was quite a substantial distance at that time between the new International Airport and the city of Leduc. Of course, as Leduc grew and got closer and closer to the airport, pretty soon people started to complain and say, "Hey, the airport's making too much noise." Well, the fact of the matter is that the airport was there first.

9:50

Now, the move to cost saving I think is certainly a laudable goal, but the Minister of Municipal Affairs is responsible for the airport vicinity protection areas, yet the airports fall under the responsibility of the Minister of Transportation and Utilities. The

airports – and in particular I'm coming back to the city of Calgary airport, which of course is the one that I guess I feel the closest affinity to, is an airport that is very successful, and this airport vicinity protection area is a low- or in fact perhaps a no-cost item to the province to administer. So I'm asking the minister if he will discuss this concern with the Minister of Municipal Affairs, because I would hate to see any of our provincial airports . . . [interjection] I have lots of time left. I would hate to see our airports become endangered by a shortsighted move to get out of something that is designed very simply to protect airports not only in the city of Calgary but in fact other airports around the province.

The city of Calgary was a leader in this, in fact. At that time a young urban planner, who ultimately now has become the mayor of the city of Calgary, had a hand in drafting that legislation. In fact it was asked to be considered by the province to be taken under the wings of the province rather than the municipalities because it was felt that if it was at arm's length, out of the control of local city councils or subsequent city councils, then in fact you could ensure that those airport vicinity protection areas would remain and the viability of our airports would remain. We've got a tremendous investment in our airports around the province, so I'm just hoping that the minister of transportation will have a chat with the Minister of Municipal Affairs to ensure that those airports remain viable.

With that, I'll close my comments. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities.

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A lot of the questions that were asked tonight were asked the other day, on September 15. A number of them are repeat questions, so if I miss some of them, would the members please look at *Hansard* of September 15, and they'll probably find a lot of the answers there. I'm going to try and cover as many as I can, Mr. Chairman, but should I miss some of them, I know the questions from across the way are in *Hansard*, so I'm sure we'll look at *Hansard* after we get done. The questions that I do not touch on tonight, we'll get back to the members.

I'll start at the beginning with the Member for Fort McMurray. I don't recall ever saying that Highway 63 was in trouble, but it is a narrow road, and it does need some upgrading. The question was asked: will it go next summer? I can't make a commitment in that regard, whether it will go or have to be held back for a few more years.

The road from Fort Chip to Fort Smith: yes, I've been through that area and met with the group. They're requesting an all-weather road, and we do have a sort of a three-government agreement to keep the road open in the wintertime, but the federal government is not reacting the way we would like it to. So I will commit to talking to the federal government, but as to committing to keep it open, I cannot.

The revolving fund he talked about. He asked a question in regards to: is it for capital or is it for trucks, boats, airplanes, and things like that? I just want to say that we do use the revolving fund for gravel supply. I probably won't touch on it again, but in 1992-93 there was some \$9 million deficit. The actual year-end was over a million dollar surplus. We have sold a considerable amount of equipment in that time; there has been over \$2 million of equipment auctioned. The \$8 million in equipment addition that we have in this budget is all for new equipment, and it's replacement equipment. We do not have dozers, Cats, being bought by government. These are snowplows only. Any dozers

and Cats and other equipment that we might need we hire from the private sector.

Gas Alberta. The question was: why did we pay back some dollars in regards to Gas Alberta? We are a broker, and \$1.5 million was distributed back to the producers because they were their dollars and not ours. So that's why that was returned from our surplus funds.

The Al-Pac road was the next question. Yes, the Al-Pac road is at the end of the line. It's completed. There was some \$25 million in regards to railroad construction. All the dollars were spent on public roads and all for public use. There were no private roads built by Al-Pac.

The \$45,000 that the member mentioned in regards to legal fees pertained to land acquisition, expropriations. It's all primarily in-house lawyers.

In Public Communications: why do we have \$526,700? We advertise tenders; we put on safety programs; we communicate in regards to construction programs and projects and public advertising of road bans, road closures, and things like that.

In regards to Transportation Policy Development, all transportation policy, highway planning, studies, traffic studies, et cetera, such as Canadian Airlines, rail policy, ports, highway policy, and urban transportation policy are within that funding.

