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8:01 p.m.

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

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

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call subcommittee B to order, and we're considering the estimates of the Department of Transportation and Utilities. We'll call upon the hon. minister to make his comments.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good evening to everyone. Before I begin, I'd like to introduce some very important people, and that's the members of our department staff. [interjections] Okay. No, we won't go there.

I really want to express my sincerest appreciation and . . . Oh, my God. Where's he from?

MR. HAVELOCK: Hugh, what's your riding?

MR. MacDONALD: Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: We welcome the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

AN HON. MEMBER: Since he's the only one here.

THE CHAIRMAN: Order.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: I didn't say that.

Nevertheless, I want to take this opportunity of welcoming our staff, who basically represent a department of 761 employees. The work they have done has been very, very significant as far as the development of our infrastructure these past years, and certainly I sincerely want to express my appreciation to Ed McLellan, my deputy; to Jay Ramotar, the ADM responsible for regional services; to Lyle O'Neill, the ADM responsible for planning and technical services; to Mr. Reshke, responsible for corporate services; to Gary Boddez, traffic safety services, and certainly Mr. Boddez has worked very hard in the development of our traffic safety act as well as all his staff, and we very much appreciate that; and to the director of communications, Leanne Stangland. We will later be joined by my executive assistant, Mr. Hlus, who is so capable in responding to so many of the requests of not only my colleagues but to the members of the opposition as well. We want to express our thank you to each and every one of you.

The 1999-2000 estimates of Transportation and Utilities frame how we will contribute to Alberta's prosperity and economic development by ensuring the provision of a safe and effective transportation system; municipal water/wastewater facilities; and disaster and emergency services. We support the provincial government's theme of strong financial management by ensuring the

provision of the best value transportation and water/wastewater infrastructure.

As a follow-up to recommendations resulting from the September 1997 Alberta growth summit, the Premier established a Task Force on Infrastructure in the spring of 1998 to examine ways to support necessary improvements to transportation systems in Alberta's municipalities. The improvements are necessary in order to accommodate economic and population growth pressures and to deal with the problem of aging infrastructure. The recommendations of the task force were announced August 24, 1998, calling for additional multiyear funding to be provided to municipalities, as well as less complex methods of administering existing transportation funding. These recommendations are reflected in our three-year business plan.

Work will continue with a number of ministries to address specific issues and ongoing initiatives and to increase our effectiveness and efficiency. Some of these initiatives include participation in the development of an Alberta strategy on climate change, implementation of the recommendations of the Premier's Task Force on Infrastructure, assistance in the development of a co-ordinated provincial strategy for municipalities, and participation in the western Canadian corridors and ports initiative.

As I mentioned earlier, the Premier's Task Force on Infrastructure recommended additional funding for municipalities. The commitment of \$150 million in infrastructure funding in '99-2000 will help Alberta's largest cities cope with the challenges of growth pressures and help the province's rural communities upgrade highways to support current and proposed resource development. The \$150 million is the first part of a three-year infrastructure plan that totals \$450 million and is included in the 1999-2000 business plan. The additional funding is being provided to help deal with transportation pressures that municipalities are facing as a result of population growth, aging infrastructure, and increased economic development. The city of Calgary will receive an additional \$31.1 million in '99-2000 for a backlog of transportation projects resulting from the significant growth that the city is experiencing.

MS CALAHASEN: That's the work of the MLAs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: It's the good work of the MLAs. That's right.

Edmonton and neighbouring cities in the capital region will receive \$29.3 million in the coming year to complete the highway 2 and Ellerslie Road interchange and other local and transit priorities. The province will also commit an additional \$10 million to other Alberta cities. Rural municipalities and Métis settlements will benefit from an additional \$40 million for local roads in '99-2000, including \$20 million for a new resource road/new industry program. Towns and villages will receive an additional \$12 million under the streets improvement program, which we are continuing this year based on a task force recommendation, and \$4 million dollars under

the resource road/new industry program. Our estimates for '99-2000 also include \$29 million in additional funding for completion of the rural component of the north/south trade corridor and the rural primary highway program to address high-growth areas.

It's intended that the initiatives I've just mentioned will each receive additional funding for the second and third years of our business plan, similar to that of '99-2000, and thus the additional total funding of \$450 million that is contained in our '99-2002 business plan.

I would at this time like to highlight a few other aspects of our estimates for this year. Through supplementary estimates we've advanced \$12.5 million in '98-99. As a result the '99-2000 capital expenditures were decreased by \$6.5 million for the north/south trade corridor and \$6 million for primary highway construction projects. This adjustment was due to the good weather that we had in '98-99 which enabled us to accelerate construction projects scheduled for this year, as well as our early tendering initiative.

You may also notice that the ministry has reported revenue of \$71.7 million as internal government transfers. This is from the lottery fund. Sixty-five million dollars will go toward construction of the north/south trade corridor, and \$6.7 million is being provided to the city of Calgary for the new Calgary airport access on 96th Ave. As well, \$86 million is requested for primary highway rehabilitation. This is an increase of \$20 million from last year. Increases in rehabilitation funding last year and this year will help maintain the integrity of our primary highway system. Our budget for primary highway maintenance this year is \$97 million.

I'd be remiss if I didn't also mention some of the ministry's other major initiatives before concluding. We're working on implementation of an infrastructure management system, a state-of-the-art system that will enhance the ability of the department to prioritize construction, rehabilitation, and maintenance on the primary highway network. We'll continue to implement the traffic safety initiative by working in partnership with stakeholder groups to improve traffic safety provincially. As well, we'll undertake an evaluation of the results of the first three years of the program and implement changes if they are needed.

We are streamlining legislation by amalgamating the Highway Traffic Act, the Motor Transport Act, the Motor Vehicle Administration Act, and the Off-highway Vehicle Act into one traffic safety act. We'll also be paying close attention to our staff and their needs by implementing a corporate human resource plan that deals with training, succession planning, and teamwork. We'll participate in the joint industry workforce development initiative to develop a transportation infrastructure career development program, and we'll be undertaking a stakeholder satisfaction survey.

Before closing I'd like to point out yet one more example of business choosing Alberta as a home base due to the Alberta advantage. Jim Pattison Lease is relocating its vehicle leasing division from Vancouver to Calgary, and as you know, Pattison has a contract for our government vehicles. In addition to the cost savings that we're realizing from outsourcing these operations, Pattison's relocation is obviously an additional Alberta economic development benefit.

8:11

I believe everything I've outlined today is evidence of Alberta Transportation and Utilities' continuing commitment to the economic prosperity and the development of this province. Prosperity and development result in growth challenges for our transportation and utility infrastructure. But with reinvestment and creative solutions we'll grasp all opportunities that will successfully see Alberta into the 21st century.

I'd now be happy to take questions. If I'm not able to provide the answers today or if we don't have sufficient time to provide those answers, I assure you that you will receive the answers in written or verbal form at some time shortly hereafter.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to once again get to ask the minister of transportation a few questions regarding his department and its budget. The minister of transportation always has his sleeves rolled up, and he's always anxious, it appears, to get to work. He does this rather modestly, even with a small increase in the minister's office budget. He's certainly running a significant department . . .

MS CALAHASEN: A tight ship.

MR. MacDONALD: . . . a tight ship, with his budget. It's always, as I said before, a pleasure to discuss this with him.

We need in this province, of course, to continue to be a good model for managing growth. With all the significant changes that have occurred, managing this growth can sometimes be very difficult. I read with interest in the growth summit, which the minister talked about - I'm talking about the big growth summit that occurred at the Shaw Conference Centre a little over a year ago. There are so many summits that a guy can easily get confused. But in the big growth summit we talked about the significant increase in the number of heavy vehicles traveling on the roads and highways of this province. There was a 35 percent increase in heavy vehicle traffic. In order to accommodate that, the roads, as the minister spoke about, constantly need rehabilitation and repair. This is a big job, and it's a big job on a limited budget. I think the taxpayers of this province owe a bit of gratitude to the minister and his staff. It's very important because they are providing safe and convenient routes of transportation for the province. By the province I mean people in the industry that employ so many of us. However, there's always room for improvement.

In my own constituency the largest single issue facing our constituency on the east side of Edmonton, of course, is the transportation issue, and that's the inner ring road within the city and the location of that inner ring road. The priority at the moment with the city is to complete the southwest section, and the minister talked about this also. He talked about the interchange at highway 2 and Ellerslie Road and the continuation on the construction of the north/south trade corridor.

