

Title: Estimates of Infrastructure, Wednesday, March 8, 2000

00/03/08

8:06 p.m.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

### Subcommittee B – Infrastructure

Tannas, Don, Chairman  
 Laing, Bonnie, Deputy Chairman  
 Blakeman, Laurie  
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 Stelmach, Ed  
 Stevens, Ron  
 Tarchuk, Janis  
 Woloshyn, Stan  
 Zwozdesky, Gene

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, a couple of things. One, as is our custom frequently in room 512, we've invited the deputy minister to come be at the table. Is there any objection to that? Please register that now, and you just know that you've lost a road in your constituency. No one? Okay.

Secondly, these signs are not for each other's benefit. These are for *Hansard*. So if you've got it in some way that they may be able to see it, that helps them.

We'll begin this evening's deliberations on the estimates of the Department of Infrastructure and call upon the hon. minister to begin this evening, and we'll go from there.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good evening to all. Before I begin, I would like to introduce the ministry staff that has joined us this evening. I would really sincerely like to take this opportunity to thank them for the excellent work they've done this year and in the past year as well.

Seated to my right, the most important position, is Mr. Ed McLellan, who needs no introduction to many of the people around the table. Seated in the audience are Mr. Ray Reshke, who is the ADM, corporate services; Gary Boddez, ADM property development. We have Mr. Bob Smith, ADM of property and supply management. Bob is right against the wall there. We have Gregg Hook, chair of the Transportation Safety Board and responsible for transportation safety services, and Brian Marcotte, executive director, infrastructure policy and planning. We have also Leanne Strangeland, director of communications. With us today we have Mr. Tom Hawnt, who is acting for Mr. Jay Ramotar, ADM, transportation and civil engineering. Welcome to everyone.

The business plan and the 2000-2001 estimates indicate how we plan to contribute to Alberta's economic prosperity. We're going to contribute to the prosperity by ensuring the provision of safe and effective transportation systems; managing the development of seniors' lodges and learning, health care, and water management facilities; and planning, operating, and maintaining government facilities. The government's prudent fiscal planning and management allows us to continue directing funds to a number of different programs and initiatives throughout the province.

Alberta Infrastructure continues to work with a number of ministries to address priority issues and ongoing initiatives and to increase our effectiveness and efficiency. Some of these initiatives include continuing to lead the cross-government Alberta capital planning initiative by working with other ministries on the development of a cross-government approach to infrastructure planning, information management, and project prioritization. This will ensure the most cost-effective and efficient use of infrastructure dollars.

We are working with Alberta Learning to plan and develop capital plans, programs, policies, and legislation for all learning facilities; with Alberta Health and Wellness to ensure that long-term regional capital plans are developed in partnership with the regional health authorities by March 31, 2001; with Community Development on the provincewide upgrading of seniors' lodges; and of course with Alberta Environment in protecting the integrity and effectiveness of water management infrastructure.

We support the provincial government's ongoing theme of strong financial management. In order to position the ministry to address infrastructure funding and management matters, we continue to seek more functional and accountable ways to accomplish our mandate. This is evident in the internal restructuring we did after the government reorganization last spring. We have reduced our FTE count by nearly 100, and we have also been able to reduce the administrative budget by approximately \$4 million.

In fiscal year 2000-2001 in direct response to the Premier's Task Force on Infrastructure's recommendations several initiatives, including the north/south trade corridor, will receive accelerated funding. In fact, the task force recommendations have resulted in significant changes to the funding and management of our highway systems. The changes will also have a major impact on the engineering and construction sectors in this province. An additional \$900 million is required over a three-year period to address these recommendations. The Alberta government is providing most of this additional money through the '99-2000 supplementary estimates and in the 2000-2001 fiscal year for several initiatives.

The Alberta cities transportation partnership program will receive a \$256.3 million investment. The cities of Calgary and Edmonton will receive funding based on the equivalent of 5 cents per litre off on-road fuel sold within each city. In total this represents an increase of about \$30 million per year for each city. Other cities will continue to receive basic funding of approximately \$60 per capita per year and will also be eligible for a \$50 million supplemental funding on a project-specific basis.