Overlay. The member asked: why do we have \$40 million in overlay in the budget? We do have in our budget some \$41 million of overlay funding, and that's to keep the infrastructure that we have in place now in good repair. The highway rehab program is done, as I said yesterday and the day before, by a computer system in Alberta that is probably the best in North America. We're leaders in regards to picking the roads through a computer system for our rehab overlay program. It's not done, as I've said before, by request of an MLA, a member, or anybody else. It's done where the need is; it's done on that basis.

We talked about the Motor Transport Services. We have some \$13 million in the budget for that. We are developing the motor transport services into an educational branch, so they'll try to educate the traffic across Alberta more so than looking at fining the people.

Water and sewer grants: the formula depends on the application. Most of them are 75 percent government, 25 percent community.

A question was asked about purple fuel. That, of course, is not something that we do; that is done by Treasury. Yes, a farmer that hauls his own product to market can use purple fuel, but where a farmer hauls for somebody else for profit, he cannot use purple fuel. If he's caught by the inspectors, of course, that farmer will be charged. I can appreciate that farmers are in need of the purple fuel rebate, but that's there for that purpose.

The Member for Lethbridge-West talked about export highways 2, 3, and 4 and when they can be completed. I want to outline that we have entered into a program with the federal government for some \$60 million for our export highways. It's a \$30 million share by the federal government and a \$30 million share by the province. There's some \$30 million allocated to export highways 2 and 3. That is a five-year program, and hopefully we can stay on track with that, depending on the weather.

The Red Coat Trail: yes, it is more than a highway. It's a historic site, where the RCMP traveled many, many years ago from Manitoba to Alberta. It is a scenic route. That is being tendered and should be completed.

10:00

Lethbridge-West asked for planning for three years for budgets for municipalities, and I agree totally with him. I believe it's time

that we look at allowing the municipalities, be they rural or urban, a three-year program so they can plan their own programs, and we have to get that out as quick as we can. That of course will be based on: can we get a firm budget for the next three years? I want to put on notice to all members that I have spoken to a number of urban municipalities. I met with the city of Edmonton about a month ago, and I put them on notice that they can expect a 20 percent reduction. I could not relate to them whether it's 20 percent this year or if it will be 20 percent over two years or three years. We have a mandate to balance the budget, and we can all expect a 20 percent reduction.

The Member for Leduc asked a question in regards to right sizing of the department. I explained it to him, but I guess he didn't understand. At least, that's what he said. When you look seven years ago, in 1986 we had 246 managers. That was because the department of transportation amalgamated with the department of utilities, but since that time we have reduced within the Department of Transportation and Utilities some 1,000 permanent positions. We are comparable to any department in government. In December of 1986 we had 246 managers. Today we have 170. So I think it goes without question that we are moving in the right direction.

He asked about the minister's budget increase, and he wanted to know why. Well, I don't know what he's looking at, because the minister's budget this year is less than last year, so I'll have to take a look at what he's getting at.

He asked a question on road cost recovery from Al-Pac. Well, there's no road cost recovery from Al-Pac in any way that I'm aware of. It's a grant. The road was built for the forest industry and Al-Pac and the railroad. I don't know how we'd do it.

He talked about airports and extending of runways, and he wanted to know where. Most of our airports were built 3,000 feet in length, and now many corporate aircraft require more than 3,000 feet. We have airports such as Bonnyville, Elk Point, and Fox Creek that have asked for some extensions, and we're looking at that.

He asked about increases in airport costs. Yes, there are some. It all depends on the amount of use of these airports in regards to fires. That's what dictates the airport cost.

The next question was signing of Alberta highways. I don't know what the member was getting at. I'll have to look at *Hansard*. We are looking at a program hopefully in the future where we will allow communities to advertise on the highways in a proper and right manner in regards to services in that community.

The Member for Calgary-East asked a number of questions in regards to streets and highways that are a joint responsibility of the city of Calgary and the province. I'm going to have to look at *Hansard* and go over each and every one of them, because he gave me a number of streets. I appreciate that. We'll have a look at it and see where we can tie in with the city. You have to remember that all urban centres set their own priorities, and we provide the funds to them based on their priorities. So I'll have a look at that.