We are very pleased that there is a development of a north/south trade corridor, at least I am. I see this some day. Goods coming from Peace River can travel south to markets not only in America but also in Mexico. The sooner we can complete this, I believe the better off we will be.

To see the twinning of the highway west of the city and north at some point in time up to Grande Prairie will be significant. I would ask the minister at what point in I understand his expedited schedule will we see the complete twinning of the highway between, let's say, Spruce Grove and Grande Prairie? When can we drive to Grande Prairie on a twinned highway?

Can he also explain to all members of this Assembly the update on the financing of the bridge over the North Saskatchewan River that will be part of the Anthony Henday, the north/south trade route over to 23rd Avenue and highway 2? How much is that bridge going to cost? When can the officials in the city of Edmonton start construction on that?

We consider that route to be very important, but I would like the minister also to consider at some time putting a priority on the northeast section of the ring road. It would be an excellent economic advantage for the city as we see the industry expand in the northeast section of the city. We also see the industry in Fort Saskatchewan is growing. There has been another plant construction announced in Fort Saskatchewan. We have the significant industrial development in Joffre. All this is related. If we had the northeast section of the outer ring road of the city of Edmonton complete and connected to 14X, then all this heavy vehicle traffic that may want to go between Joffre, Red Deer, Calgary, and Fort Saskatchewan, and maybe on to Fort McMurray could get around the city quite efficiently. I would like the minister to consider this in his priority plans. I think it is very vital for the continued economic growth of this city.

I have some other questions as well for the minister. When I talk to municipal officials, they're certainly disappointed with the per capita spending on transportation. In the future if we could work something out with Mayor Smith and his councillors, they would be delighted to hear that. The transportation corridors in this city are congested, and I think it's going to take very, very good planning to alleviate some of the traffic congestion.

I understand that it is not nearly as bad here as it is in Calgary. Mr. Chairman, I've been in Calgary at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and I found the traffic flow slow. I can certainly sympathize with Calgarians when they complain about traffic gridlock. Certainly with the dramatic growth that has occurred, the transportation infrastructure has not been able to keep up. The quality of life of any urban area cannot be just measured by the amount of time that it takes you to get from point A to point B.

Specific questions for the minister. I would like to start then on program 2, construction and operation of transportation systems, and in particular at 2.4.2, resource roads and new industry. We have \$20 million earmarked for the operating expense. That's a slight increase from last year, but could you describe for me what exactly is the operating expense in relationship to a resource road in new industry. Is that after it's built? Is that some sort of maintenance of the road? Is it snow removal in the far north? If you could explain that operating expense for me, I would be very, very grateful.

8:21

Now I have some questions regarding traffic safety services, on line 2.1.1, the increase of nearly \$1.8 million, to \$20.4 million. What is the increase planned for in traffic safety services? I understand that in the business plan goal 5 is "improving traffic safety." That's an initiative I'm curious about. If the minister in due time could provide an answer, I would be very grateful.

The issue of traffic safety. Now, according to Alberta traffic collision statistics, in 1997 Alberta recorded the second highest fatality rate in Canada. Only Saskatchewan, I understand, had a higher rate. The fatality rate for 1997 is up from the previous year, and the nonfatal injury rate has increased every year for the last five years. What is the minister doing to improve safety?

I have another question that's related to that. Now, heavy truck traffic in rural Alberta has been permitted, I think it was three years ago - and the minister may correct me if I'm wrong; it may have been four years ago. The speed limit was increased to 100 kilometres an hour. [interjection] Five years ago. Pardon me. I'm wondering if his department is doing any monitoring to compare safety statistics before the speed limit was increased and what is going on now. I would be very grateful if he could provide that to me.

Also, further on the issue of truck safety, total traffic increased 7 percent between 1996 and '97, yet fatal accidents involving truck

tractors almost doubled. I understand 1998 figures have not yet been published, but if the minister has any provisional figures he could share with us, I again would be very, very grateful.

Information from CRASH, which is an organization called Canadians for Responsible and Safe Highways, shows that the death rate for collisions involving trucks over 4,536 kilograms in Alberta is one and a half times the national average, and they're using the statistical range between 1991 and '95. If the minister could comment on that, I would also appreciate it.

The 1997 Alberta traffic collision statistics report states that the factors that were present were more likely in truck tractor collisions than in total casualty collisions. This report also stated that vehicle factors were identified for 4.7 percent of truck tractors involved in casualty collisions. My question to the minister is: what is being done to improve inspections to reduce the chance of vehicular faults?

Another issue that I would like to talk about briefly is the issue of commercial vehicle testing. All hon. members of this House, Mr. Chairman, are concerned that the quality of commercial vehicle testing could have declined since privatization in 1996. We are told that the government used to visit and check on commercial vehicle inspection stations. These are those inspection stations you see, going down the road, with the pine shakes on them. These inspection stations check on commercial vehicles two, three, or four times a year, but since privatization these inspection stations are now inspected only about one or two times. I would like to ask the minister if this is correct, and if so, what is the government doing to improve the monitoring of commercial vehicle inspection stations? What sort of constant improvement program has he or his staff initiated?

The government still employs its own inspectors checking on commercial vehicles. We are pleased on this side of the House to see that in November of 1998 the government released news on the number of Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance vehicle inspections. Now, we talked in there about over a 70 percent increase in 1997-98, and that was in comparison to what occurred in 1993-94. My question is: what has been the increase in staff carrying out inspections compared with the increase in the number of vehicles on the road? We are also concerned that the government inspectors may only be skimming the surface. We've been told that government inspectors are given prizes for the number of vehicles inspected, and these prizes are items such as work tools. They're probably flashlights so the inspector can work after dark. I would like to know if this is correct. If this is correct, I would like to ask the minister: does it encourage quick checks to get a high number of inspections rather than thorough checks that take longer but identify more problems?

With those questions, Mr. Chairman, I will take my chair and allow the transportation critic if she is anxious to continue questioning the minister.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Before I recognize the hon. minister, I wonder if we might briefly revert to the introduction guests.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Family and Social Services.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It gives me great pleasure tonight to introduce two members from the Brooks & District Chamber of Commerce who are with us here tonight. I introduce to you and through you Terri Magnuson and Jeff Benson,

who are sitting in the members' gallery. Could you please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly?

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

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I'll try to follow through the questions as they were asked.

The inner ring road east of the city. Obviously the ring road is a critical part of the development of the infrastructure of the city of Edmonton. The focus, as the member correctly pointed out, is on the west/south portion, the completion of the Anthony Henday Drive, as well as the interchange which will be focusing at Ellerslie first and then ultimately the interchange at the Anthony Henday Drive. It is an important part of the north/south corridor, and consequently it's included within the time frame for completion of the north/south corridor. The north/south corridor should be substantively completed from the B.C. border to Coutts by the year 2007, and that includes the southwest portion of the ring road within Edmonton as well. Hopefully, construction of Anthony Henday and the bridge and all should be completed by the year 2005. That's the anticipation. It's about a \$151 million project, which is just within the city, when all of this is completed.

MR. MacDONALD: Including the bridge?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Including the bridge. Yeah.

Obviously, Fort Saskatchewan, we may have to do some work there before we've completed the north/south corridor, because there are some acute pressures. Hopefully the industry will continue to grow in that area and grow very substantively, and ultimately we'll have to deal with that.

8:31

The per capita funding for the cities of Edmonton and Calgary is now in the area of \$65 with the additional funding that we have infused. So it's fairly substantive, and it's getting to the point where it's almost as much as the highest funding ever that was contributed to the cities. So obviously we recognize the acute needs of the cities as well as the rural communities. We recognize the growth, and we recognize the need for additional funding. So we've infused a fairly substantive amount of funding.

As far as 2.4.2: what is it the resource roads are going to be used for? Basically they're to enhance the opportunities to develop resource processing within the province. It may mean a short stub road to a grain terminal. It may mean the building of a road to a new processing facility such as the potato plants in southern Alberta or a new processing plant of whatever nature in northern Alberta. So basically the resource road funding will accommodate the need for the development of new or expanded resources.

