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8:01 p.m.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Subcom.B: Trans. & Utilities

Subcommittee B – Transportation and Utilities

Tannas, Don, Chairman
Laing, Bonnie, Deputy Chairman
Barrett, Pam
Blakeman, Laurie
Calahasen, Pearl
Dickson, Gary
Doerksen, Victor

Forsyth, Heather
Fritz, Yvonne
Graham, Marlene
Hancock, Dave
Havelock, Jon
Jonson, Halvar
Kryczka, Karen

McClellan, Shirley
Melchin, Greg
Olsen, Sue
Paszkowski, Walter
Sloan, Linda
Tarchuk, Janis

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members of subcommittee B, we have this evening under consideration, then, the estimates of the Department of Transportation and Utilities. We'd call upon the hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities, but before doing so, we might just go back to the consideration of only one member standing and talking at a time. Right now we only have four or five, including of course the Government House Leader.

We'd now like to call upon the hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities. Following that, we'll hear the questions and comments from other members.

Hon. minister.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good evening, everyone. Before I begin, I'd like to take a moment and introduce our devoted staff that is really working so hard. I'll tell you who they are. We have my deputy, Ed McLellan; Ray Reshke, Jim Sawchuk. This is a very, very special evening for Jim and myself and all of the crew, because this is very likely Jim's last budget. Jim has been a very loyal employee of the department for years and years and years. He's contributed very, very significantly through the years, and I just want to acknowledge all the outstanding work that Jim has done. You're going to be missed, guy. You are; really.

We have Lyle O'Neill, Gary Boddez, Jay Ramotar, Sheena Sheppy, and of course my loyal servant and best friend and certainly the most willing employee in this building, Brian Hlus. Brian has indicated he will keep track of the hockey scores tonight, so if you want an update, he will be the one that will deliver that too, if you're particularly interested.

The 1998-99 budget for Transportation and Utilities frames how we will continue to contribute to Alberta's prosperity and economic development by ensuring the provision of a safe and effective transportation system, essential utility services for rural areas, and disaster and emergency services by supporting the provincial government's theme of a strong financial management.

It is anticipated that strong economic activity in 1997 will continue to be maintained in 1998. Our budget for '98-99 shows operating expenses will decrease slightly, by \$4.2 million, from \$550 million in '97-98 to \$545.8 million in '98-99.

Capital investment, on the other hand, is increasing from \$136.5 million in '97-98 to \$174 million in '98-99, and that is an increase of \$37.5 million. The \$37.5 million is due to a reallocation between votes to provide increased funding for the following department programs: the north/south trade corridor, primary highway construction, infrastructure for new industry, and information technology related services and equipment to help employees to be able to do their job better.

The reallocation was made possible by a decision earlier this

year where the government approved a \$100 million onetime capital injection for '97-98, which includes an advance on a portion of the '98-99 program commitments. This resulted in relief for '98-99 operating fund pressures and reallocation between votes to reduce the capital spending pressures. A significant portion, nearly \$16 million, of the \$37.5 million increase in capital investment relates to the north/south trade corridor. Construction is continuing on the corridor through Edmonton, and negotiations are under way through the city of Calgary for corridor related work within the city's limits.

Increased economic activity reflected in increased truck and other traffic traveling to and from the United States, capacity pressures in urban centres, and extreme wet weather in northern Alberta during 1997 have resulted in the need to reinvest in Alberta's transportation and utility infrastructure. Recommendations from the September '97 Growth Summit confirmed that this was indeed a pressure and a need. To that end, as you know, \$100 million in onetime funding was allocated to AT and U in early '98 to deal with these pressures. Funding was allocated to high-priority projects which I will outline to you in a moment.

Our business plan identifies how the additional onetime funding has been allocated and the impact on future program budgets. Recognizing that the funding does not represent a long-term commitment for additional funding to any of the programs, AT and U will continue to monitor the condition of Alberta's transportation and utility infrastructure and to identify future needs and future pressure points. We're definitely a smaller organization than we were a few years ago, and we're obtaining our goals through innovative partnerships, sound business principles, technologies, and objective performance measures.

What are our goals right now? Well, we're focusing on seven main ones at this time: improving traffic safety, improving access to world markets, managing the primary highway system, reinvesting in strategic highway improvements, supporting municipal transportation partnerships, supporting safe and cost-effective utility services, and the seventh is supporting responses to major disasters and emergencies. There are a number of ways we're working towards these goals. With the help of the onetime funding allocation of the \$100 million – and that is what I would like to highlight to you today.

The effective rehabilitation of Alberta's highways and bridges is important to the makeup of the Alberta advantage. To maintain current pavement condition, the overall integrity of the system, and to save tax dollars, an additional \$30 million has been added to the '98-99 base budget for the primary highway preservation and rehabilitation program.

We will maintain our commitment to provide funding under the Alberta cities transportation partnership. Additional onetime basic capital funding of \$15 million will be provided to the cities in '97-98, representing an increase in the per capita allocation of \$7.50 per person, to enable our cities to commence work on their most urgent priorities as early as possible in the construction season.

Ten million dollars of the '98-99 per capita funding will be advanced. The current streets improvement program was renewed in '96 and will continue for '98-99. Additional funding of \$5 million will be provided in '97-98 to alleviate some of the backlog of applications, increasing the '97-98 program commitment to a total of \$15 million.

We'll also further our partnerships with rural municipalities to ensure that the secondary highway system continues to form an integral part of Alberta's transportation system. To assist in needed upgrading of roads under municipal jurisdictions, special onetime grants totaling \$15 million will be available in '97-98 for rural municipalities. AT and U will advance \$10 million to the '98-99 allocation for the formula-based rural transportation grants for municipalities to advance their '98 construction projects. The resource roads improvement program will continue in '98-99 to provide funding assistance to rural municipalities to upgrade existing local roads, bridges, and to accommodate the resource-based truck traffic, specifically nonlocal or through trips. To advance priority projects, \$6 million will be advanced in '97-98, thereby reducing the '98-99 program expenditures.

To support new industry, a new program was established in '97-98 to assist with the provision of rural roadways to accommodate new resource, industrial, and value-added developments. In the '98-99 budget year, \$10 million has been included for this program.

8:11

Through the Alberta municipal water/wastewater partnership, rural gas program, and rural electrification program, the AT and U will continue to assist Albertans residing in rural areas and small communities to obtain basic utility services. Additional funding of \$2 million will be provided under the rural gas program in '97-98, and \$5 million will be advanced under the Alberta municipal water/wastewater partnership for priority projects to reduce the waiting list of applications.

We'll continue with the development of the north/south trade corridor, which is scheduled to be substantially completed by 2007. Additional funding of \$25 million in '97-98 and \$10 million in '98-99 is being provided to accelerate the project.

As a result of advancing the funding that I have identified above, the budget for '98-99 will be correspondingly reduced.

AT and U will work with our municipal partners to develop and test their emergency plans and enhance their preparedness for disasters and emergencies. We'll also ensure the readiness and reliability of the government emergency operations centre and ensure staff respond quickly and effectively to assist Albertans in the event of disasters and emergencies.

Working with our stakeholders and partners on the traffic safety initiative, we'll continue to pursue a reduction of the number of collisions on Alberta roadways through education and awareness programs and effective enforcement.

Our ministry will streamline legislation by consolidating the Highway Traffic Act, the Motor Transport Act, the Motor Vehicle Administration Act, and the Off-highway Vehicle Act into one proposed traffic safety act. As well, the safety of trucks and buses will continue to be a high priority for Alberta Transportation and Utilities. Safety and dangerous goods inspections of all commercial vehicles will continue, with the focus being on truck and bus deficiencies that could lead to collisions and injuries.

We're in the process of finalizing a contract with a private-sector provider of vehicles whereby departments would lease vehicles directly rather than have the government purchase and own its own fleet.

I believe everything that I have outlined today is evidenced in

Alberta Transportation and Utilities' constant commitment to the economic prosperity and development of the province. As you have heard, prosperity and development result in growth challenges for our transportation and utility infrastructure as well as all the other factors that are involved. But with reinvestment and with creative solutions, we will grasp all the opportunities that will successfully see Alberta well into the 21st century.

I'd now be happy to answer any questions. If I'm not able to answer the questions here today or if we don't have the time, I commit that we will have a written response or a verbal response in some manner to all the questions that are asked here today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the hon. minister because often when I've called his department with different questions, your staff has been very co-operative and very forthcoming with information. Especially during the minicrisis when the farmers were worried about vehicle registration, I sent every headache Brian Hlus' way. It worked quite well for me, so thank you, Brian. I didn't do it to sell memberships, as the hon. minister of agriculture hinted last night. I just want to set that straight.