Rural municipalities will benefit from a \$160 million investment, and the new resource roads program introduced last April will receive \$34 million. Under the streets improvement program, towns and villages will receive \$60 million. This program has now been expanded to include hamlets.

In our ongoing commitment to the development of the north/south trade corridor, \$130 million will be invested in the rural portions of the corridor, \$10 million in upgrades to Calgary's Deerfoot Trail, and \$15 million to Edmonton's southwest ring road, for a total of \$155 million. This continues the government's commitment to accelerate funding to the north/south trade corridor until four-laning is substantially completed in 2007.

Primary highway construction will receive \$147 million. The province begins assuming responsibility for the construction, maintenance, and rehab of secondary highways as of April 1, 2000.

The 2000-2001 estimates show an increase of \$70 million from '99-2000 to \$160 million to cover the cost of all maintenance and construction for secondary highways. That results in significant savings to municipalities as they will no longer have to fund maintenance or their previous 25 percent of secondary highway construction.

As a point of interest, over the next three years the \$900 million in transportation infrastructure funding resulting from the Premier's task force recommendations will create up to 13,500 person-years of work for Albertans.

There are some other aspects of this year's estimates that I would like to highlight. Pressures on other municipal infrastructures such as water and wastewater treatment facilities continue to be recognized in the 2000-2001 estimates with increased program funding of \$29 million, which is \$10 million more than last year.

Compared to the '99-2000 budget, spending on health facilities has increased by \$53 million to \$168 million to address health infrastructure upgrading needs.

School facilities funding allocations include \$160 million for preservation and high-priority expansion to accommodate increased enrollments. As a part of this allocation \$40 million includes block funding to school boards for minor preservation needs – that would be the BQRP – \$40 million for new facilities, \$10 million for innovation, and \$70 million for preservation and modernization of existing facilities.

The 2000-2001 estimate for postsecondary institutions is \$47.4 million. The funding provides institutions with the flexibility to address present and future renovation and replacement needs as well as program expansions.

The seniors' lodges will be provided with \$17.1 million to be used for the upgrading of 15 lodges and the start of designs for 12 additional lodges.

In 2000-2001 we have an ongoing commitment of \$95.6 million for the operation and maintenance of all of our government-owned facilities in the province. Approximately \$76 million has been allocated to the leasing and operation of private-sector facilities for government program use. The government is targeting revenues of \$100 million from the sale of surplus properties over the next three years. It is expected that about \$35 million in property sales will be achieved this year, and the 2000-2001 estimates reflect the use of this revenue.

I would also like to mention some of the ministry's other major initiatives before concluding. Transportation safety services in consultation with stakeholders continues to focus on generating a stronger awareness of the role Albertans play in traffic safety. Work on the regulations under the new Traffic Safety Act will be completed. We will continue with extensive public consultation as these regulations are developed.

In 2000-2001, consultations will include discussions on graduated licensing, commercial vehicle equipment standards, and also off-highway vehicles.

Regulations will be developed in consultation with the railway industry and user groups prior to proclamation of the Railway Act. The objective of the new act and regulations is to provide for the safe operation of railways under provincial jurisdiction.

8:16

In collaboration with school facilities stakeholder groups, many of the recommendations from the School Facilities Task Force will be implemented this year in order to fulfill the government's commitment to improve capital funding practices. Using teams of private-sector consultants, we have completed phase 1 of a complete facility audit of all schools in Alberta. Phase 1 completed 433

schools out of the 1,460, and the audit looked at structural, mechanical, electrical, and of course the building envelope. When the audit is finished in the summer of 2000, we will have a complete condition inventory of all Alberta schools. We'll be bringing forward a funding strategy to address the backlog of modernization and upgrading while addressing the requirements for new student places in the form of new schools.