Traffic safety services, 2.1.1. We've increased the funding there substantively because indeed safety on our highways is something that we focus on and we consider of a very, very critical nature and of critical importance. Eighty-nine percent of accidents on our highways at present are a result of driver error. Now, 89 percent is a very unfortunate number, because what that really means is that in effect they could have been avoided. When you have a figure such as that, there's really one effective way of dealing with it, and that's through a higher profile, a higher degree of education. That's really what we're focusing on. Our education programs are a significant budgetary item. Our education programs cover the whole gamut of traffic safety. During the year virtually every week is dedicated to

focusing on a particular element of traffic, because indeed it's not just one area that causes us the grief of traffic problems.

The fatality rate. Depending on whose stats you're using - according to the national agency, we're about middle of the line as far as fatalities are concerned. Though we had a sharp increase in fatalities last year in Alberta, even with that we are still, according to the national agency, about middle of the line.

Speed limits for trucks were increased, and that's a situation that's happening across North America. We've been in touch with our counterparts in other provinces and states in North America, and it's deemed that more accidents happen as a result of variable speeds on a highway than they do when you have a consistent speed. Because almost a third of our accidents happen when drivers change lanes, if you've got variable speeds, you're going to have a lot more lane changes, and consequently your accident rate actually increases in that particular area. So maintaining a consistent speed limit on the highways is deemed to be the more acceptable fashion. Most of the states and provinces that have variable rates are now moving towards a consistent speed rate.

CRASH. Interestingly enough, CRASH is a group that's primarily funded by railroads, so I would anticipate that the railroads would present a fairly gloomy picture for the trucking industry. I wouldn't be surprised that CRASH sort of demonstrates very clearly that the trucking industry is a dangerous industry.

What are we doing? We've established the PIC program, partners in compliance, that is growing and is certainly proving itself to be successful. This past year we announced a major initiative in developing a driver training curriculum for truck drivers. It's the first one of its kind in Canada and one that will be developed by Red Deer College to be used by private-enterprise driver training schools throughout the province. Every driver training school will be able to use that curriculum for its guidance as to delivering the service of truck driver training.

The oil field. We're just going to be signing an agreement with the oil field industry whereby they're going to be developing a structured program for dealing with their drivers. Obviously they're a very significant contributor to the economy of this province.

Inspectors: we have just hired another 49 field officers. As far as inspection is concerned, yes, we've changed our inspection process in that no longer will a facility be registered. The facility will now have to be licensed, and the facility will be inspected first to see if it fits the proper process, to see if they have properly trained staff, and we do employ auditors to monitor that.

As far as prizes are concerned, I'm not aware of any prizes, and if you know of how we can get these prizes, I'd really like to know something about them, because I'm sure our staff would be lining up for them as well. It seems to me that if there are prizes out there, I'd like to be in the lineup to obtain some of those prizes. I haven't heard of any prizes or any rewards of that nature, so if you know of something that's out there, let me know and I'll get in the lineup.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Wainwright is next and then the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to get up and ask a few questions of the minister. First of all, I want to compliment the minister and his staff for the good work that they do. I know that when you've got limited dollars and you've got huge demands, big growth in this province, it's not an easy job, and I really compliment everyone on what they're doing with that.

I have a couple of concerns, and I'll try to be short with them. One of them I suppose would be the resource road program and the amount that's in there. My biggest concern is for rural Alberta and

being able to get the product to market. As you know, there are many, many changes going on, a huge transition in our rural areas, where the railways are going out. The elevators in the small towns will soon all be gone. You'll have high-throughput elevators sometimes up to 100 miles apart. We have a lot of grain in our country that has to move. I know that it's going to be a very difficult job for your department. With the amount of money that's in that resource road program or wherever you get it, I know there's going to be a big strain on it. I don't want you to overlook that one little bit in rural Alberta.

I would be interested in a little bit of an update on the deregulation of the trucking industry through the Canamex highway through the states and what kind of progress has been made in trying to get consistent trucking weights and streamline the permit process with the other states and provinces that we are working with.

One of my other concerns is traffic safety. I have to say this - and I guess I shouldn't say it in the way I'm going to, but I have to anyway. We do key - and I give full marks to our traffic safety initiative group that has brought forward drinking and driving and more penalties for drinking and driving, but that is not causing all of our accidents. If you get right down to the fatalities, I've heard a lot of numbers, but I'll stick with the one that says it's less than a quarter of the fatalities that are from drinking and driving. My concern is: what are we doing about the other 75 percent?

8:41

Without giving my new private member's motion a boost, I have a suggestion that we need to do something in rural Alberta regarding intersections of primary and secondary highways. I do not believe that we are giving enough notice for highway traffic that comes onto and meets a major highway. I've gone to different locations where we've had accidents, people have gotten killed. They've driven right through everything there.

Now, I know it's driver error, and I know we cannot shake everybody up when they're looking down the road. I know that we've all probably gone by a sign or missed something. My suggestion would be that possibly - and I'm using approximate numbers - 300 to 400 yards before you get to that intersection, there should be a big red stop sign, the same size as at the intersection, and it should have an arrow on it and a "stop ahead" marker, and it should be huge. I wanted to say that we should have a flashing light on that, but I know it's too expensive to put electricity in. Now we have "important intersection" signs. They're yellow and black, and they're not very big. Maybe those signs could be moved back another couple hundred yards, and then have that big red stop sign there. I really believe that that would help alert those drivers.

I look at some of the places people have gone through, and unless you're watching carefully, you can drive through them quite easily. Many of our warning signs now, the "important intersection" signs, are fairly small, and they're yellow and black, and people don't seem to pay as much attention to them. So I would like us to take an awfully good look at that and possibly put a little bit more money into it. I know that the secondaries would be cost shared. It would save lives, in my opinion, and I'd like us to take a serious look at that.

With that, Mr. Minister, I look forward to your answers.

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

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you to the hon. Member for Wainwright. Good points made and certainly good questions as well.

The resource road program, movement of grain: you're dead on.

There is obviously going to be more and more heavy traffic on our roads, and certainly that's going to put additional pressure on our roads. One of the major problems we have is where our roads are paved and in reasonably good condition - the roads that were built and paved in the '50s and '60s are all narrow. With this huge traffic and heavy traffic on it, they're relatively dangerous, and consequently we do have to carry through with the program of widening our roads.

The challenge that we have is in the southern part of the province, where the roads were built earlier. They're narrow. In the northern part of the province there are still roads to be built. Consequently we do have to prioritize, and we do have to find a sort of magic process that will allow for the roads to be built where the development is happening and increasing yet work with the other areas where our roads are narrow and relatively dangerous as we keep expanding the size of our vehicles. So the challenge is there. We recognize the challenge and certainly are working with it. The additional funding that we have been receiving is very, very helpful and supportive of dealing with these particular pressures.

The grain movement issue is one that is of great concern. When the Crow benefit was eliminated, the consolidation of our grain handling facilities was inevitable, and this of course is something that's going to hopefully create greater efficiencies. The problem we have is that the greater efficiencies are not getting back down to the producer. The people that are really producing the product are the ones that are sort of being left out even though they're burdened with all the additional costing. They're the ones that have to pay for the additional fuel, buy larger vehicles to transport the product an additional distance.

We also have a lot of other issues that have to be dealt with. Fortunately, Judge Willard Estey identified a lot of those issues and a lot of those problems and developed a 15-point program to deal with those particular problems. For the first time ever we've been able to get the four western provinces to come together and support the proposal of his one-person task force in developing a strategy to deal with these particular issues. So I'm optimistic that perhaps for the first time ever we're going to be able to sit down and develop a strategy and a structure that's going to work towards developing a world competitive, more efficient system that recognizes efficiencies, that rewards efficiencies and penalizes inefficiencies.

The process that we're just going through the last several months, as a matter of fact, with rotating strikes and now walkout strikes: there's only one group that's paying for that, and again that's the poor producer. It's not right, it's not fair, and we've got to find a better way. Indeed, if people are going to create a burden on another group where the other group can't have the opportunity to be able to try and deal with the issue, we're going to have to find a way that that group is going to become somewhat responsible for their actions. I feel very strongly about that.

Regulations for Canamex. A good question and one that we've been working on, to the point where the Premier has asked that we gather the governors and the Premier himself to have a meeting later on, in early June, to basically deal with the issue of regulations along the Canamex. This is very critical and very important because if you don't have a standard set of regulations that allows product to move from north to south in a consistent manner, there will be no efficiency there and it's simply not going to work properly. So the Premier has asked that a group of governors and the Premier be organized - I think it's in early June - hopefully to deal with these issues in a responsible way to develop a process that will allow for an efficient transportation system from Alaska right on through to Mexico.