I do thank the minister because this is the first minister who has asked his department to brief us on upcoming legislation, and I really appreciate the opportunity to do that. That's the first time since I've been in here, and I truly appreciate that.

I want to speak for a moment on just a few general things and then some specific questions, if I may.

School bus safety. I see that the goal is excellent, and I support that of course. When a good move is made, you know the opposition takes credit, and when a bad move is made, we slam the government, so it's not bad over here sometimes. I do appreciate the minister's focus on safety. I can't stress enough, as you know, my concern about bus safety. I think maybe part of your role is working with the Department of Education. Do you have somebody who co-ordinates that between you and that ministry, because I do fear that the underfunding to Transportation within the school budget is going to affect the quality of our buses and that bus owner/operators will not be able to replace old equipment. So I am worried about bus safety and safety inspections. I know that you've increased the number of transport officers, though inspectors are still privatized.

I must tell the minister that once the transport officers were set up near Villeneuve. As I went by, I pulled over. They gave me a wonderful tour of the mobile unit they used and pulled a few trucks over and gave me a minicourse on what they do. They offered to let me go under the truck for a good view. I said, "Not without a television camera here, thank you." In all seriousness, I really appreciate the work they do, and it gave me firsthand experience seeing the fine job that they do. So I can't encourage you enough to keep up the focus on bus safety. I appreciate that.

I do have a question, though. The actual method of measuring performance has changed three times in the last three budgets, so it's hard to do a kind of comparison or an analysis. The first one was that collision rates were measured on the basis of number of annual collisions on our highways per 100 kilometres of vehicle travel. The second one was collision rates measured on the basis of number of collisions annually on our highways per 1,000 licensed drivers. This year the collision rates were measured on the basis of the annual number of casualty, injury and fatality, collisions per 100,000 licensed drivers. So I'm just wondering

why you keep changing those ways of measuring. How do you obtain a goal when it keeps changing compared to the year prior? So if you could clarify that.

I support the north/south trade corridor. I had an interesting call from someone who said: "Why don't you totally bypass Edmonton? Wouldn't that be cheaper?" I said, "Well, I won't tell my Edmonton colleagues that you suggested that." But it was a suggestion on his part, which I said I would bring to you, so I leave that in your hands.

I see that within the plans of my own constituency highway 794 will be upgraded. One would think I would do a jig, I know, but as the minister knows, there won't be – I like to ask for as much as I can, you know – shoulders put on it. That's not in the plan. I know that Sturgeon county is still in conversation with you and your department. I am truly hoping that while the work is being done, some sort of arrangement can be made to widen that road just so that it has shoulders so that when you are traveling on it, you can change a tire. I know the minister has heard me talk for five years now about the condition of 794, and I truly appreciate that the county has made it a priority. I'm hoping that within your power or your domain you can work with them to try to get some shoulders on the stretch they are doing. I realize it's an added expense; it's not like widening a driveway. But I would appreciate the minister, when he does do that – why don't we do it right? So I thank you for looking into that.

One of the questions I have: with the privatization of road maintenance, does that include within your department weed control along the highways? Can I ask how that's working where it has been privatized? I've had people talk to me about chamomile – I remembered the weed's name tonight, thanks to the minister of ag – scentless chamomile. I've heard concern about that from farmers in my area, and I would appreciate the minister responding to that.

8:21

Women of Unifarm have sent me their resolutions, which I tabled in here. Interestingly enough, three of their resolutions deal with transportation. If I may just quickly reiterate them for the minister. One was

to recognize the increasing cost to rural municipalities to maintain the roads and to make compensation to municipalities for this expense. [Especially] with the closure of country elevators and the abandonment and closure of rail lines, there has been a dramatic increase in heavy truck traffic on rural roads. There has definitely been an increase in maintenance costs to municipalities which are already dealing with smaller grants.

Their next one:

Women of Unifarm urge the Provincial Government, in the efforts of vehicle and personal safety, to make it mandatory that both tail lights and head lights be on at all times.

I thought that was interesting. I didn't realize the back taillights don't automatically go on. So I appreciate that

it has been proved that the number of head-on collisions has been reduced by approximately 50% with running lights being mandatory. Additionally, Women of Unifarm would request that tail lights be included in this provision . . . that both tail lights and head lights be on at all times.

MR. JONSON: Horses?

MRS. SOETAERT: Not horses, Minister of Health. No; on all vehicles. In fact, I'll send this over to you. It's Women of Unifarm. Both taillights and headlights on all vehicles.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Must be farm equipment they're talking about.

MRS. SOETAERT: Highway vehicles, not just farm vehicles. I'll send you this.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: The taillights come on automatically with the cars. That was only one year that they didn't. They come on automatically now.

MRS. SOETAERT: Sorry; we're getting off topic. Through the chair.

I'll do the last one because I have so many other things and probably only one crack at this, so I want to take all the time I have. This was another interesting one. You know, I think they've got a very good point here that it be

mandatory that all vehicles have a front licence plate on their vehicle.

I'm wondering if the minister has discussed that with his department.

It has been pointed out that it is impossible to identify an intruder's vehicle while it is backing out of a yard. Additionally, it is pointed out that school bus drivers have repeatedly said it has been very difficult to identify a driver when coming towards them in an unsafe manner.

So I told them I would present these to you, and I think they have some very valid points. I will get copies made and send one over to you.

A question for the minister, if I may. Last year in the 1997 projects the interchange at Campsite Road and Spruce Grove – now it's highway 16 – the interchange at Campsite Road, the bridge structure, and highway 16 was one of the priorities last year. It isn't this year, and it isn't built. I'm just wondering what happened. Where did it go? We're missing a bridge and an overpass.

The minister mentioned bridge construction. Who does bridge inspection now? I know you used to have that equipment and the department of transportation used to do bridge inspection. Who does them now, and how is it consistent across the province? How do we make sure that bridges are being inspected? So I ask that.

I appreciate the minister – and he probably knew when I requested the list – sending me that list of luxury car. I caught something in your opening comments. I'm referring to the cars that the committee chairs and some of the Executive Council, et cetera, use. And I appreciate that you sent me this. I am concerned that not all are needed. When you mentioned that you were going to get a fleet and lease cars, did that refer to the luxury cars that I had asked the minister about? Maybe I shouldn't say "luxury," the Minister of Health says. Do you drive one of these? No, you don't. Or did I miss it?

MS CALAHASEN: No, he doesn't.

MRS. SOETAERT: He doesn't. Okay. I bet you do though. Oh, you do, minister without portfolio: a four-wheel-drive Cherokee Laredo.

Anyway, when you were talking about leasing, does that mean these vehicles? If it doesn't, I would appreciate a cost-benefit analysis. I appreciate that some ministers make so many miles that it's probably cheaper to purchase the vehicle. I appreciate that. But I would venture to say that for some committee chairs, maybe even the Clerk of the Assembly, it would be cheaper to pay him just mileage and gas. So I guess I would appreciate a cost-benefit analysis of that. I don't expect your department to do that within two days, but I think that's something that, in my humble opinion, could be addressed by your department.

If I may speak for a moment about the disaster relief programs.

I appreciate that the minister did help out the people of Peace River. However, I am concerned that much of the time was spent arguing with the feds. I see you're not budgeting for a disaster. I mean, we should be optimistic and hope that there are no disasters across the province. Does that come out of extra revenue? Is that supplementary estimates? If there is a disaster, is that what happens? Last year we needed an extra \$30 million. So I don't know. Is it just automatically out of extra revenue?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: It comes out of supplementary.

MRS. SOETAERT: It is supplementary?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Yeah, because we have no idea how much.

MRS. SOETAERT: We have no idea what disaster will befall us from year to year, thankfully, and hope that there is nothing. I went and saw the Peace River area, as I know you did. I was quite distressed by the lack of prompt action, and I would urge the minister to act with a little more speed if he can, I guess I would say.

I want to ask a question about the rural utility grants and services expenditures, item 4.0.1. They're expected to increase from \$6.1 million to \$6.4 million. Would you mind explaining what those expenditures are for? Since Gas Alberta has been privatized, I guess I don't understand where this will come in. If it's privatizing, shouldn't the expenditures go down? Or is that going to be to help them set up? Would you mind clarifying how that funding works and where in the budget we would see savings to the taxpayers from this privatization? I know I have expressed some concern about the privatization of rural gas. I worry that some farmers in isolated areas may end up really paying dearly for their natural gas, so I don't feel a complete level of comfort with that bill, and I know the minister knows that.