The member also asked about seat belts, and some other members did too. I know it's important. He wanted to know what was the total percentage of use by Albertans. I'm pleased to say that the current usage rate in Alberta is 86.6 percent. We are going to advertise again and again and again. We want to have seat belt advertisements. I believe the week of October 10 to 16 is the seat belt enforcement campaign. We're looking to see if we can raise that 86.6 percent usage rate up to 95 percent by the year 1995. So we'll be using as much education and advertising as we can to make that happen.

He asked the question about the fatalities. It's unfortunate, but in Alberta we have approximately 400 people die each year in motor vehicle collisions, and approximately 19,000 people get injured requiring medical treatment. So that's not good. Eighty percent of the deaths occur in cars traveling over 60 kilometres per hour, and 75 percent of the collisions, death, and injuries occur within 40 kilometres of home. I think we have to spend as much time as we can in regards to education, and we'll do everything we can in that regard.

Edmonton-Whitemud wanted to know what the studies were on the Western Grain Transportation Act. That is now being handled by the minister of agriculture, and we are working with him. There's no final decision on that Western Grain Transportation Act, but we'll be working on it jointly, of course, with the other provinces and see if we can move that along. It will provide more demands on local roads, but we have a very fine network of roads in the province, and I believe that if we keep the weights on the trucks to the legal limits our local roads shouldn't be hurt that much.

He talked about overlay on roads, and he mentioned again that it was political. As I outlined at the outset, none of these overlays on highways throughout the province are political, contrary to what the Member for Leduc stated the other day in the House. He's wrong, and it's unfortunate that he would use that kind of language in here in regards to innocent people. All our overlays done in the province are done by computer tests, by engineering surveys and are done on the roads that are needed.

He wants to put up a roster for public information. Well, I don't know what that means, but if he's suggesting that he wants to know which roads will be overlaid or which will be base course or which will be graded, all he has to do is send me a letter and say which roads he's interested in, and I can provide that to him. All these programs change on a weekly basis. They change because some jurisdictions change their minds. They change because of weather. They change because of a number of things.

He mentioned that we have a 2 cents a litre tax on gas in general revenue. Well, we really don't. We have a 9 cents a litre gas tax that goes to the general revenue fund. He wanted to know what that provided and if we were going to net budgeting, how we could do better. Well, Mr. Chairman, the fuel tax in the province of Alberta for '92-93 was \$397 million, and our budget was \$708 million, so if you dedicate the whole fuel tax to net budgeting, you would still need funding from general revenue. If he wants me to explain the system in regards to net budgeting – and, yes, I think that would probably be a way to go. If you would take all the fuel tax, if you would take all the licence fees, if you would take all the permits, and if you took everything that related to road travel, you still wouldn't have the dollars that we have to have today to provide the service to Albertans, but it would probably come close. So if the Liberals are saying that we need another increase in taxes, well, then I guess that's what they're saying.

Cost recovery by the department. I don't know what he meant by that. We have the transportation fleet of the province now under the department of transportation. That's all the trucks and vans throughout the province. We have asked all departments to reduce their fleet by some 25 percent, and everybody's working on that, and it's working very, very well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Three minutes.

10:10

MR. TRYNCHY: Okay. Fine.

He talked about the countervail on roads. My understanding was that the question was only on roads in the forest industry that

were put in there by government. It's not countervailed on roads leading from Edmonton to Montana; it's on forestry roads. I hope we've cleared that up.

I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman. If there are just two minutes left, I would ask the indulgence of the members here to allow me to finish. I don't have that much left. They asked too many questions. If they don't want me to finish, then . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister has requested consent to go beyond his time so he can finish his comments. I know we have one more speaker. Do we have unanimous consent to this request?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Okay; it's yours.

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

Now I'll go as quickly as I can. Highway 41 to the U.S. border. When will it go to tender? That is going to tender shortly and will be completed this year.

Highway 1 four-laning to the Saskatchewan border. It's in our export highway transportation program. It's tendered, and we hope to have it completed by this fall at \$4.2 million.

He talked about having some base course on Highway 41, and when will it have the pavement overlay. Again, the pavement overlay will take place when it's done by computer and engineer assessment on the basis of need.

He talked about upgrading local roads to a good gravel standard. Well, unless they're anything but secondary highways or primary highways, we don't have any jurisdiction on local roads. So he might want to talk to the MDs and counties or IDs. He wanted to know the cost comparison for gravel as to base course. Base course is over \$100,000 a kilometre, and gravel would be considerably less. So yes, you would have quite a saving there.