Mexico is very supportive of the Canamex route, by the way.

They feel that they have tremendous potential to do a lot of business in Canada. We know that we have a lot of potential to do a lot of business in Mexico as well, but we have to have a standard set of regulations so that we're not unloading, reloading, offloading of whatever as we move from one state line to the other or from one interstate to another.

What are we doing about the other 75 percent? It's a problem. As I mentioned, 89 percent of accidents are a result of driver error, and ultimately that means somebody's done something wrong. Of that, there are three major focus areas: one is changing lanes, two is tailgating, and three is driving off the road. We're dealing with the driving off the road on primaries because we're putting rumble strips along the edge. So if you happen to fall asleep or doze off or something, those rumble strips will certainly wake you, as you're probably familiar with.

As far as the signage, obviously we're looking forward to your motion and certainly will be listening very closely to your recommendations on that as well. What we have done as far as secondaries, particularly where they approach primary highways, is put a series of rumble strips before you approach the stop sign. Again it's helping. Really, if you go through that and you haven't heard them, if it hasn't really startled your attention, I'm not sure that an additional sign is going to attract that much. Nevertheless, we'll be looking at it, and we'll certainly give it thorough consideration.

8:51

The other thing that is happening, one that I'm quite excited about, is the whole reflectability of signage, and 3M has come up with a new type of sign. It's our hope that within three years we'll have all of our signs changed in the province to the new highly reflective signs. Those are bright; I'm sure you've seen them. They are very, very bright and certainly should attract more attention as well.

Intersections are the cause of a lot of accidents; there's no question about it. In the urban setting virtually half of the accidents are caused at intersections, so it's serious. You've identified something that is very serious.

Accidents resulting from alcohol. Again you're correct: 10 percent of accidents are alcohol related; 23 percent of the fatalities are alcohol related, so the severity of the accident increases very dramatically. Still, 10 percent of accidents are a result of alcohol. So you're right; there are a lot of other accidents that are happening out there and have to be dealt with.

Education is the key focus that we've been looking at. You can legislate all you want; you still have to have an educated driving community. So our intention is to continue to focus on education, to continue to work with stakeholders in trying to find better ways of dealing with accident prevention. We've been successful, actually, in that our accident rate is dropping. In that sense, even last year when our fatality rate took a bit of a jump, our accident rate actually dropped for the province, so we are showing some successes. We'll continue to work in that area, and, again, we'll be looking forward to your motion.

THE CHAIRMAN: The Official Opposition critic, the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I think this is my favourite night of session, when we get to talk about transportation. It truly is, because . . . [interjection] Pardon me? I missed that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Just that I hope you have a nice time.

MRS. SOETAERT: I will, because I have several questions for the minister. I'd like to start by thanking his department and his staff that I know are up there. I have to say that when I talk to my colleagues and I say, "Yeah, we phoned and got that information; yeah, we got a briefing," they're surprised, because they don't get that kind of co-operation from all the departments. I want to thank the minister for that because he takes the leadership role in that, and I appreciate that very much. I've even had constituent concerns and his staff has helped me with them, and I very much appreciate that. So you can relay that to your staff, that that co-operation is very much appreciated.

Now, now we go to highway 794. [interjections] I don't have corduroy roads. I must pay better attention than the Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Seriously, I am very pleased, as the minister well knows, that a third of highway 794, the portion in my riding, will be done this year.

MS CALAHASEN: How could you ask for more roads when I need them the most?

MRS. SOETAERT: And I would appreciate the opportunity to speak. I could lobby for some corduroy roads for you too.

MS CALAHASEN: Oh, I don't need corduroy. I need pavement.

MRS. SOETAERT: You need pavement. Well, we'll talk about that.

Seriously, the engineers who won the proposal invited me to their office to see the plan. They did a public meeting out in Villeneuve, with lots of public input, and I really appreciate the fact that they are doing a very good job. They said that of all the projects they have done, this is the one where they received the most support from the community. Often people are concerned about where the road's going, whose property it's going to take, where it's going to be. They have had nothing like that, and they're just pleased with the support of the community. In fact, tonight at around 4 o'clock there was yet another accident at that intersection at Villeneuve and highway 794. Tonight. So I can hardly wait for that to be done. I hope the other two-thirds can be done in a timely fashion because there's a very bad bridge on that where there have been accidents.

There's going to be an access to Rivière Qui Barre with this change, and like the Member for Wainwright, I'm hoping there are flashing lights at that entrance into Rivière Qui Barre. Is that the municipality's responsibility, the flashing red lights when it enters from a village into a secondary? It would be their responsibility then. Then I will phone the reeve about that. Rather than lobbying for it after three more deaths, I think that should be in place.

Speaking about 794, I know you've been doing a review. I forget the name of the official review about what's secondary and what's primary. I know that 794 more than qualifies, when you look at the traffic volume on that highway, as being a primary highway. I know that that also doesn't mean it will be finished, et cetera, but it will mean that the tax burden of that highway won't fall on just the residents of Sturgeon. I think that with the use of that highway, in all fairness it should be a primary highway. So I am anxious to see that report come back. Will that report be tabled in the Leg.? Will that be something we'll have access to? I forget the name of that report.

MS CALAHASEN: It's 794.

MRS. SOETAERT: No, it isn't. Could she go have coffee? [interjections] If the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake would go have a coffee, I'd pay for it. Gourmet Cup.

Anyway, I'm asking about that report. Will that be tabled in here? Will that be something we'll all be able to look at? There's no doubt that across this province I think people question the fairness of what roads are primary and what roads are secondary and how they ever got labeled that way. Maybe it was a time when somebody else - actually I know it - was the minister responsible for transportation. I expect this minister - I know he is fairer with regard to that, so I'm looking forward to that.

I'm going to support the Member for Wainwright; I haven't seen his motion yet. When he talks about access to secondary highways and primary highways, I have seen people go through stop signs. Maybe one thing you didn't mention was rumble strips before the access to the highway; that might be a possibility to add. I know it's an expense initially, but you know, if it saves one accident, we've saved a life and, beyond that, the cost of medical and all the stuff that goes with it. The minister mentioned there's 75 percent that isn't alcohol related and said, yes, that's a problem. But what are we doing about it? Are there are awareness campaigns? Do we talk about safe driving? I know those commercials about drunk driving are very powerful, very powerful. I believe they have an impact, and I'm glad to see those.

With the bill coming up, I'm anxious to see about riding in the back of pickup trucks. I know there are other issues with it. The forest fire issue: I was talking with one member about that. What are we going to do when a bunch of people hop in the back of a pickup truck to go to a fire? What are the legalities of that? In a parade in a town? My concern is that often high school students hop in the back of a pickup truck, go down to . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: The bar.

MRS. SOETAERT: No. . . . the corner store or somewhere else, and there's trouble there. You know, it's a foolish moment in a kid's life that costs them for the rest of their life. We just have to look at Rick Hansen for that example. That's how he became a paraplegic. Hopefully we can learn from that.

I got the whole highway rehabilitation and construction program, and I really appreciate that information. Is it possible to get a breakdown of each constituency and what's happening? I mean, I know I could look it up on a map. I could do that, but if you have that, I would really appreciate that information.

I'd like to speak for a moment about highway 37. I see that some of it is being rehabilitated: the bridge near Namao and west of highway 28A and highway 15. But I would like to mention that from highway 794 west to Calahoo is very narrow. The access to Calahoo is very poorly marked, and with the commuting going on to the cities of St. Albert, Spruce Grove, and Edmonton, that's becoming quite a busy and dangerous part of highway 37. I know that you're also looking at the continuation of 37 on to Onoway and the changes that may happen there. So I'm wondering if that is part of that plan, that the highway may even take a bit of a different course to cut a few curves, which I know can be a bit contentious in that area. Though it's not in my riding - it's in Whitecourt-St. Anne's - I'm wondering if there's a plan for highway 37 in that area.

9:01

Recently I've been getting a few phone calls about bicycle helmets. I'm hoping it won't be just up to municipalities. I'm hoping whatever decision is made is provincewide, as with the riding in the back of pickups. I'd like to see that a provincial law, because in my neck of the woods you could hop in the truck in Sturgeon and then cross the bridge and be in Parkland. I really think we need some consistency across the province on safety issues. I'm thinking

they should be provincewide, not just municipally.