One more thing. I got a call from a person in southern Alberta who was talking about highway 3. I know the minister is more familiar with that, probably, than I, but I did want to just comment that he for one wanted the highway to go right through the town. Now, I don't know what the town has been saying about that and what the decision was. I brought my map. I'll find it yet. One of the things that he had heard – and it was rumours around the town, so you know how far you can trust rumours. Down south, highway 3. Barnwell. He was wondering if there couldn't be an overpass so that the traffic would be right through Barnwell and not bypass it. Now, I have no idea what the municipality and the town asked for, so I'm just expressing those concerns on his behalf.

The other thing he had heard was that some people were getting a phenomenal – phenomenal – amount of money for selling their land to the transportation department and others were not. Some were bragging about it because they were friends of someone or had connections to somebody. I just took it for rumour, but I'll give it to the minister to maybe check into to see if it is true that it's a fair price that people are buying and selling their land for and that one person isn't making a fine dollar off this government and another person is. Actually, maybe you could explain to me how that works and if it is a standard price when you buy land for highway construction. I would appreciate that. I said I would bring it up. I have no proof, and that's why I'm not asking it in question period. But I did say I would bring it to your attention in estimates. So I'd appreciate that.

I know my colleagues have many questions. I think I've touched on some of the things I wanted to talk about. If I have a chance, I can, hopefully, speak again.

To end, I can't stress enough the importance of 794. The day it is widened, I will invite the minister and his staff out for coffee, because you'll have to travel on 794 to get to my home. I could even find a doughnut for you if you and your staff came. That's not a bribe in any sense, but I just want to tell the minister how very important that highway is. I know you get my letters almost weekly, my little notes about the accidents that happen on that highway and the deaths that happen far too often. Every time there is an accident on that highway, as around your home town when there's an accident on a highway, you know that you know that person. It's not a matter of if but usually a matter of when you're going to be in an accident on that highway. So I would urge the minister to please try to work with Sturgeon county and try to get that with shoulders. Once we're doing it, try to make it wide enough to change a tire on the side.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

8:31

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Minister, for sitting here and taking some questions. As I travel around the province as Municipal Affairs critic on secondary roads and in the towns and cities and so on, I'm hearing the same thing all the time. Is the government listening to us when we tell you about our pressure points? Are you taking it into one big overall scheme? One thing that you find in the small towns when you get out into the western part of the province where logging has been a main industry for a number of years is that they have the same complaints that we're finding closer to the city of Edmonton and where the logging is really pounding the roads. With the wet spring last year this has been a major concern as to actually what's going to be done and so on.

One of the items that I've been watching – and we've asked you this question in question period too. On the \$100 million extra funding to the municipalities last year to deal with the growing problems related to the criteria of infrastructure, I can see in the line figures how much is going into the north and south, the dollars and cents that are actually going back to the municipalities. You also say there's a three-year plan out there. Is that on a crisscross grid system throughout the whole province?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: The three-year plan was for primary only. The one-year plan, for secondary.

MR. GIBBONS: Oh, okay. The other thing, too, is that under rural and urban transportation partnerships, 2.4 and 2.5, program budgets are getting cut by a total of \$28.4 million. To the minister: do you feel that that figure . . .

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Which line is that?

MR. GIBBONS: Lines 2.4 and 2.5 in the budget. The cut is \$28.4 million. You don't have to answer that now but when the questions get asked.

The feedback I'm getting from a lot of the municipalities is that they feel like they're being ignored on this particular line figure. Also under the same line, 2.4, rural municipal transportation partnerships, it says here that expenditures are expected to be cut by \$18.4 million, from \$157.9 million to \$139.5 million. Urban transportation partnerships expenditures under line 2.5 are expected to be cut by \$10 million, from \$58.6 million to \$48.6 million. Now, municipalities have been saying for quite some time – and this is adding to a lot of the questions that have been

coming back to me – that their infrastructure needs are being ignored.

The Growth Summit asked the government to implement a stable funding plan for infrastructure. Municipalities are having difficulty planning without the cut to municipal transportation in this budget. One can only assume, which I've been pushing, that maybe the Growth Summit hasn't been looked at as much as we thought, as you were mentioning in number one. The question to you is, Mr. Minister, alluding to this: can the minister point out the recommendations in the government's Growth Summit which suggest that a \$30 million cut from municipal support for transportation was needed? Why does the minister insist on downloading onto municipalities when he knows that they're pushing for this?

Now, this relates to last year's figures, but the government is planning on \$36 million more of a download. My question to that is: why is this cut needed?

Decrease of the MAG. Municipal assistance grants have really gone considerably down, from \$113 million in '92-93 to zero this coming year. When I point out these figures and we talk about these figures, these are major concerns. Your 20 percent decrease plus the decrease to municipal road grants since '92 and the secondary highway partnership programs, municipal share, is virtually, I understand, \$30.3 million in '97-98, and approximately \$95 million has dropped since '94.

What I was trying to listen to before and what you were mentioning is the partnerships for municipal and rural utilities. That all those things are kind of wrapping together is what I'm hearing more and more from out in the country. Under 4.0.1, rural utility grants and services, expenditures are expected to go from \$6.1 million to \$6.4 million. My question to you on this one, though, is: what exactly are these expenditures for? Since Gas Alberta is being privatized, shouldn't some of these expenditures go down? Could the minister clarify how the funding works and where the budget would be saving taxpayers from this privatizing?

Mr. Minister, I'll sit and listen, and I'll see if I can get some answers on that. If there are more afterwards, I'd like to ask more.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, are you ready yet?
Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I've got a number of questions for the Minister of Transportation and Utilities.

Mr. Minister, let me start off by asking about an issue that I think has been raised with your office before through correspondence. I have to suggest that the response hasn't been entirely satisfactory. It has to do with cellular call boxes. Some of the correspondence was with your predecessor minister, but this had to relate to I think it was back in 1993 when the province entered into a contract with Polar Safety-Tel Ltd. This had to do with the provision of 4,000 call boxes on, I guess, Alberta primary highways. The minister can confirm this. I'm not sure whether this is under element 2.1.5 or where I'd find it in the budget, but what I'm interested in, in particular – my understanding is that some \$240,000 was paid out, and the issue had been, since there are a number of businesses in the province that provide cellular call boxes, why this would be done on a nontendered basis. I believe I heard that the city of Calgary is moving to an open tendering process. I guess my question would be: is the province going to follow suit? For those of us that operate on sort of a first principle basis that tendering always ought to be the practice

when dealing with public funds, I'd be interested in the position of the ministry in that respect.

The other thing. Mr. Minister, I've listened to you numerous times speak about the north/south corridor. That would be element 2.3.5. I certainly understand the importance of the north/south linkage, but the estimates I've got – and the minister can tell me if I'm wrong – is that we're talking approximately 2,000 vehicles a day at Coutts, 15,000 vehicles per day between Lacombe and Leduc, 15,000 to 20,000 vehicles per day between Calgary and Red Deer. Now, if those numbers aren't accurate, that's what I've been advised.

8:41

In the city I represent, Mr. Minister, through the chair, just by way of contrast, we're talking about 120,000 vehicles a day on the Glenmore causeway, we're talking about 85,000 vehicles a day on the Macleod Trail, 14,000 vehicles a day on 4th Street N.W., up to 40,000 vehicles a day on 56th Street N.E. So I'm having difficulty understanding how it is that the province is prepared to make the substantial commitment in terms of the north/south highway when the fastest growing city in the province and indeed in the nation, the city that arguably is anchoring or driving most of the economic activity that's come to Alberta in the last short while – and I don't mean to exclude other centres, but when you look at the numbers, whether it's housing starts or unemployment, it's clear that Calgary is driving much of this. I'm having some difficulty understanding the decision of the provincial government to make the kind of commitment that's been made to north/south transportation when we have such high traffic volumes with the consequential problems in the city of Calgary.

Mr. Minister, I know I've heard you say in the past, "Well, Calgary is on the north/south corridor," but the reality is the difficulty that Calgary businesspeople report to me, what I hear from the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, what I hear from people relocating to the city of Calgary, people contemplating relocation to the city of Calgary. There is enormous concern not about getting north/south – we have the Deerfoot Trail for that – but people getting in from industrial areas and downtown Calgary, from east to west. Those are major, major issues in a city that to a large extent is the locomotive of our economic growth. So I'd like you to address that apparent imbalance between the commitment to that north/south program and what, I respectfully suggest, is some serious underfunding in the city of Calgary.