Alberta Infrastructure recognizes that we need to continue being innovative and forward-looking. Using a value-based focus, we're planning to look at new technologies and to review the ministry's processes as they affect our stakeholders and partners. We're reviewing roles and responsibilities in our relationship with these stakeholders, specifically with our consulting and contracting partners.

As you have heard this evening, Alberta Infrastructure is committed to the economic prosperity and development of the province and Albertans and to keeping up with the rapidly changing world around us. We will continue to face challenges as a result of economic and population growth pressures and the problems presented by an aging infrastructure.

I believe that the estimates for this year indicate that we have a renewed focus on infrastructure in this province. With the collaborative efforts of ministry staff, our partners, and our stakeholders we are addressing these challenges with creative and effective solutions that will lead us successfully through the 21st century.

I would be happy now to take any questions you may have. If, of course, I'm unable to provide any of the answers today, I assure you that you will receive written answers promptly.

I'd just like to add that the detail in the budget is considerable, and as we answer questions over the rest of the evening, I think we'll give you further examples of some of the reasons why we had to put the budget and our estimates in a format like that because of some of the restrictions we work with with respect to consolidated budgeting.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome to the minister's staff, and I am hoping that we'll be able to get some answers. We were wondering, Mr. Minister, if you could define "promptly" for us before we get under way here.

MR. STELMACH: It will be as prompt as I've always returned responses.

MS OLSEN: We just needed to clarify that, because, you know, we're not the Infrastructure critic, and we wanted that on the record for her. [interjections] We're really interested, and I'm glad I have reinforcements.

You know, I have so many questions here. In my first questions today I'll take the minister to the program operating expenses category. Under vote 1.0.1 the minister's office has received an incredible increase, about 76.4 percent. Of course, the big question is: why would the minister's office need that kind of increase? What are you anticipating for changes in your office over the next year?

The deputy minister's office also has a significant increase of 19 percent. Again, what's going on that we see such a dramatic increase in those two areas?

Could we move down to the highway system and the north/south trade corridor. If we go to this year's expenditures, we're looking at doing a comparison between 1999-2000 and 2000-2001, a 969 percent increase. Now, I realize that there was a commitment to the north/south trade corridor, and you spoke about the rehab of secondary highways. Are you anticipating this work to be done on

the north/south corridor next year? Is that why this over 900 percent increase in the budget in the capital investment? I think that obviously is very significant. I'll draw your attention to that. It's 2.2.1, Mr. Minister.

The rehab of the secondary highways. How many secondary highways are targeted, and how did you determine the priority for those highways? I guess I'm kind of curious. We see lots of lobbying going on for roads. I hate to say this, Mr. Minister. You're in the unfortunate position of having highways and roads, and you know how people feel about their highways and roads, especially in an election year. Overall, when we look at the transportation aspect of your department, there's a 126 percent increase, so that I think is important to explain.

I also have some other concerns, and they arose out of Justice the other night. Actually the hon. minister for intergovernmental affairs, I think, raised the issue in relation to the secondary highways and the policing of those highways. I'm just wondering if you could maybe try and inform us as to who is going to be policing those highways. There's been some discussion about having special constables police those highways and that kind of thing. Is there a move afoot to do that as opposed to having the RCMP contracted to do that? I have some concerns around that if that's the route you're anticipating going, and I think we should have a fuller discussion on that.

I want to talk a little bit about 2.4.2 under facilities infrastructure, the school facilities. A number of issues have come up. I think the most recent one is where the principal of the soon-to-be or hoped-to-be aboriginal school in the city of Edmonton is struggling with the lack of a facility. They've got 600 to 800 students that would like to register at the high school level in that school. I don't know if you're aware, Mr. Minister, but Edmonton also has the Awasis program at Prince Charles, I believe it is, and Ben Calf Robe under the Catholic system. Both of those programs are operating very well. One is an elementary, and one is an elementary/junior high. Ben Calf Robe is in the old St. Clare's elementary/junior high.