I have some concerns about highway maintenance. I've had some complaints, and I know the minister has as well. I had a letter that I know was sent to you and to the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne from a Mr. Albert Albinati. I'm wondering if you are going to respond to that, if his concerns have been addressed - I believe he lives along highway 43 - some of the concerns about the lack of maintenance along it during the winter and the quality of the maintenance that was done. I'm sure you may have it in your files, and actually if you can't find it, I will gladly send you a copy of it. Maybe it was just CCed to you, but I will make sure that you have a copy. His name is Albert Albinati.

I have had complaints actually, and people have asked - in fact just tonight before I got here, a person asked me: do you know what it's cost us to privatize the maintenance of these highways, and has it saved us any money? I know I asked something similar to that in a written question, but it has to be so straightforward. My real intent to this: I want to see if it was a wise move to privatize all this. If it was, well, fine. If it wasn't, I guess we have to relook at how we do things. I don't know how you get that back. If we've made a mistake there and it's costing us more money than ever before, I worry about that, because I don't how you get that back.

There was a bus accident with a volunteer driver. I did not bring it up during question period, because like so many of us who have been on field trips with our children or have taught in schools, often the bus driver is qualified to drive and is a volunteer. I am sure that person that was driving that bus is really distressed over what has happened. I guess it brings up the whole issue of buses and the regulations around them, the qualifications, the inspections. I know that had nothing to do with inspections, but I continue to worry about that since we've privatized the role of the inspectors. I still have concerns over that.

One more thing. Well, there are a few things. The overpass that was constructed into Stony Plain off the fifth meridian, and there's another one off Campsite Road that is slotted to be done in seven years, by the year 2007, I believe. Mr. Minister, it was before you were the minister. This was promised to the city of Spruce Grove and the town of Stony Plain, that these two overpasses would be done within a year of each other. Suddenly the one in Stony Plain is done, and the one to Spruce Grove is slated to be done and then postponed until the year 2007. Now, you can imagine what that looks like in my constituency: a riding that has a minister, they got done; and the riding that has an opposition member, that was promised but doesn't get done for another seven years. [interjection] I know the member for Slave Lake says that's okay, but that's not okay.

MS CALAHASEN: It's Lesser Slave. Be right in your name: Lesser Slave.

MRS. SOETAERT: Lesser Slave Lake.

I would appreciate the minister explaining what changed that. I have to take that back to the city of Spruce Grove and explain why Stony Plain was done and not the access to Spruce Grove. I'd like something solid to go back with. I don't want to say: look; it's because of partisan politics. I don't want to have to say that. I'm assuming there's a very good reason why that was promised and then postponed for another eight years. So I would really appreciate a very solid answer on that.

This is interesting. In the mail some people across the province, including my husband and in fact another woman here from Edmonton, just got from Alberta Transportation and Utilities - it has "class 1, 2, 3, or 4 drivers who have insulin." It's talking about the

implementation of a new medical reciprocity agreement for operators of commercial motor vehicles. Now, did this automatically go to everyone in the province or just people with certain class licences? This woman who got this letter has just a regular licence with no commercial vehicle class. I believe, then, that would be a class 5, your regular driver. So she's wondering why she got this letter. Did everyone across the province get it? It's interesting how you got some rather than others, and I'd like to know how some people got that.

I also know the minister got letters from the RCMP in Spruce Grove and the Stettler and county community advisory committee. Rural Crime Watch sent me a letter concerned about the use of cellular phones, and I'm wondering: is the department looking at that? I'm kind of cringing. I hate to admit it, but I'm one of those people who uses the phone a fair bit. Now, mine is hands free. I just want everybody to know that. Well, I need one hand for describing and one for driving. I'm wondering: have many accidents been attributed to that, being on cell phones?

MR. HANCOCK: You being on cell phones.

MRS. SOETAERT: Me being on cell phones. We're not going there because we don't want to know that one and neither does my husband.

Anyway, that's just a question for you. Has that become an issue, people using cell phones? I got that from a crime watch association. That's one of their resolutions that I said I would bring up, so I did.

I also have another letter here from Sturgeon county, and I'm not sure if this is under your domain or under the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Along the CNR right-of-way, the railroads, is that weed control up to the department of agriculture or is that the department of transportation, the weed control along the railways? There was some concern out in Sturgeon county that weed control has not been maintained along the railway. Now, this was last fall, but we haven't had estimates since last spring, so I just keep everything in a little file, save it. In it they say, "We expect the farming community to maintain their farmland," yet weed control seems to be a low priority to the - I don't know. If it's the actual railroad, then who enforces it through them? So that's my question to you. Is that within your department, and if it is, what do you do about that?

Now the minister says CRASH is a program that is totally sponsored by the railways. [interjection] Partially. I met with the director and heard some of their concerns, and I think we have to take everything we hear and learn from it. By standards it doesn't look as if we are as strident and as cautious as we could be with some of our safety conditions on our highways, our enforcement of maintenance on vehicles, et cetera. So I just wanted to raise that point to you, and I know you have their information as well.

I have a couple more points here. How am I doing for time, Mr. Chairman? A minute left? A short minute left. Well, I have a few other questions.

9:11

Now the lottery dollar funding, the onetime shot of infrastructure dollars, that's money well spent, and I'm glad it's there. My concern is that it's not consistent, and I'm asking: is the minister looking at ways so that municipalities know that maybe every three years they're going to get an injection of infrastructure dollars? Just something consistent. It seems that if you squawk really loud, then we'll throw some lottery dollars at you. That seems to be the philosophy of some of the reaction of this government. I would appreciate more consistent funding for them. I know the dollars are

appreciated. I'm not slamming that. What I am slamming is the fact that it would be nice if they knew. If it's every other year, every three years, will they get a consistent injection of funds?

I realize my time is almost up, and I really appreciate the minister responding. I realize that if he can't answer them tonight, I've always received the responses in the mail, and I appreciate that. So, Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity. If there's more time tonight, I have more questions, but I know there are others of my colleagues who wish to ask some questions as well.

Thank you.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: First of all, in response to a note from the hon. Member for Wainwright. He forgot to ask a question, and that's regarding Highway 13 and the rehab. What we did last fall, at the very tail end - the highway developed some ridges. Because of the safety concerns regarding hydroplaning, regarding ice building up in the ridges, we filled those ridges with pavement. It was late in the year, and it was difficult to do much else with it. We'll be monitoring the situation this year, and if necessary, we may be putting a chip seal over top to stabilize the overall surface of highway 13.

The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert: 794, secondary portion construction that's going to happen. I think everyone, as far as municipalities and everyone in this House, knows that prioritizing of secondary highways is done by the local municipality. Municipalities have asked for that. They want to maintain the opportunity to prioritize, and as a result 794 this past year has finally been put as the number one priority in that municipality. As a result of that, we are moving ahead with funding to start the project.

It was not the government of Alberta that was establishing the priorities. It was the municipality that established those priorities, and when the number one priority was placed on 794, we immediately assured the municipality that funding would be there. So I want to make it very, very clear that the province was quite willing to deliver as far as the program is concerned, but the responsibility of prioritizing it is within the local municipality. Municipal associations, all of the municipalities in Alberta want that retained, and they want the integrity of that process retained as well. It's not the intention of the province to browbeat municipalities and tell them where their priorities should be.

The issue of primary, of course, is one that is being reviewed at the present time. As to whether there will be any changes or not, I do not know, because the task force has been structured and the task force will be making those types of decisions. The public participation on 794 is no more, no less than the normal public participation on all highway development is concerned. There was nothing more and nothing less on this particular highway. There is a recognized process, and the process is used throughout all of the development of highways within the province.

Driver error was the cause of all the fatalities on that particular road. The police issued a statement indicating that. The enforcement officers clearly identified that it was driver error and not the condition of the road that resulted in all the fatalities on that particular road.

The disentanglement report will be part of the strategy of the Premier's task force, and once the report is put together, it will be delivered to the Premier's task force. That's where that particular report will be delivered to.