I remember a time when this province made a very major commitment. The Member for Calgary-Cross or some of the people who were on Calgary's city council at the time would remember. I remember when this province made a commitment to the major centres. This was involved with the light rail transit. It seemed to me there was a very substantial infusion of provincial dollars that made that happen. I daresay we wouldn't have the light rail transit systems we have currently in Edmonton and Calgary if it had not been for a very substantial, generous, long-term commitment from the province of Alberta, from the transportation ministry. That was at a time, Mr. Minister, through the chair, when Calgary was growing at a significantly more modest pace than we're witnessing right now. Between '91 and '96 Calgary's population has grown by 8 percent. That's 85,000 people. The morning peak vehicle kilometres of travel has been up 16 percent. The hours of delay have increased by 25 percent.

The significance is that businesspeople tell me they're becoming increasingly frustrated. They thought that by relocating their business to Calgary – this wasn't Etobicoke, this wasn't the lower mainland where traffic gridlock are constant problems. Calgary used to have a first-class transportation system. What they're

experiencing now is prejudice to their business interests, to their commercial interests, to their profitability simply because of congestion in the city of Calgary. The city of Calgary has estimated – and I'd be interested, Mr. Minister, if you accept or dispute the estimate. I've been told that the annual cost of delay has been estimated by the city of Calgary planners at \$21.5 million.

Mr. Minister, it seems to me that all of these advantages that we hear spoken of in this Assembly on a daily basis – about the Alberta advantage, about a booming economy – all of that is frankly at risk if we can't ensure we've got a transportation system, not just at Coutts, Alberta, not just at Red Deer, not just at Claresholm but in the four different quadrants of the city of Calgary.

The traffic volumes, I understand, on Glenmore Trail and Crowchild Trail have increased by 46 percent in the last 10 years. I understand that in the city of Calgary every morning at 83 different intersections the actual traffic volume exceeds the design capacity. In 1991 it was only 68 intersections where we had that problem.

I want to specifically address the question of transit ridership. I want to know, Mr. Minister, because I don't see it anywhere in your business plan, what the position currently is of the Department of Transportation and Utilities relative to promoting public transit. My understanding is – and I suspect this is true of Edmonton as well, but it certainly is true of the city of Calgary – that transit ridership is anticipated to be up to 65 million revenue passengers in 1997. That's up 4 million rides from last year. The expectation is Calgary is going to grow in the next eight years by 20 percent. That's an increase of more than 160,000 more people. I'm advised by the city of Calgary that if you were to announce tomorrow that there would be another \$40 million available to the city of Calgary, we wouldn't see a single piece of pavement for perhaps two, two and a half years.

My concern, Mr. Chairman, is that in this budget, in the business plan summary, I see talk about “reinvesting in strategic highway improvements.” What could be more strategic, Mr. Minister, through the chair, than making a commitment now to cities like Calgary and perhaps other areas of high growth so that those urban growth centres, economic engines, locomotives, are going to be able to do the planning to keep pace with that population growth? It may be that something changes radically and that population suddenly is capped or slows or whatever. I think what we can do now is make the best decisions we can on the best information available to us. It sure seems to me, with respect, Mr. Minister, that the information is that the gap between need and resources in the transportation area is just going to continue to grow. My concern is not so much for my constituents or Calgary businesses in 1998-99. My concern is what's going to happen in the year 2000-2001.

I'm speaking generally, because as I look through the budget that's particularly identified and broken down, I see two things missing. I see the concrete commitment in terms of dollars required now, but what's more worrisome, Mr. Minister, is that I don't see the planning in terms of how we're going to manage this huge population. It may be happening. I'm sure you've got people in your department that work over the same statistics that the city of Calgary does, and if they're projecting something different, I wish you'd share that with us, because the information I've got on the city of Calgary suggests that we're headed to some fairly major concerns.

What the city of Calgary projects – and I'm going further than the current budget year, but I've tried to explain why I'm doing that – as I understand it, Mr. Minister, is that with the anticipated

population growth, the gap is going to be in the order of about \$280 million, \$290 million between what the province is indicating they will pay and what the city of Calgary has identified they need. If the minister has different information, I hope he'll advise us.

8:51

I'd mentioned before the lower mainland in British Columbia, where they've had some really major transportation problems. One of the things they have done, which I think is a very positive move, was to create the Greater Vancouver Regional District. What they've done is they've integrated for transportation purposes. I see the minister nodding, so he's way ahead of me again.

Two things are happening there that are different from what's happening in Alberta. Firstly, there are dedicated fuel taxes. I'm not clear whether it's 100 percent of fuel taxes or a portion that go back to the Greater Vancouver Regional District. The other thing they do is that on all major projects there's cost sharing between that greater Vancouver regional entity and the counterpart in British Columbia to your department. We've seen some very successful collaborative processes in the past between your department and the bigger centres. My question would be: why aren't we doing that now? The need is here, and I just think something ought to be addressed. I'm interested in your comments on that.

The other thing I'd just say. I salute the initiative to consolidate a number of different highway statutes under the traffic safety act. I've always supported the notion, Mr. Minister, that laws should be simpler and consolidated wherever possible. I think that's a terrific initiative. I think it's confusing; it's inefficient to have all those separate statutes. It makes great sense to consolidate those things in a single statute. I for one would be happy to support that initiative when it comes into the House and we're ready to deal with that.

Those are my concerns, and I'd surely appreciate it, Mr. Minister, if you get the chance to address them before we finish the debate tonight.

Thanks, Mr. Minister. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

[Mrs. McClellan rose]

THE CHAIRMAN: To ask questions?

MRS. MCCLELLAN: Yeah. Is that okay?

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd have to take that under advisement, hon. minister. It was my understanding – and I'd have to check it – that members of the Executive Council don't normally ask questions during supply. If that's not so, then I stand to be corrected, but that's my understanding. I can't give you a quote right now.

In any event, hon. minister, are you ready yet, or would you like to hear further questions? I have two people that have indicated that they are interested in continuing to talk. One is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. The other one alluded to it several times during her initial questioning, so we'll take her after that, that being Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll apologize in advance because I'm going jump around a bit in some of these questions, and I hope you can bear with me. I have a few questions based on your performance measurements. I'm finding

these performance measurements in any of the departments a little confusing, because somehow the government always seems to score in the 90 percentile and up, yet I can still see some problems out there. Under goal 3, managing the primary highway system, I find that the performance measurement is really vague. I am not clear on what exactly is being measured, so if I could get some clarification on that.

How does the department define desirable standards? I'm also wondering if the users of the highway system are being asked if they think the standards are desirable or if their opinions, wants, needs, and desires are being reflected in what the department is doing.

I have to express some concerns about disasters. I am concerned that there is no money that regularly appears in the budget, that it's a system of using the supplementary estimates to accommodate the requirements for money for disaster services or for disasters. We pretty much have at least a disaster a year, so I do question . . . He's shaking his head. Well, okay. Then I guess I'd be interested in seeing that.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Five this year and none last year.

MS BLAKEMAN: Five this year and none last year. I still would appreciate getting the rationale, in writing would be fine, on why that money does not appear.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: That's it: five this year and none last year. [interjection]

MS BLAKEMAN: Through the chair. Sorry. The chairman is to be complimented on the congenial atmosphere that they create in the Chamber and the amount of work that is able to be done as a result.

Okay. So I have an answer to that. I will respectfully disagree with you if that's the reasoning.

There's 100 percent on the performance measurements for response to major disasters and emergencies. What's the rationale behind this performance measurement? I'd be interested in knowing that, seeing as the department scores 100 percent across the board.

I will pass on the concerns that were given to me over the apparent difficulty in a faster response to those that were in a disaster. My hon. colleague had already mentioned that there seemed to be an awful lot of negotiation going on with the feds about who would pay for what. I appreciate that the province will try and get as much assistance as possible, but that did seem to stretch out the time line for which people could actually look forward to amounts and what exactly they were going to be getting. I'll admit that in Edmonton-Centre, a metropolitan area, we don't tend to get too many of those kinds of disasters, but that is the feedback from people that did phone in to me around that, their concern over the time and what appeared to be excessive infighting with the federal government about who would pay what.