He wanted to know about the dollars for airports. The airports that are the responsibility of Transportation and Utilities are those that we use, mostly in northern Alberta, for forestry, for fires. We do have 18 of them, and I'll provide the member with the dollars and the ones we have under our jurisdiction. I don't have it broken down in total cost, but I'll provide that to the member in the near future.

He wanted to make sure that we met with the urban centres to discuss the grants. Of course, the grant to Medicine Hat this year was \$25 per capita; it was a little over a million dollars. Again, as I said at the outset, we have to meet with municipalities, be it the urban or rural ridings, and make sure we can provide them with as much information as we can in regards to a three-year program.

The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford talked about the revolving fund, and of course I've outlined that. It's mostly for gravel, which is charged back to programs. It's not for trucks, it's not for airplanes, and it's not for boats. As I've said, we've reduced our vehicle fleet by some \$2 million.

He wanted to know about the urban grant funds to Edmonton in this last year, a fund I just provided about two weeks ago, a grant of some \$15,454,875. He wanted to know why the rural areas get more. Well, they don't, Mr. Chairman. Improvement of streets throughout rural Alberta: the budget is \$7.5 million. The grants to all rural municipalities are some \$30 million, which covers – what is it? – 90 percent of the province.

The Alberta cities transportation partnership funding in this year's budget is some \$81 million, so the transportation grants are \$25 per capita. I have met with the city of Edmonton and told

them that they should budget for a 20 percent reduction, and that if it's less, it would be a bonus. I put them on notice.

He wanted to know how many paved roads were done in the secondary highway system. I would ask the member to look at *Hansard*; I won't repeat it. On September 15 I set it out. In it is all the mileage and the percentage, so if you'd look at that. If there are other questions the members have, please get back to me.

Pincher Creek-Macleod talked about Highway 22. Yes, I've traveled it, and it is completed. It's a very fine road, yet the worst section of Highway 22 is in the north end, that section that runs from Highway 18 south through my community and south towards Highway 16.

A cost sharing and overlay at Claresholm. No, we do not ask for cost sharing from municipalities on overlay. If it's a primary highway, that would be our responsibility.

You wanted to know about the time limit on the export highway. I mentioned at the outset it's a five-year program, a \$60 million program, and it's cost shared by the federal government and the province on a 50-50 basis.

Secondary road 785 needs attention, and I'll have to look at that and see where it's at in regards to priority. Of course, those priorities come to us from local municipalities, counties, IDs, and of course the MLAs are allowed to submit their priorities to us.

Highway 3 from B.C. to Monarch. I don't have any idea when that would even be considered. With the budget we have now, I would suggest that it could be a long ways down the road.

The Fort Macleod shops to close: I'm not sure. I can't answer that question, but I'll let you know as soon as I can find out. I'm not aware of it; it has never come to my desk, in regards to closure of those shops in Fort Macleod.

Calgary-Buffalo talked about safety of highways. He said it's needed, and I want to just agree so heartily with him. That's why we spent \$13 million on our highway safety program through our highway patrol people. He wanted to know how we could provide information on risk to the public. Would the employees let us know of a hazard? Yes, I'd be very disappointed if an employee of Alberta Transportation and Utilities would not let us know of a hazard as quickly as possible and rectify it as quickly as possible. With my deputy sitting there, I'm sure they'd have a policy in place, as a number of departments do, that encourages our employees to report hazards on the highways or in whatever departments.

There was a concern raised by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo in regards to a 21 percent reduction in safety programs. Mr. Chairman, I can't comment on that, because I thought that with the way we've changed some of our actions in regards to the Motor Transport Board people, we're working more on safety than we are enforcement. Education of course is a must. I agree with him there that we have to provide an education service to the motoring public.

Our Motor Transport Board funding is some \$14 million, and hopefully that will take care of where we're going. Yet you can't ask for more dollars, as some members say, and then the other member next to that member says we're spending too much.

They want freedom of information by the department. I really don't know what that means, but when the freedom of information Act is introduced and passed, I'm positive that the Department of Transportation and Utilities will abide by all the instructions and rules and legislation that are there. If there's something that that member or any member in this Assembly wants to know in regards to my department, please just ask.