What are we doing about awareness campaigns? I mentioned earlier that we virtually have an awareness campaign every week of the year as far as traffic safety issues are concerned. We work with our stakeholders. We work very closely with the enforcement officers. We work very closely with the trucking association, with the AMA, with all the key stakeholders as far as transportation is

concerned. So we're very conscious of the needs of education as far as awareness is concerned, as far as accidents and safety on our highways are concerned. Obviously we've got to continue to work with our driving community, and with that, we'll be bringing forward some new initiatives as far as safety is concerned and the traffic safety act. We'll be bringing forward a graduated licence, for example, administrative licence suspensions; those types of processes will be brought forward.

Traffic safety legislation. The traffic safety act will deal with the issues of bicycle helmets and riding in the back of pickups. As far as the breakout of projects in the constituency, each MLA has received a breakout of the programs within their constituency.

Highway 37. The development of highway 37 is certainly a challenge because the community itself is split on this. We can't seem to get a clear definition of where the community wants to go on this particular issue. It's critical and it's important that we get community consensus before we move ahead with those types of projects. We're looking forward to that. We've met with the communities. We've basically described to them the importance of coming forward with some sort of consensus, because indeed splitting a community through developing a road is not exactly what we feel we want to see happen.

Highway maintenance use. As far as highway maintenance is concerned, we're using more salt. We're using more sand. We're using more actual material than ever before as far as the maintenance is concerned. The maintenance questions were asked under Motions for Returns and will be responded to at that time.

Despite more roads, despite more miles of road, despite more traffic, despite more vehicles - and there's something like 63,000 more vehicles on our roads every year since 1993 - our maintenance costs have dropped. Even though we're using more material, even though we're actually delivering more of the services, our maintenance costs have dropped and dropped significantly. As far as our maintenance program is concerned, we feel we have a better program today than what we had before.

Our auditors are still in place. The same auditing system that we had when it was maintained by Transportation and Utilities is still in place today. As far as triggering the process that's in place, that hasn't changed.

School bus safety. I'm pleased to say that our school bus mechanical condition is in far better shape today than it was two years ago. We're down now to 8 percent of school buses that need service, down from 16 percent two years ago. So obviously the program is working.

Overpasses. My colleague from Stony Plain tells me that one and a half of the overpasses are in his constituency, not one in one constituency and another in another. We don't do overpasses on the basis of political decisions. I want to make that very clear, and I think it is unfair to suggest there's any politics involved in this process. [interjections] We want to make it very clear that we have . . .

9:21

THE CHAIRMAN: Order. The hon. minister is trying to answer the question of the same person who continues to question, and this is not aided and abetted by all the others who are chirping in as well. I wonder if we could just hear one person speaking in the subcommittee, and that would be the minister.

Thank you.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I sat very quietly when the questions were being asked, and I would appreciate that courtesy.

The priorities were changed two years ago in that the decision was

made that the top priority, as far as safety is concerned, is to have the road twinned as quickly as possible. There were several overpasses in several parts of the province that were delayed to the back end of the development of the north/south corridor, which is closer to the 2007 year. There wasn't just one; there were several. Subsequent to that, I met with the community. I explained the situation, and the community very clearly understood what the situation was. So there appears to be some difference of opinion here as to what is happening, because indeed I have met with the community, explained the situation to the community, and the community did understand.

What's referred to with the change of the licence requirements for traveling into the United States? This is a very positive initiative in that now rather than having to carry a medical certificate, that will no longer be needed. For those that have epilepsy, for those that require insulin, and for those that have hearing requirements that normally required a medical certificate each time they were traveling into the United States, now it will be placed on their licence. So that will be there as they move through the United States. It's actually simplifying the process. It makes it a lot easier as far as the overall process is concerned.

Cell phones. As far as cell phones are concerned, a study is being done through the province of Quebec. We are supporting that study simply because it was deemed through the various provinces that rather than each province conducting a study of their own, we could be far more effective funding one large study. So Alberta is supporting that study. The results: I don't know when they're going to be coming. Quebec is the province that's leading that particular study.

As far as weed control is concerned, we didn't receive any complaints until late in the year, after freeze-up. I would anticipate that if there was a concern with weeds, under normal conditions you would identify that problem immediately. So in future, if indeed there is a problem with weeds along the highway, I would really encourage the municipalities - and I have been doing that in our meetings with municipalities - that they advise us of that immediately. We've gone to great lengths to try and enhance our weed control along the highways. We have basically asked for the maintenance people to train people to identify weeds. We've asked the maintenance people to look out for weeds and to focus on that particular area. It is something that's not acceptable. Farmers are forced, basically, to maintain their weeds by weed inspectors in their municipalities. Certainly the highways should be treated no differently, and they're not, as far as our efforts are concerned.

As far as funding and municipalities knowing where the funding is coming from, we've developed a three-year plan now so that municipalities are able to look further into the future.

As far as secondary roads are concerned, we do only have the one-year plan, but we're very seriously considering developing it, expanding it. Hopefully in the near future we'll be able to do a two-year projection as to what work will be done on secondaries as we do the three-year projection on primaries. The problem we have with secondaries of course is, again, that the prioritization process is in the hands of the municipalities, not ours. With primary highways we have the responsibility of doing the prioritizing, therefore it's more manageable. We have indicated very clearly in our three-year plan that there will be additional funding for resource roads, for rural roads. As far as the municipalities are concerned, in our meetings with the municipalities they appreciate that foresight that's been placed into our three-year plan.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have actually quite a few questions. I want to ask some questions along the traffic safety

issue, the issue of impaired driving, and some of those other law-enforcement issues. I guess my first question would be to the minister. There are a number of different statutes that assist police with criminal charges in a police chase per se. Has the provincial government ever thought about any types of legislation that could help the police in terms of the problem with entering into a chase and some of the results of those chases?

I know that over my 14 years with the Edmonton Police Service there was a dramatic change in chase policy from 1981 to the time I left actually in '87. So I'm wondering: have you given any thought to what could possibly be done at a provincial level? I'm not necessarily interested in the penalties to the driver, because dangerous driving, impaired driving, criminal negligence - those have really stiff penalties. I'm not sure if there are some other minor things that we could do in terms of prevention and taking that from an ownership responsibility, a registered owner's responsibility, and those kinds of things. You know, I'm not even sure what they would be. I just think this should be explored more. I think the police have done their part.

In fact, I've been involved in chases that have become actually very dangerous and have been told: that's it; you guys are done; you're not going to chase this anymore. The chase is called off. An hour later the car is involved in another incident, and you end up chasing it again. So we really can't allow the bad guys to get away or say that we can't chase, period, because then the bad guys will get away, and that's how they'll escape, knowing full well that the police won't chase them. There has to be some sort of compromise here. We want to make sure the offender is apprehended in a safe way, and we want to make sure we're reducing and minimizing the risk to the public. Like I say, I'm not sure what it is, but I think it's worthy of some thought and consideration under the Highway Traffic Act.

The tailgating. You mentioned tailgating as one of the major causes of accidents. What I find very interesting - and I don't think this has changed since I left the service a couple of years ago - is there were two extremes. There was following too close as a charge under the Highway Traffic Act, which we as police officers would only lay if there was an accident and only if you had the appropriate evidence to have that stick. On the other hand, there was the \$150 fine under careless driving, section 123 of the Highway Traffic Act, at that time. There wasn't any kind of middle line. Either there was an accident and following too close was the charge or careless driving. For the careless driving ticket there were, you know, two or three more elements to prove that charge. So there again might be some compromise in the middle there to bring that issue to light for Albertans and help them focus a little better on that aspect of their driving.

You mentioned a couple of other offences, or I guess poor driving habits, that contributed. Red lights certainly come to my mind. Lots and lots of those particular offences. Actually, you know, even now driving home some days, I wish I were driving a different car because of those violations out there. I think the red light cameras will help that, but certainly that's an enforcement issue as well that I think would be very beneficial.

9:31

I know there was some discussion in the upcoming highway traffic safety act that will discuss the 24-hour suspensions, suspensions for people who have consumed alcohol or have been charged. That is another discussion that I think we have to have. It's interesting to note that, you know, only 10 percent of accidents are the result of impaired driving, 23 percent of the fatalities, yet that message I don't think is out there loud and clear. I think that on any given night any police officer could take up their entire shift, if they chose,

with impaired drivers. The bottom line is that there isn't enough time on a daily basis to deal with that. I could go out tonight and spend 10 hours of a shift picking up impaired drivers, which in fact I've done in days when I was very young on the police department and thought that was a great charge. It is still a great charge, but there isn't a lot of time to do that. So that's just something else that comes to mind in terms of the safety aspects of it, of the Highway Traffic Act and those kinds of things.