Now, I would appreciate a bit of guidance here. Under goal 1, improving traffic safety, streamlining the legislation, I notice that they will be consolidating a number, or all, of the statutes that affect motor vehicles and transportation, including the Off-highway Vehicle Act, which of course covers snowmobiles, which of course is a passion for me. So I'm wondering what we can expect by way of changes there. I'm wondering if there's any money that's involved with any changes in the Off-highway Vehicle Act. I'm wondering if the program – and I'm sorry; the acronym is slipping my mind. I think it's called SAVE or WAVE. It's about snowmobiling safety. I know that the RCMP

have been involved in safety checks of vehicles, whether they're loaded on trailers or whether they're stopping machines that are crossing the highways at allowable crossing stops. So I'm quite interested in this streamlining of legislation and how it will specifically affect snowmobilers, whether there will be additional fees.

9:01

I'll also pass on to you comments that have been brought to me, a desire to look into the possibility of allocating a portion of gas taxes to improving snowmobile trails. I think I'm wandering a bit off the specifics in your department of transportation, and I will certainly redirect that inquiry if it's inappropriate to be putting it to you.

Now, I'm also wondering about rail systems which fall under the responsibility of this department and whether there is any money in this budget for this year around unused rail lines being turned over for the Trailnet program, which, as you know, is an excellent program. There was a motion debated in the last sitting put forward by the Member for Red Deer-South. I'm very supportive of this program. As I learn more about it, I understand that at some point the responsibility for the rail lines passes through this department's jurisdiction or portfolio responsibility. Is there anything that I can be doing to assist or encourage the department to consider passing some of these rail lines on to the Trailnet program for a reasonable cost? So two parts to that question: are there any lines coming up that could be going towards this program, and two, is there any money in the budget that would be assisting that transference of the rail lines?

I understand that there's a process now that is to be followed in having the rail lines transferred back from the national rail lines, and then they're offered for short line linkage to private sale, and then it also goes through a process of being offered to – I'm sorry. Off the top of my head, I can't remember the whole process. I am trying to encourage this government wherever possible to get involved in this program, partly because I think that if we're shooting for a really good provincial program for 2005, a Trailnet program linking all of Alberta for multi-use is an excellent idea, and I think the government might be working towards that. So wherever I can encourage you there, I certainly intend to. I think this will become my own personal 794, much to the minister's chagrin, no doubt.

The one other thing that I wanted to comment on and to pass on comments that I have received is the concern over privatization of inspections. I know that the minister has heard a great deal about that, and I obviously don't see anything in the budget that is suggesting that any of these privatized inspections would be brought back inside the department. But I will let the minister know that this is an issue of concern. Inspection services is something that a number of people expect the government to do because they are an interested third party. They're not involved in running a trucking company or being potentially a victim. They're seen as a responsible outside party that can do the inspections in a – I don't want to say disinterested – interested way, and people in Edmonton-Centre certainly feel strongly that the government should not be giving over that role. They feel strongly that this is – what's the farm analogy? – having the fox look after the chicken coop. That's one of the things that's been passed on to me. I realize that there's nothing in this plan, and the minister obviously at present has no intention of reversing this privatization of inspection services, but I will pass on to the minister the concerns that have been expressed to me around this.

So those were the things I wanted to bring to the minister's attention: the streamlining of the legislation, particularly the Off-

highway Vehicle Act; disaster services; the Trailnet and the rail lines being passed over to that; and the privatization of inspections. Thank you for the opportunity to ask you these questions and to bring forward the concerns that were brought forward to me. I appreciate the opportunity.

Thank you.

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

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you to all the members for the questions that were asked. I think they were all good fair questions, and certainly we'll try and answer those that we can. I think we can answer most of them here today.

Starting with Edmonton-Centre, the concern about the privatization of inspection services. I just want to share with you that we audit the inspection services. We still have a process firmly in place that measures the inspection process. Consequently if something goes off track, we're in a very, very strong position to be able to monitor and react and to see that it's performing well. Quite frankly, I receive very, very few complaints about the inspection process. This is not one of the hot topic items that we have calls on. So from that perspective at least it's not one of the items that really is causing us an awful lot of turmoil.

Regarding accidents. Fair. We're not good. We had 94,000 accidents last year. That's not acceptable. Three hundred and sixty-four deaths. That's not acceptable. Those are stats that we've got to continue to work on. Having said that, 86 percent of the accidents last year were as a result of driver error. That is not good either. Consequently, we all have to assume that responsibility, because indeed those are things where, really, it doesn't matter what you do as government; it's not going to fix that. We have to be able to see that the people learn how to drive appropriately. It's not just defensive driving; it's driving according to the rules that are already there.

Surprisingly, the stat on drinking and driving, 6 percent, is not anywhere near what I would have thought it would be. Yet 23 percent of the casualties are a result of drinking and driving. Speeding is somewhat the same. Ten percent of the accidents are a direct result of speeding, but 27 percent of the casualties are a result of accidents that involve speeding. So the statistics don't tell the total story either, because the severity of the accident, of course, is a result of some of these other activities.

Eighty-six percent as a result of driver error is not acceptable, and we've got to start working on that. We met this morning with a group regarding heavy truck driver training, those types of things. I think that's what we really have to focus on. We've got to get the people that are driving the roads driving in a safe manner, and as long as everyone obeys the rules of the road, they're going to be driving in a safe manner. Ultimately, at the end of the day, that's what we have to strive to achieve.

The process of rail abandonment. The process basically is the railroads' process. The first step, of course, is to try the short line: sell it off or lease it. The railroads determine which it's going to be. If it doesn't get short-lined, then the offer is to government. By the way, these are very, very expensive purchases, so this isn't something that's got a low price tag to it. After that, of course, usually the local municipality has an option. Then it's out for public offer. Our position basically is that if indeed none of these are willing to jump at the offer, we would prefer to have a local landowner have the first opportunity. This is something very critical and very important to the local landowners, because there's a maintenance problem here that has to be addressed. The maintenance is weed control; the maintenance is

proper administration of that property. So those are some of the issues that have to be put into the mix.

9:11

As far as the Trailnet is concerned, that's under Community Development. It's not one of our responsibilities. We work with Community Development, but it is really under Community Development.

We don't have any money set aside for railroad purchases; you're right. We don't really have any use, so we're not going to be looking at buying railroads. We just sold the Alberta Resources Railway. We had that. We're out of the railroad business. That's not a business for us to be in. We're not railroaders; we're government. There's private enterprise that looks after railroads. That's not something that government should be doing, from our perspective at least. That's where I'm coming from. So I'm not going to be putting money into buying railroads. It's as simple as that.

The gas tax for snowmobile trails I have not heard before. I have met with the snowmobile associations and various groups, but I'd never heard of a gas tax to be dedicated to snowmobile trails. I think that would be a rather tough sell; I think that would be a real challenge. Nevertheless, I can't comment because I have never heard of that. Besides, it's not in my administrative ability to have anything to do with it. That's Treasury. Gas tax is a Treasury item. So again I'm not involved in that.

Goal 1 is the safety initiative, where we're going with improving traffic safety. We have 30 stakeholder groups that basically we work with. We ask them for their recommendations and work very closely with them. They establish the recommendations and bring forward recommendations. We are looking at comprehensive legislation. We're still in consultation with the stakeholder groups, and that's why we're a little behind in bringing this forward at this stage of the sitting. Nevertheless, it's still our hope to be able to do that this spring. It's not our intention to pass it this year. What we're hoping to achieve is that it would be there for consultation. In that sense, we are still working at developing the structure of amalgamating the four pieces of legislation, but it is our intention to bring it forward for discussion purposes so that we can lay it over and allow the people to discuss it. It's comprehensive; it's all-encompassing. It's a major piece of legislation, and I think we want to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to discuss it properly.

As far as goal 7, dealing with disaster services: how do we get 100 percent? There are measures for goal 7, and those are items such as early response, early payout, those types of activities. We have an excellent record on that. We have to realize that there's a process that has to be followed, and that is that the replacement bills have to be presented, the replacement bills are audited, and payout is made. As I recall, with Peace River there were cheques out within 10 days, so I think that's a pretty good process.

We've got some major problems, and I don't mind sharing that with you. I'm hoping to arrange a meeting with the two federal ministers responsible to deal with those major problems. There are two. One, if you do not have majority control of a business, you are totally ineligible. Totally. I don't agree with that and we don't agree with that. That's something we can't change arbitrarily. We have to have federal acceptance of that. The other is that if you have a farm disaster and you work off the farm and you earn substantive revenue off the farm, you're ruled ineligible.