8:26

In the past students would go to Ben Calf Robe simply because they were expelled from both systems. Now the school is operating because parents choose to send their children there because they learn Cree; they learn about their culture and their heritage. You walk into that school now and you can feel really good about the fact that the students are there learning. They're not there because they have to be there or there isn't an alternative for them. They're there because their parents want them to be there, and their parents want them to carry on to the high school level being able to enter into an aboriginal program.

I have to look back and say, well, the government decided charter schools were going to be all right. The government has allowed for other schools such as Talmud Torah, that teaches Hebrew in the afternoon and English in the morning or vice versa, the French immersion schools, the Ukrainian bilingual schools, the German bilingual schools. So there are a number of programs going on. We've got Old Scona academic, and we've got athletic schools, and we've got Vimy Ridge, which is a military school to some degree.

So I'm wondering how the aboriginal community's problem will be solved. Their issue, of course, is the need for a facility, and they have apparently been turned down. I'm hoping you're going to give us some news that's going to change that. The notion of being able to house high school students all over the city in unused space isn't going to work for that program. There needs to be that cohesiveness in the school. They need the facility. I'm hoping you're going to give us some really good news and say: look; we're going to deal with that issue, and there will be high school for the aboriginal

community. They've worked long and hard for this. They put this together, and I think it will be a highly effective program. Having the aboriginal community come forward is something we as legislators can be very proud of. It's their baby. So hopefully, as I say, we can get some good information on that.

The other problem that I'm getting phone calls on, and certainly I know some of the Calgary MLAs are as well, is that the Calgary board of education is at about 75 percent utilization rate – that's in the old formula – and they have been told that they need 85 percent in order to get new schools. Well, with the growth in that particular city, we understand a growth and density study has been done. It offers somewhat of a band-aid solution, and I'm wondering if there's going to be any fast-tracking for new schools down there.

Again, this whole utilization issue is a problem. You don't have space in a concentrated area, where you've got all of these new citizens into the province. Kids need a place to go to school. I'm just wondering what the long-term plan is that's going to provide for future growth and the existing growth now. There seems to be a need for somewhere in the area of 25 to 30 new elementary schools. That's a huge cost, but I'm wondering where you are going to start and how you are going to start without offering up just a band-aid solution, going now with some long-term solutions.

I want to go to the business plan now, if I could, Mr. Minister, and maybe page 171, traffic safety. Last year the government had a traffic safety performance measure. It was casualty collisions: the number of injuries and fatal collisions per 100,000 licensed drivers in the province. It doesn't exist anymore. I'm wondering if you could enlighten us as to why this particular performance measure was dropped. We know that the targets weren't met, but that's not a reason to drop the performance measure. I'm just wondering what's going to happen.

It doesn't seem that there was a need to change that particular measure. I'm just wondering about the new measure you're going to try and develop to gauge the effectiveness of the education programs and if that's going to replace this measure. I think they're certainly two different measures. I do think there's an advantage to try and capture that information on the educational programs, but there's no one variable that's going to have the answer for us in that. I think that specific measure is going to prove to have a multi-variable answer. I think it's also something that needs to be looked at long term, so a three-year business plan isn't going to capture that necessarily.

You need to look at driver attitudes or the education over 10 years. Are the kids now responding on a long-term basis, or is it just those 16 year olds, 17 or 18 year olds abiding by those rules because of the parental pressure expressed to them? Are those attitudes going to be a part of their driving pattern for the rest of their lives? I think there are other things, and I don't think it can be captured over one, two, or three years.

When we look at traffic safety, we also can look at the injury rate in this province and the fatality rate. The fatality rate in '98 for this province was the highest in Canada, and the injury rate was also the highest in Canada. I'm wondering what's been done to try and reduce that over the years. The last year we have the information for is '98. I don't know if you have last year's information available yet. Why has the injury rate remained so high? The accident rate has increased as well. What are other provinces doing that we're not? We know that Ontario and British Columbia have as much traffic as we do, or more in some of the concentrated areas. I'm wondering what initiatives they are undertaking that we're not or what we can learn from them. What are you going to do to try and reduce those rates?