I want to next focus on the prioritization of primary highway deterioration and maintenance. I understand through sources, if you will, that at the time the government was deciding to privatize, in fact many recommendations came forward to say that that shouldn't happen, that this was not going to be a cost-saving program, that Albertans would not save dollars, that there was no value added in that respect. So I'm wondering what the minister is doing in terms of looking at outcomes in relation to the privatization aspect of highways:

Some rural municipalities have complained about "the deterioration of our primary highway system and the level of maintenance of these highways which we believe to be of a poorer quality than we've become accustomed to. From the concerns expressed, it is obvious that many believe that privatization has had a significant negative affect on the amount and quality of maintenance of our primary highways."

That actually was taken out of a letter from the Pembina River district No. 3 sent to you February 8, 1999.

I'm just wondering what steps the minister has taken to address that issue. In fact, are there some areas that are worse off than others due to accessibility? You know, obviously we get more snow in the northern part of the province than we do in the southern part in the long term, throughout the winter. You know, they have no snow in Calgary today, but High Level may in fact have a snowstorm tomorrow. So I'm wondering where we're at with that.

I notice too, looking at the key performance measures for transportation, that we don't see any measurement that would allow us to have a good indication that money is in fact being saved. So again, how do we know that we're getting what previous ministers have said we were going to get?

We know that it was supposed to save money, but we see in the budget documents that the budget for maintenance used to be about \$60 million to \$65 million before privatization and in '98-99 it will be about \$94 million and \$97 million is budgeted for next year. Is there more maintenance work being done, or is it just costing us more since we've privatized? Are the manpower costs more? Has the cost of operating the equipment gone up substantially? Those kinds of things. What is the government looking for when they're hiring a contractor? "Do you have your own equipment? Are you looking after the maintenance of that equipment? What are your overhead costs?" Then we need to know down the line what's coming back to us. So I think that's important.

You know, we've talked about a model piece of legislation that we think would be very valuable to look at, to have the government ask some questions to themselves and then to potential contractors. We've put forward that legislation in fact in this House, and we've also talked about that in relation to delegated administrative organizations, so I'm just wondering what exactly the government is asking for from contractors. I think that's very important.

Also, how is this broken down in the budget? Can you explain how we can find out from the budget what the costs are? If you just look at the budget, it doesn't tell us. I think we need a breakdown to know what the real value is. Help us look underneath the budget, and give us some of those figures that will determine what benefits there have been from privatizing highway maintenance. You know,

in British Columbia it hasn't been a very successful project. We know that other provinces have looked at it and said: no, we're not going down that road. I know that in fact it was a recommendation to this government that it would not be a cost-saving venture. I have no problem saying that. So I would really like to see the figures from privatization to compare with the current budget.

Maybe what we should be doing is looking at a longitudinal view. We need to look back to '92-93 and take a look at those figures from '92-93 to now. I don't know if you've ever done that to see where the cost comparisons are and things like that. So I think that's important.

I also would like to talk a little bit about the issue of winter highway maintenance. We heard some of those discussions and some of the complaints over the winter about the poor road conditions. I'm just wondering what the expectations are of the contractors when they're out there taking on this job. As you know, we talk about the trade corridor, and we want the highways from the very south to the very north in good operating, safe conditions. One of the things that concerns me is: in the wintertime when we need those truck routes open, are they in fact the safest routes? Are we putting those particular drivers carrying those huge loads north and south in this province in jeopardy by not having those corridors clear? Also, the complaints from others in the province about access in these smaller towns and rural areas and some of the delays in clearing those roads.

9:41

There's been some concern about the salting of the roads. We've received complaints actually and I think you have as well - I'm not sure - about the quality and the type of salt. I'm certainly not an expert, but I think I need to bring this to your attention in terms of what's being used now. The government now uses potash salt, something that I'm not really familiar with. What is the product that the government is using, and what are the freezing characteristics? I think that's those questions.

I am concerned about the trade corridor, because I think we're going to be investing a lot of money in that corridor. I think we have to have that road clear and in the safest condition possible throughout the wintertime.

Just a note here to the minister, too, that looking at public roads on Indian reserves and Métis settlements, we see that \$6.7 million has been budgeted. It's about three-quarters of a million dollars more than last year, capital and operating combined, I'm assuming. Is this just for roads on the settlements? Are we correct in thinking that the \$5 million is for additional access to the Métis settlements allocated by the Premier's Task Force on Infrastructure?

I know that probably you, Mr. Minister, as well as other members here have been on some of the settlements and reserves in the province. I can think of one reserve in fact way up north, Assumption. I was up there actually when I worked for Nova Corporation a few years back. The roads there were impassable. It was spring. It would be very difficult in an emergency situation in some of those settlements and reserves to move, if you needed an ambulance or a fire truck, in and out of there. Some of those roads are in pretty rough shape. So I'm wondering, you know, certainly for Métis settlements, how that funding is allocated, and what sort of needs priority and how that's determined.

I would like to just draw your attention to key performance measures again. I have highlighted here: "Casualty Collisions - This measure is defined as the number of casualty (injury and fatality) collisions per 100,000 licensed drivers." In 1997 there were 802; in '98, 752; in '99, 747. I know that there were some pretty hard-hitting educational commercials on TV, and I'm wondering. We see

what the target was for '98. I don't know what the rate was for '98 and sort of where we sit now in comparison, but I notice that you're looking at a fairly substantial decrease by 2001. What are the prevention messages that are being sent out along with the issue of safety on the roads, the enforcement of the trucks - and truck safety is an issue - enforcement of just the average Albertan driving on the highways? What other plans, and what other messages?

I know that Australia has some really great high-impact commercials that deal with driver safety and speeding. We've seen some variation of that here with the impaired driving program. We've seen that as well. Can we look forward to some more of those great programs down the road?

One other thing I wanted to talk about that is off the actual transportation issue is in relation to the effectiveness of emergency and disaster response. I'm not going to go to your target KPIs here. I just want to ask some questions. I had asked a question of the Minister of Justice some time ago in the House about the vital points program.

I think my time's up. I will actually write the minister a letter in relation to the vital points program.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Minister, would you permit another member to speak before we run out of time? The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: I guess I'd like to speak for a few minutes about planes, trains, and automobiles. We talk a lot about trains and automobiles, but we haven't talked very much about planes or air transportation. As we move more and more into a global economy, I think it's essential to the economic well-being of our province and our major business centres that we have an excellent air transportation system in place.

Earlier this evening as we met with the Alberta Chamber of Commerce, the question was raised as to what the possibilities were to have some sort of scheduled airline service within the province to aid in tourism development. Mr. Minister, I would like to know what initiatives you and your department have taken toward improved air transportation for the province, both externally and internally?

Thank you.

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

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you. To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, the issue of chases is a serious issue and one that if anyone has any suggestions, please come forward, because I can think of no greater frightening experience than one of those chases, really. Not just for the enforcement people that are involved but the innocent bystanders that are along as well. If you have any suggestions at all, please come forward, and certainly we'd make every effort to work with the stakeholders, Justice, the enforcement officers, because this is something we have discussed. The problems, as you well know, and I think you've recited the concerns and the issues very clearly - we have the risk to the innocent public. If you let those people get away, then they'll do it again. And they keep doing it. So it's not easy to resolve and ultimately has to be dealt with in some form. The spike belts, of course, are something that are useful and used. Again, that is of great concern to all of us, and certainly if you have any suggestions. Obviously, with your experience, you may have some better insight as to how to resolve and how to work with this.

I've been out with enforcement officers. You were discussing the

impaired situation. It's strange because you can go out one night and there's nothing there. Everything is fine and dandy and you don't run into an impaired all night, and the next night, as you properly described, it seems like everyone shouldn't be on the road at all. And those are frightening experiences too. To be a traffic officer on foot walking up to that is not a nice experience, as I have learned. I've gained a tremendous appreciation of the valour of those people that are out there, with enforcement officers and the risk they take.