Now, those are difficult. Those are difficult issues to deal with. We have an awful lot of people that work off the farm, and we have an awful lot of businesses that are in partnership. Where the husband and wife are equal partners, you're ruled ineligible. You

have to have 51 percent control of that business in order to be eligible for it. Those are things that we're trying to negotiate to get changed, and I think it's very important that we do get that changed, because in Peace River's case that was where the problem was. That was where the people weren't getting paid, and that's where the frustration was coming from. It wasn't people who were eligible that were complaining. It was strictly those who were ruled ineligible because of the fact that they weren't in control. It was partners in business. It's unfortunate. It's not right. At least I don't think it's right, and I don't agree with it. We're working to try and get that changed.

Again, I'm very proud of the performance of our disaster services people because they were there, in Peace River's case, immediately. In Fort McMurray's case they were there immediately. In Fort Chipewyan's case they were there immediately. In the southern fire they were there immediately. In fairness, Alberta is recognized as having the best disaster services process in all of Canada. In my previous history, when I was on municipal council, I attended a disaster services seminar in Arnprior. This was commonly acknowledged by the professors there and by all the other municipal officials as well, that we were head and shoulders above. Much of Alberta's process is used as instruction for the other provinces. So if there's one area that we really have a wonderful strength in, it is the delivery of the disaster services process.

Who was next here? Calgary-Buffalo. Call boxes. We're hoping by spring to have the call boxes finally out. This has been a long process. The bases are there. The stretch from Calgary to Banff is going to be the first stretch that's going to be used. Hopefully it will work well. It's something that's been worked on very closely with the enforcement offices, with all the agencies and stakeholders that may have some involvement.

MRS. SOETAERT: Why wasn't it tendered?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Why wasn't it tendered? Proposals were called for and submitted, and that's what the process was. These people presented the best proposal, so it's just a matter of wordage and verbiage here. They presented the best proposal, and that's where that came from.

As far as budget is concerned for Calgary, I think Calgary-Buffalo has a good point. I'm certainly not going to argue that indeed growth has to be dealt with. Calgary is an exciting place, a dynamic place in Alberta. It's got the greatest growth component in all of Alberta, and we're going to have to deal with that growth. We're going to have to sit down and work with the stakeholders and find the best way of dealing with that growth. It's as simple as that. We've tried to do that somewhat with our \$100 million that was infused. Of that, \$50 million went to the cities and \$50 million went to the rural. So that was the rough split of the \$100 million. Within the next four to five years \$64 million will go to Calgary for the north/south corridor alone. That's a fairly substantive amount of investment into Calgary. Roughly \$31.5 million will go into Calgary this year with the budget, and there may be some additional money that may flow as well, providing we are going to be able to successfully sign agreements with the city.

Enough money? There's never enough money, quite frankly. Calgary is a dynamic growth centre. We're going to work very closely with Calgary, and I commit to working very closely not only with Calgary but with Fort McMurray. My gosh, that place is just jumping. Brooks is just jumping. Grande Prairie is just jumping. Edmonton is doing very well. So we've got all communities to work with, but these are exciting challenges

really. I think we're very fortunate to be living in a time when we can deal with those kinds of challenges rather than a downturn in the economy, when things are doing the opposite. I think that by working together we can come up with a satisfactory process and a satisfactory solution for all here. It's going to take some creativity, and it's going to have some challenges.

9:21

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo is correct regarding the rapid transit for example. This is something where I'm arranging a meeting with the federal minister as well, because recently when he spoke to the Van Horne Institute in Calgary, he made some fairly strong statements, such as: we've got to get the vehicles off the roads in Canada – that's a pretty profound statement, quite frankly – that rail is being underused and we've got to use more rail, and that emissions are far too great with the vehicular traffic that's out there. These are things that I want to explore with the federal minister, remembering that the federal Department of Transport contributes absolutely zero to Alberta and takes over \$600 million in gasoline tax out of this province every year on an ongoing basis. So I really want to explore with the federal minister just what he's talking about. When he's talking about rail, I would hope that he's talking about rapid transit as well. I'd hope that we could sit down, whatever the process is going to be as far as a national highways programs is concerned, and perhaps come up with some sort of a satisfactory, workable solution that will work.

The traffic is very, very busy in Calgary. I acknowledge that, and certainly there is every justification for focusing on Calgary and working with them to see that we can resolve that. Again, it would be my hope that we can get the federal government involved regarding perhaps extension of rapid transit in both Edmonton and Calgary, and perhaps we can find ways of moving our traffic in the most expeditious and effective way. Certainly we don't know what's going to be coming out of Kyoto, and that may become a factor. But we're going to have to do that together. We're going to have to do that as federal, provincial, and municipal bodies.

The dedication of fuel tax is one that has some pitfalls and one that I think we want to fully explore. It's certainly one that personally I see more downside to than I see upside to, dedicating fuel tax in a specific region or a specific area. I think that's one we want to be a little careful of and one that I personally, as I said, have some concerns about.

Edmonton-Centre, regarding disasters and no money in the budget. Well, if anybody can tell me, if anyone has a vision of what the disasters are going to be this coming year, I'll be willing to lobby Treasury Board to put in some money, if anyone can give me any form of insight as to what the disasters might be and what the implications may be. We do come back with supplementary estimates. The House has an opportunity to deal with the estimates.

With disaster services, remember that we are there within a matter of hours. It's not a matter of mobilizing and then: can we find some money, or where are we going to get the money out of? We respond first, and the money is something that's dealt with after the fact. A disaster is something that's very critical, it's very timely, and it's one that needs an immediate response. So this is not something where we can sit down and talk about money.

For example, we participated in the east's ice storm, and within a matter of hours of the request – and it was three days before we received a request to respond – we had generators on the way to eastern Canada. We were able to do that because of the effective-

ness of our disaster services program. We have a complete inventory of where all the generators are. We know exactly where we could call and who we could respond to. We don't own the generators – and we shouldn't – but we know where they are. Private enterprise has them. We're able to rent them. We move them by rail, we move them by truck, and we move them by air, depending on the urgency and depending on the request. The request was coming from the people that manage disasters, and we responded. Quite frankly, I was very proud of the way that we were able to respond.

Edmonton-Manning. Wet weather was a major factor this year regarding much of our Alberta problems. Again, we advanced the \$100 million, roughly 50-50 for rural. I can give you a breakdown. With the rural transportation grant we gave a onetime funding of \$15 million. Half of that . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Would the subcommittee give unanimous consent to allow the minister to complete his thought?

MRS. SOETAERT: Could we ask a few more questions?

THE CHAIRMAN: Oh, sure. Either we let the minister continue, or we ask some questions to let him come again. Hon. minister, maybe that's just as easy. The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert has her second wind.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: I'm in your hands. Whatever you want to do.

MRS. SOETAERT: That's an offer, Mr. Chairman, that I can't refuse. The minister said he's in my hands. [interjections] Be careful how I say that.

To the chair, yes, because a few of us have a few more questions, and I truly appreciate the minister giving us this opportunity to ask and being very forthright with the answers. You were talking about disaster services. How much of the money that people received was federal dollars? What does that break down to? I've forgotten now. Would it be smart to look at the average money that has been spent on disasters over the years and budget for part of that? I mean, I agree; I don't want to forecast a disaster. It's not an issue of begging for the money when the disaster happens, I'm assuming.

I want to mention that up in the north, where so many of our resources are and the growth is so great, people have mentioned to me – I don't know if it's even in a plan – a road continuing up from Fort McMurray to Fort Chip and then across to High Level. Is that in the plans at all somewhere down the road? People have mentioned that. Certainly when you are in Fort McMurray, you go back down to Athabasca before you ever attempt going to Grande Prairie. So any type of route across northern Alberta: is that in the works? I would just be interested in knowing that.

The railroads we were talking about. I must express some concern. I don't know if it's come to the minister's attention with Bill 23. I know you're putting that in so that we're in line with safety and stuff. The very last section of that bill I would hope is worded wrongly, because it virtually gives the minister the power to change the act without coming back to the Legislature. Usually it has to do with regulations. If the minister could look at section 56, I think it is. I think it's the last section in Bill 23.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Section 56(1).

MRS. SOETAERT: Yes. Thank you; 56(1).

The minister mentioned the trucks and the training program. I'm really glad you brought that up, because that was another.

The PIC program from what I hear has been fairly successful. If we can get more on that, that would be great.