They wanted to know how large projects are awarded. I don't know what he's getting at, but I guess it's probably transportation programs such as the overlay pavement on Highway 22 that's

disturbing to some of these members. I thought I explained that, but if I haven't, then maybe he can be more precise on just what he wants. We have highway projects such as the one on the export highway, contracts for \$8 million on the road from Airdrie to Red Deer. That's done automatically. You tender out a road, you accept the tender, and it goes out to that project division. Completion of the twinning of Highway 1 to the Saskatchewan border was \$4 million. That went out in one tender. So we don't dictate the dollars. We have a tender on a highway that I'm just aware of that we thought would come in at \$5 million. It came in at \$4.5 million. We have another one that I thought would come in at \$4 million come in at \$5 million. That's the way it goes. So that's how they're awarded. They're awarded on the basis of tender, and they're also accepted or rejected by the department people on the basis that we are getting good value for the dollars that we're spending.

10:20

The Member for Calgary-Bow talked about a very good program in both cities, Calgary and Edmonton, and that's the low bus program. We provided some \$750,000 to Calgary for 51 buses. That was the difference between an ordinary bus and what it cost to develop a low bus. We provided some \$885,000 for 59 buses in Edmonton. Again, that was the difference in cost between an ordinary bus and a low-floor bus. The difference in cost I believe is around \$15,000, somewhere in there. They are not constructed in Alberta. I believe they're constructed in Winnipeg. I'll have to check on that. Are they in Winnipeg or Ontario? Anyway, they're Canadian.

She wanted to know about cost sharing on roads. Yes, we will move more and more in the next two years to cost sharing with all levels of government. I've said this to all the people I've met and as I've done my highway tours throughout the province. I've talked to MDs and counties saying: be prepared to be in partnership with us by 20 percent, because we will reduce our budget - we have to reduce our budget - by 20 percent, but if you provide the additional 20 percent from your funding, you will get as many kilometres of road next year as you did this year. So that will be something we'll look forward to, and it has to happen.

The Member for Calgary-North West talked about the Stoney Trail funding. Yes, that's been tendered. I believe this year's budget will be a little over \$4 million. It's a five-year program, hopefully, if we have the budget. The total cost of the project I'm not quite sure of. I thought it was around the \$40 million mark, but I will get that figure. I don't have it with me.

He wanted to know how we decide what projects get approved. I don't know what he was getting at again, but if that's across the province, how projects get approved is that when we get the priority from each MD, county, ID, town, village, and so on where we have the responsibility of a primary highway, we look at it, it's analyzed by transportation, and if that's what they say and we approve it, then that's how it gets approval. Now, in the cities - the city of Edmonton, the city of Calgary, all the cities - they set their priorities and come to us with their priorities and ask for funding. The funding for Calgary in '93-94 was some \$17,928,325. They set their priorities and we work with them, and that's how the funding is arrived at.

He wanted to know when we expect total completion of the Stoney Trail and all the way north and east. I'll have to get that to him because I don't have that.

Overlay on primary highways and why don't we use glass beading. I'm not sure where we are in regard to the glass beading. I know it's been used sometimes, but I haven't seen it on any of

our new projects this year, so I'll have to ask that question and get back to him.

He talked about the service road along Highway 2 – yes, Red Deer to Airdrie – and why was it built, because somebody told him it was only going to be used by a few people. Well, it's there for a safety reason. In time you will see all the highways from, say, Edmonton to Calgary with very, very few crossovers unless there's an overpass. A level crossing is not safe, and of course the service roads on that road are done for safety. As I've mentioned, I've just come back from a trip where I've traveled through a city, some 70 to 80 miles of road, and never had one stoplight within that distance. So when you look at where we want to go from now on, we have to make sure that there's a service road and that when that service road ends and we have to go across the highway, it's on an overpass and not a level crossing.

He wanted to know how much was left to be done on rural gas co-ops. We put in about 4,000 infills each year, so we're a long way from being done. With the grants that we provide to local gas co-ops getting smaller and smaller, those high-expense gas infills will not happen. He suggested we shouldn't do it. I don't agree with him, because in rural Alberta we should do it.

He wanted to know about transportation to the south in review. That's under review with the five western states, and of course we're also reviewing the road from Alberta through the States to Mexico.

He wants to protect airports, and I will assure him I will talk to the Minister of Municipal Affairs to see if that happens.