Certainly, the whole issue of red light cameras that you had alluded to is something that I think will be effective as far as bringing down traffic in an effective way without putting people at risk, as well as trying to deal with those people that are - most of the people that run a red light know they're running a red light. That's something that virtually 9 out of 10 times you do consciously, and that's why I strongly supported the hon. Member for Redwater with his Bill 215 last year. I think it will help. Almost half the accidents in urban settings happen at intersections, so red lights are certainly a major, major problem. As far as urban setting is concerned, I'm hoping the red-light cameras will help. I think that's perhaps the most effective technology we have to date in dealing with that particular issue.

Regarding tailgating, it's the same problem. If you have any suggestions at all, please feel free to bring them forward, because that's a tough one to enforce too. That's almost impossible to enforce until there is an accident, until there is something you can clearly identify, and an accident of course is usually what does that.

9:51

Privatization on primary highways. Yes, there is cost savings. The benchmarking process is something we had to be careful of, and we really couldn't get involved in doing the benchmarking too soon because our winters are too variable. Our major costs as far as highway maintenance and the critical nature of highway maintenance really happen in winter because that's when you get the buildups of snow and ice and the likes of that. That is something that varies, so now we have a bit of a history that we can combine and develop a benchmarking process, which we are doing, and quite frankly, we will be tabling the information subject to the request that was made.

I think you'll be pleased with the results, considering there are more miles of road; considering there's more traffic on the roads; considering there are more vehicles, 63,000 additional vehicles a year on our highways since 1993; considering also that our highways - we had a tremendous run of highway building 15 to 20 years ago. Every 15 to 20 years you've got to do the rehabilitation, and we're at that stage now; 15 to 20 years ago is when we did our major construction projects, so now we're into the rehab process. But we're using, as I mentioned earlier, more salt, more sand, more maintenance than ever before, and our costs are quite gratifying relative to the overall process.

What does maintenance provide? They provide the complete package. They may not do it all as that particular company. They may sublet, but at the end of the day the complete maintenance, the mowing of the grass on the sides, the painting, all of that is done under one maintenance contract. So when they bid, they bid for the whole package of maintaining that road.

We still have auditors. We have the same group of people in place that we had when Transportation and Utilities actually did the maintenance. We still have the people that identify when there is a need for maintenance. We have all of that still in place just as we did before. So that process hasn't changed at all. As far as that's concerned, nothing has changed there.

The issue of severe weather. We had some very, very difficult

weather this early January stretching right through from Jasper, a strip that went right through to Lloydminster. Under the circumstances it was tough to keep the roads maintained. We try to have a process that indeed the roads will be serviced within four hours after a storm. We try to have that type of process in place. We have our people on the roads that identify that there has to be service work and to contact the service people. After that, they are the ones that have to go out and provide the service.

What do we use? We use straight salt and sand and mix the salt with sand so that indeed it will be effective. The problem that we have, though, is when it gets to be roughly 25 below, salt and sand don't work. That becomes an issue and an ongoing problem that you just can't resolve. We don't have anything that'll remove ice once it gets below 25 below. We don't have a solution for it. There just isn't a solution, and ultimately people have to drive more carefully and more according to the conditions of the road. The sand is sifted to meet a specific size so that indeed there aren't lumps or whatever in the sand and there aren't problems created as far as windshield damage and the likes of that.

The north/south corridor is a billion dollar project. It's a major project. The maintenance on the north/south corridor will be no different from any primary road that we have in Alberta. All primary roads will be treated the same. Their maintenance contractor is responsible in a similar fashion. The system is the same for all of the highways in the province, so there's no picking and choosing, where we'll do this road first or that road next type of thing.

We've put together a program to deal with the needs of the Métis community, and certainly that is something that perhaps needs some extra pressure. I think the program we've got in place will adequately meet the needs of the Métis community. The process is that we need agreements and plans as well with each Métis settlement before we can move ahead. We've got agreements with most of them now, and we're moving ahead with them as well, largely through the urging of our minister responsible for Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs. We appreciate the support as well. Nevertheless, I think we do have a schedule in place to work for and resolve the access to the Métis communities. I think that overall, as it keeps moving through, we'll be able to resolve their particular needs fairly quickly here in the near future.

Education and enforcement is something that's going to be key to working to resolve the accidents that we have out there. As I said, last year we had 92,000 and some odd accidents, and that's just not acceptable.

We put together Project 43, which was developed largely for the twinning of highway 43. Together with K Division of the RCMP, up to 10 detachments are brought into highway 43 between Valleyview and Whitecourt, where there were nine fatalities the year before. When we brought in the 10 detachments and started a process of enforcement once or twice a week, there was one fatality. The accident rate dropped to almost a third of where it was the previous year, when we didn't have that program in place. The success was so great that, indeed, we're looking at perhaps moving that type of process to other parts of the province. Obviously it has successfully dealt with some of the speeding and some of the activities that really shouldn't be on the roads.

Education is still the key. You still have to get educated drivers out there that are responsible and knowledgeable and know that you have to drive according to road conditions. The road conditions aren't always the same, and consequently, you have to make those adjustments. Hopefully, through the advertising campaign - and, yes, we will continue to use a very strong advertising campaign. We're going to continue to focus a very, very strong profile on the education as well. As I said, enforcement is sort of a backup, and

we'll continue to use the backup where it's necessary. Again, we're going to be trying to make our roads safer with the Traffic Safety Act. That's already one of the objectives of that. That will be one of the intentions.

Emergency disaster response. I'm proud to say that we've got the best emergency disaster program in all of Canada. If you've had the opportunity of attending the emergency measures courses in Arnprior, Ontario, they make very clear that they use Alberta as the ultimate model. Fortunately, we didn't have a disaster last year. The year before we had a whole multitude of them. You don't know when disaster is going to come. That's why we don't budget for them. We don't know what the nature of the disaster is going to be. We don't have any idea of what it could be. A disaster is something you're not planning for and can't plan for either. That's why it's a disaster.

So I'm proud of our disaster team. We have regions. We have directors in each region who are responsible for seeing that all of the municipalities who deliver the program - it's the municipalities that deliver the program - are trained, are responsible. We put together a checklist for Y2K, for example, to the municipalities so that they all deal with the dangers of not properly dealing with the Y2K issue. Our directors are communicating with each municipality to see that each municipality has taken a responsible position on that. Ultimately, as I said, I'm very proud of our disaster services program.

10:01

Air transportation strategy. I appreciate that question, because indeed with the movement of goods and the marketing of our products changing, air transport is going to become increasingly important. We're now moving to a just-in-time delivery system, which basically really is going to require a seamless process of moving products - whether it's truck, whether it's rail, or whether it's air or water - and the three have to be co-ordinated. As we move to more and more value added, we are going to move more and more products through containers, so that's going to become more critical as well.

We've put together two meetings regarding aviation strategy, where I've brought all the stakeholders together to try and develop a plan that will service Alberta to its ultimate. Ultimately, we have tremendous opportunities to enhance the transportation network in Alberta, and aviation has to be very, very key. With just-in-time movement of product, though, what's going to happen is that we're going to need warehousing near the airports. We're going to need a different type of distribution system. It's going to be a smaller type of distribution but quicker and more streamlined, and much of that is going to have focus around air.

Airlines are going to have to focus more and more on cargo from

passenger. At the present time their whole focus in the area has been strictly passenger, and that's going to have to change so that it's a blend of cargo and passenger, because the competitors to our airlines are flying with bellies full. Ours are flying, and the passenger level is virtually the same. In our particular case, the passenger service is competitive, but our cargo is empty, really. That's the area that we can build on so our airlines can become more competitive. We're going to have to get clients that'll become more willing to use the system, and that, of course, is what'll drive the whole process. We know that in North America the average from the time a product is produced until it's consumed by the client is something like 105 days. In Europe it's 63 days, and they're going down to 45 days. In Japan, of course, it's considerably less. So we've got an opportunity, and certainly it's one that we want to build on.

At this time, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to move the subcommittee rise and report.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister has moved that the subcommittee do now rise and report progress. All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Those opposed, please say no.

AN HON. MEMBER: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Before we recess, two things. For the benefit of those in the gallery, this is the subcommittee. There are four such subcommittees. Another one is meeting elsewhere, and the other two meet at another time.

May we briefly revert to the introduction of guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Lois Sterner, who is the president of ASET, the engineering technologists' association, and Glen Horne, the past president. Please extend to them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

[The subcommittee adjourned at 10:05 p.m.]