Can the minister tell me how many vehicles have actually lost wheels or how many big units have lost wheels? How do you keep track of those kinds of infractions? I think the fine is fairly low. I can't recall right now what it is for a truck losing a wheel. I would encourage the minister to look at that. I think we've been fortunate so far that we haven't had a tragic accident that I've heard of – I don't know; maybe there have been some people hurt – unless I don't have all the information. I would like to know how many wheels have actually been missing from vehicles.

The don't drink and drive education program. That's out of your department; isn't it? Is that sponsored by your department? Bravo to you. I think it's an excellent campaign. I think young people are far more aware of the hazards of drinking and driving than, let's say, the minister of FIGA when he was young, which was not that long ago. Maybe we can extend that type of educational program to safe driving, because as you said, our accidents are too high, and much of it's attributed to unsafe driving. I don't know; it's just a suggestion. Can we expand that program? The don't-drink-and-drive campaign I think is a good campaign.

I would suspect but I don't know that the stats this year will be lower for accidents just because the weather has been better. I mean, last year we had a lot of icy roads.

9:31

MR. PASZKOWSKI: I hope so.

MRS. SOETAERT: I hope so too. So I'll be interested to see those stats, and we'll thank El Niño if there are less accidents.

Of course safety is tied, though, to the condition of highways. I know some that are so rutted that when it rains, you're virtually hydroplaning as you go along that highway, which of course is 794, and you know I never lose an opportunity to mention that.

I have one question within the budget that I forgot to mention earlier. It's 1.0.4, other corporate services. Would you mind explaining to me what that means? I'm not sure exactly what that entails. So I would appreciate that.

I was also at a meeting with regard to the Yellowhead highway, because it connects the three prairie provinces and of course into B.C. I just want to voice my support for the Yellowhead Highway Association and the work they do, and I know the minister has worked with them. I think I did see the federal minister at something, and at the time I was hoping they would talk about some transfer payments to transportation. I know that they don't. Certainly that's the Trans-Canada highway, in a sense. Is there anything in the works for that? I do appreciate that you've sent the entire plan for the province and what's being done. I don't know if there's a specific plan just on the Yellowhead, or would that be within everybody's constituency where it is marked? Probably. Or is there a comprehensive plan for the Yellowhead highway or wherever it needs improvement?

I know my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo had a few more questions. I truly appreciate the minister's willingness to let us ask questions tonight.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I understand that my colleagues are anxious to afford the minister the chance to finish up the responses, so I only want to add a couple of other questions to the list.

One of the things I've been thinking about, Mr. Minister, is when we talk about key performance measurements. The government has said that they're trying to move towards a more objective assessment of whether we're progressing and so on. One of the things I find odd – and I'm looking at pages 368 and 369 of the budget book. I look through the key performance measurements. We were talking before about some of the issues in Calgary with its rapid urban growth, so when I look at key performance measurements, I see primary highway pavement condition. So the criteria that are being used there are smoothness, riding comfort. I think I understand that.

When we look at level of service on rural primary highways, we're using some internationally used measure: "the ability of traffic to move freely." I guess when I read that, I thought that maybe is a really useful indicator, but why on earth would we only use that when it comes to rural primary highways? Why wouldn't we use that criterion when we're evaluating whether we're advancing or falling behind in Calgary and Edmonton and those large urban centres?

Mr. Minister, you recall that earlier I was giving you some of the statistics that I've received in Calgary in terms of volume on Glenmore Trail and the Crowchild Trail and those heavy arterial routes. It seems to me, if I understand this description in the budget book, that this level of service on rural primary highways would be an instrument that could just as easily be used to equal or greater advantage to measure how we're doing on our big-city routes. Now, maybe there's some reason that wouldn't apply, but it seems to me that if we've got, you know, over a million people in this province living in Edmonton and Calgary, it would be pretty darn significant to find out what's happening in terms of moving those people around. That should be a key concern for the people in your department. So I'd be interested in why we don't use that as a measurement.

The other thing I've been thinking, Mr. Minister. I've been listening carefully to your responses, and one of the things that strikes me is we talk about a per capita grant. I think it's now \$25 per capita, and that had been increased by another \$7.50. Have I got my numbers right? On the face of it, it seems fair and appropriate. But then I got to thinking that in our large urban centres there must be some sort of threshold points where you have qualitatively different issues.

I'm thinking that if you're in Airdrie or Drumheller or Medicine Hat, Alberta, and you say "We're giving you the per capita grant," it seems to me that in effect that may have a very different impact than to a city of 800,000 people, like Edmonton or Calgary. Now, I don't know this. I have no background in urban planning, but it just seems that if one sort of considers it logically, per capita grants in fact may end up giving – and once again, I don't know this – substantial dollars to centres that have a different kind of need than the two bigger urban centres. Perhaps you could address why per capita and if in fact there are within the lexicon and within the study of urban transportation some thresholds that indicate that as a city gets bigger, it requires some substantial capital costs which are very qualitatively different than what would be the case if you had a very small urban centre. I don't know; I just raise that as a question.

Now, the other comment. I appreciate your comment about the call boxes. This isn't some sort of a trick question, but I've seen correspondence from your predecessor, December 5, 1996 – and I'll send you a copy of the correspondence, Mr. Minister. As I read this, it appears that Polar Safety-Tel Ltd. had approached the government in 1993 for the call box trial project and that the government entered into that arrangement and that there was no tendering.

MRS. SOETAERT: Polar's were accepted.

MR. DICKSON: Okay. All right. Well, I misunderstood then, Mr. Chairman. I just want to be clear to the minister. I'm not sure I've got an answer, so I guess my question still is: why was there no tendering for this expenditure? I think that ought to be an element of every substantial expenditure of tax dollars.

So those are the additional questions I wanted to put to the minister. Mr. Minister, thanks for your patience.

Mr. Chairman, thank you.

MR. GIBBONS: Mr. Minister . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: You haven't been recognized yet. I just wanted to check and see if the minister was now going to reply.

We'll now call upon the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

9:41

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a couple of short ones. He answered one of my questions here, on how many dollars are coming from the gas tax, on the federal side. He said \$600 million. The next one is: what portion of a litre of gas does the province receive in fuel tax?

Then the next question. The city of Calgary is one item that they keep talking about, and they keep bringing up the fact that they put in 200 million plus dollars in fuel tax, yet they only get 10 percent of it back.

Then I've got a couple of other items really quickly just so we can get them on the record and so on. On that question that was asked a couple of weeks ago by the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake on the military, you say it's not in the criteria. If I could find out when that is, if it is in the future, if it is planned.

The last one – and this one comes from communities down south that have the major highway, highway 2, going through them – is now that you've privatized, they find that the actual repair and the quickness to repairing that road is very slow. That is your main strip from Calgary through to High River and so on. That's my last question.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Just, I think, two questions and one observation, and thank you for your patience.

You were talking about the number of accidents that were caused by driver error, and I had noticed a public education campaign. I don't watch much television, so it probably wasn't television ads. It might have been radio or posters or something. I'm wondering if there's any more money or any specific money in your budget to cover public education to improve driver training and more awareness. I mean, we know about the ones that are about "don't drink and drive," but I'm specifically looking for a public education program about being a better driver.

Back to the railway lines. One other little point of clarification or encouragement. I wasn't asking for the government to operate rail lines; I'm really just interested in the land. I encourage the department to perhaps in the future – it's not in this budget – look at when the national rail companies offer the lines. They offer them with the rails, and it's possible for the rails to be sold off for scrap. Have I been totally misinformed? Is that what the minister is telling me? Well, darn. I had heard that the rails came with the actual land and could be sold off, which would almost pay for the land.

Also an encouragement. I'm sure that the local participants in Trailnet and other recreational groups would be interested in getting into a partnership or perhaps assuming responsibility for keeping the trails open. We were talking about weed problems and maintenance of the line. So that was just a little bit of encouragement on that one, and the one question that I had.

Thank you very much for the additional time.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Just on the last one, we're very interested in working with the snowmobile associations, not only the snowmobile associations but the Trailnet people, the walking trails and all. Certainly we're most open and most receptive to working with them as far as developing some sort of a trail network in Alberta.

Rails. Yes, you can probably buy the rail line with rails, or you can buy it without rails. But the rails are very, very expensive. So, again, we're not in the business of railroading. We're not in the business of railroad salvaging. You can buy with rails, but you have to have a lot of money.