Mr. Chairman, that pretty well cleans up all the questions. If there's anything else I've missed . . . [some applause] Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are you ready for the question?
Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this budget, and I beg for the indulgence of the Assembly. I realize that it is late.

I'd like to commend the minister for emphasizing that the decisions with regards to this particular budget are not political and are indeed based on need. So I will make a case for the constituency of Edmonton-Meadowlark with regards to the needs for certain transportation items that need to be looked at.

The constituency of Edmonton-Meadowlark includes both established communities and rapidly growing areas. For this reason, there are two distinct transportation needs that need to be addressed. One is in terms of the rehabilitation of existing roadways and sidewalks in developed parts of the area, and the second is in terms of improving roadways to accommodate traffic growth through the area that's due to some of the new residential development.

What your department's mandate states is that it is responsible for the development, construction and maintenance of an integrated transportation system in Alberta to facilitate the safe and efficient movement of people and products and the economic development of the province.

In conjunction with these goals you're probably aware that the reductions in provincial grants in recent years have affected both the improvement of roadways and the rehabilitation of existing roadways, which have in turn created a situation that is unsafe for the residents of Edmonton and in particular with regard to Meadowlark for the roadways along 170th Street, 178th Street, 95th Avenue, and 87th Avenue. This is one of the most heavily trafficked areas in Edmonton and has one of the highest accident rates. You will know that prior to 1992 the city of Edmonton in

partnership with the provincial government was improving major roadways in this area to provide an alternate route for heavy truck traffic on 170th Street. This work has now stopped. Whitemud drive remains incomplete west of 170th Street, and construction has stopped on the extension of Anthony Henday Drive to Yellowhead Trail. The completion of both these facilities has been postponed, with the result that 170th Street must continue to accommodate this high traffic and truck volume in the city, including the movement on the dangerous goods routes.

As you are aware as well, West Edmonton Mall, one of this city's major attractions, is on 170th Street. Should an accident occur along that particular avenue, the results could well be disastrous. In addition, the city of Edmonton has been working in the past to provide more funding for the rehabilitation of major roads and neighbourhood streets, and in particular I'm talking about the AMPLE program. You indicated in your reply to some of the questions that the city of Edmonton sets its priorities and that you will work in conjunction with the city. I would like to turn that around in terms that the city of Edmonton's priorities are based on the budgeting that's available from the provincial government.

10:30

In summary, there are other issues that I would have liked to address, one in particular with the issue of busing and the LRT. One of the reasons that there is new busing now within the city of Edmonton is that the funding for the LRT is no longer available, and therefore the city of Edmonton has had to purchase new buses.

The second is a question I have in particular that you mentioned in *Hansard* on September 15. That indicates that there's an advisory committee throughout the province in just about every constituency to look at improving the trucking industry. As I am a new MLA, I would well like to know who that representative is that is looking at improving the trucking industry within my particular constituency.

To summarize, one of the major areas I would like to address in terms of the benefits of transportation is that major construction projects do continue to provide direct job creation for the residents and that improved regional highway connections will provide an economic development incentive for the future.

Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are you ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

Agreed to:

Program 1 – Departmental Support Services	
Total Operating Expenditure	\$10,740,100
Total Capital Investment	\$120,100

Program 2 – Construction and Operation of Transportation Systems

Total Operating Expenditure	\$260,997,200
Total Capital Investment	\$329,770,500

Program 3 – Financial Assistance to Alberta Resources Railway

Total Operating Expenditure	\$586,600
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Program 4 – Development and Support of Utilities Services

Total Operating Expenditure	\$43,636,500
Total Capital Investment	\$15,000

Summary

Total Operating Expenditure	\$315,960,400
Total Capital Investment	\$329,905,600
Department Total	\$645,866,000

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Chairman, I move that the votes be reported.

[Motion carried]

MR. DAY: Mr. Chairman, I move that we rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1994, for the departments and purposes indicated.

The department of Transportation and Utilities: \$315,960,400 for Operating Expenditure, \$329,905,600 for Capital Investment, for a total of \$645,866,000.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: All in favour of the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed, if any? Carried.
The Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. DAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's been considerable request that we continue on with the debate tonight, but in deference to your age I move that we adjourn and reconvene tomorrow at 1:30 in the afternoon.

[At 10:37 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