By the way, just for everyone's benefit, the hockey score is 3 to 1 for Edmonton with less than five minutes left. Just to have everyone in touch.

Last year we spent \$2 million on public education, so it's something that's very critical. It's something that we stress and put a lot of effort into. This is in all areas of safety as far as delivery of safety services for highways. Really it doesn't matter; you can't just pick one element out and focus on that area. We have to do the whole element.

The Bonnyville road: I'm not totally clear what the question was there. Maybe you could clarify.

MR. GIBBONS: The question was . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: You may wish to sit down, and then the hon. member can stand up and ask the question.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: It might be better, because we have to respond and I'm not totally clear.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: The question was from the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake the other day about the building up of the road in Cold Lake by the military. Your answer to it was that wasn't one of the highways that was going to be fixed up. When can we look forward to it?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: The road that was referred to was a local road, and consequently it's not one that the province has priority over. The municipalities look after the rural roads. The secondary roads we work in partnership as far as building, and the municipalities look after. We're responsible for primary roads. This is a local rural road that was referred to.

The question that was asked was: can resource money be placed to develop this road from the resource road program? Now, the resource road program has some qualifications that have to be adhered to. Some of those qualifications are that traffic has to be able to move a resource through a municipality where the resource is not based. So the municipalities that basically have vehicular traffic moving resources through it are getting compensated. They don't get any tax benefit; they don't get anything else. They've still got the cost of maintaining that road.

In this particular case the road is located within the one municipality. It serves one municipality only. The other element

is that there are no resources really moving on the road. The identified resources are energy, forestry, and agriculture. It doesn't qualify under that process. Really, it just didn't qualify under any of the criteria for the resource road program. The question was asked: why not use the resource program to fund that? So that was the answer for that.

The funding for Calgary. Your mathematics weren't very right on that relative to what they get back and relative to what they pay for fuel tax in that, indeed, with the cities they get \$25 per capita. That was the regular. For '97-98 \$7.50 was advanced. They also get \$1,959 per kilometre to maintain primary highways within the city. They also get a 90-10: we pay 90 percent for the building of the primary highways that go through the city as well. Those are funds that cities get over and above the \$25 plus the \$7.50 this particular past year. So they do get additional revenue as well for funding.

The performances: why couldn't the performances for rural roads be used the same as for city traffic? Traffic moving freely is one of the criteria for rural roads. The process is different in the city. You do have stop lights. You do have speed restrictions. You do have all of these other little regulations that really don't apply to rural roads. So trying to use that criterion just doesn't work.

Just in case we do run out of time, I want to make sure that Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert recognizes that 17 kilometres of 794 from highways 16 to 37 will have side slope improvement and overlay in '98. So that's a pretty substantive infusion of funding. I think that's a fairly substantive involvement really.

MS CALAHASEN: That's a lot of funding. I wanted that, and you got it. I was just begging for pavement, and I didn't get it.

MRS. SOETAERT: I've been begging for five years.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members of the committee, we only have one person that's speaking and standing at the same time, and that's the hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities. Other members know who they are, and we would hope that they would contain their thoughts for a few minutes more.

9:51

MR. PASZKOWSKI: The question regarding vote 1.0.4, what are the corporate services? Reporting are the personnel services, the communications, the finance and administration – the finance and facility services branch leads to the development of annual budgets and things like that – and policy development branch. So indeed those are all part of corporate services.

The PIC program, partners in compliance, has been so successful that most of the other provinces, and certainly Ontario west, are working with us to pattern our program regarding the truck safety. Certainly, the carriers that are involved in this truck safety program are showing profound results. We have something like 28 percent, I believe it is, of trucks that when they're stopped have some problems that are identified. In the partners in compliance we've been able to bring that down and bring that down very dramatically. It's something that not only partners in Canada are looking at but in the United States as well. Eventually, it's a program that we hope we'll be able to have instituted throughout all of Canada. So it's a program that seems to be working and one that hopefully will lead to additional safety on the roads.

The number of wheels lost: I don't have that number. I did see one earlier in the summer, and I really don't want to be sending a number out there, because I may or may not be right.

The drink and drive, safe driving program. I think you are

referring probably to the SADD program – that's the most successful one – students against drunk driving. That is one that's been most effective. As far as drinking and driving, the area that is dropping the most – and it's 25 percent – has been the under-30 age group. It's surprising, but that's the area where we've actually had a 25 percent decrease. The other areas are either holding or increasing, so that seems to be the most responsive area.

Stats on highways. About the time you think you know what's causing all the problems out on the roads, you suddenly find that there are some very interesting stats. Fridays, for example, are the highest day of the week, and it's consistent. Fridays always have the most accidents. Late summer has the most accidents. We don't have too many icy roads in late summer, and we don't have too many snowdrifts in late summer. So those are the periods of the year and the days of the week when we have the most accidents. So there are actually some . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: Cancel driving.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Yeah. If we could cancel it, it would be fine.

There are issues involved in highway safety other than the weather conditions, and still we go back to the 86 percent, and we go back to the driver error. That is the one consistent element, and that's the area we've got to keep working on. The only way we can do that one effectively is with education and then follow it up with enforcement. So the two have to work in support of each other, but education still has to be the key. It's something you have to be proactive on.

The wheels lost. We've got well over a thousand people trained now to inspect the wheels as far as trucks are concerned. They have taken the course to be able to identify what the weaknesses are and how to identify a wheel to potentially come off the truck. So that's a program where we're trying to work with the education process as well. I think once we get a full understanding of the various things to look for, we're going to be able to deal with that particular element in an educated manner rather than with a hit-and-miss manner.

As far as the east/west road in the northern part of the province, the hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca, who is head of NADC, is working on a long-range strategy as far as the whole north is concerned. That's come about as a result of the Premiers and their discussions. So together we're working on a long-term plan to deal with roads in the north.

The hon. member has asked if he could ask another question as well. So I'll allow for that.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you. Mr. Minister, if I don't ask this one, the phones will never quit ringing, but it'll also help the Member for Redwater. That is highway 28 going from the military base up just past Gibbons with no shoulders and dark road. It seems like everything seems to be pushing on highway 28A, which is what is called the Gibbons highway. The other aspect, coming from both the town of Bon Accord and the town of Gibbons, is that there's a turnoff from highway 28 into the town of Gibbons, the new entrance onto the new bridge, very dark, very dangerous. It's probably one of the highest accident areas out there. I just want that on the record so you can look into it.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Is the question on highway 28 or 28A?

MR. GIBBONS: Okay. The question is highway 28. Highway 28 goes from 97th street out, and 28A is the one that used to be highway 37, the Gibbons highway. So the actual question is highway 28: no shoulders, narrow road, and also the entrance into Gibbons from that highway, highway 28. It's a major factor and a very big concern out there.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: I have the information. I'd have to look it up, and I think that in the interest of time we'll respond to you in writing.

The federal dollars for disaster: there's a formula. We look after the first two dollars per capita in Alberta. The next two are shared 50-50. The next two are shared 75-25. I'm right on that; am I not? Then anything over and above that is 90-10. You were asking for the formula that's used. So that is where we're at on that.

I'll go back to your original questions. Who co-ordinates bus safety with schools? Gary Boddez is the ADM responsible for safety. I think you may know who he is. In the interest of safety we've actually established a whole area in our department for safety, and Mr. Boddez is the ADM responsible for the delivery of the programs. It's identifying the fact that it is something that's a very major concern to us and one that we have elevated to the point where we want to try and find, not just in school buses but in all areas – school buses are something very important and something that we are focusing on.

As far as replacing the old equipment, of course, that comes out of school divisions' budgets. Nevertheless, we do see that the inspection is conducted, and we will continue to do that. That is something that's very important to us, and we will continue to monitor that very, very closely. That's why we hired the additional staff members.

MRS. SOETAERT: How many transport officers?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: One hundred and twenty-four is what we will eventually have when we're up to full speed.

Weed control on highways. Yes, the first year there were some problems with weed control. So we've had sessions with the people that are basically providing the maintenance on the highways to identify weeds. We've expanded the opportunity so that they can actually hire ag field men as well to help them, which was not allowed at the start.

Mr. Chairman, do you want me to . . . [interjections] We're done; okay. It's past my bedtime.

So I'll commit to a response for all of the questions that may not have been answered today. I want to thank all the members for the questions. We'll move from there.

I move that we rise and report.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities moves that the subcommittee now rise and report. All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Those opposed, please say no. Carried.

[The subcommittee adjourned at 10:01 p.m.]