Truck safety: you know the hon. Member from Spruce Grove-

Sturgeon-St. Albert will deal with this as well. We know that last year and the year before, the Edmonton city police had undertaken a very aggressive enforcement program, which proved to be very beneficial, I thought, in talking to the member from that particular traffic safety unit. They were feeling that this was an absolutely necessary undertaking. I'm wondering now what the regulations are. Are the regulations going to change in relation to truck safety? We seem to have, along with our neighbouring province Saskatchewan, the most lax truck safety regulations in North America. So I'm wondering what you anticipate doing about that.

**8:36**

There's also a pilot project, I believe, that's been undertaken in relation to fatigue management for truck drivers. I'm wondering what progress is being made with that particular pilot project and study. How long are you going to collect the data, what do you anticipate doing with the findings, and are you potentially going to change the number of hours that truck drivers can drive? I believe pilots have that specific type of safety code where they can only fly a certain number of hours during a week or a day. I was just wondering if that type of thing is going to happen as well.

The other concern I have. I think this is a good question. With the increase in fuel costs, are truck drivers going to be on the road longer just to get the job done, just to put more money in their pockets? This is hurting their bottom line. What are you doing in terms of, I guess, the whole enforcement aspect in relation to maintenance? I think there may be a correlation there between trying to cut some dollars. We know prior to fuel costs going up what the school bus situation was in this province. Are we now going to see truck safety compromised as a result of the fuel costs and less maintenance done on the vehicles as a result of that? The bottom line is an issue here, so maybe you could let us know if you have a plan for that.

The north/south trade corridor is going to be an interesting task. As I traveled in the northeast U.S. this past fall, I was just amazed at the number of trucks on the road. In fact, I didn't enjoy that drive at all. You could drive through the New England states and see all the colours you want providing you didn't take your eyes off the road at any given minute because of just the tremendous number of trucks. I understand the reason for that is that the transportation of goods by truck is much faster than rail. We have that same problem here. We're going to develop this north/south corridor. After driving on those roads, I really wonder how that's going to impact on general traffic north and south. It's actually quite a scary notion the way that whole business works. So increased truck traffic is not necessarily going to be good. It needs to happen, but what are you going to undertake to ensure the safety of everybody else on the road? I guess that would be my big concern.

Okay. I guess I'll stop now, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, would you like to reply?

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me find all of the votes here first.

I think we were doing 1.0.1, the minister's office expenses. Although the minister's office is now handling all of the requests coming from the former department of T and U – all of the issues centred around public works, seniors' lodges, all of the environmental projects, including school facilities and postsecondary – our office is working with the same full-time equivalents. So even though the budget was put together here reflecting the anticipation of a larger office, you will see at the conclusion that the proof will be in the pudding in terms of what is spent, and it won't be the kind of increase that you see here.

So far we have been monitoring the calls, the requests not only from MLAs from both sides of the House but also from Albertans, and we try to get back to them as promptly as possible either by phone call or by letter. The last few months' experience I've been very satisfied with, and I don't see a need for increasing the staff. I suppose that if need be, there would be room for expansion, but to date I think we've been through the amalgamation, the restructuring, and this is the very same staff we brought forward from Agriculture. You know, Agriculture was a large department, but we didn't have the same kind of mix and varying degrees of interests collected in one office. I don't foresee a problem there, and if we save a little bit of money, maybe we'll pave another square foot of road someplace.

The same thing with the deputy minister's office. It's a stab in the dark. We're going to make do with the kinds of dollars that we have available to us and do it as effectively as possible.

Remember in my opening remarks that I referred to the complexity of the budget, the estimate presentation. As you know, in consolidated base budgeting we must expend the revenue in the same year that we collect it, and as a result of that, most of the money that will be going into projects with health facilities and school boards will be given to the school boards and health authorities by way of contract and the same thing with the municipalities.

Vote 2.2.1, the north/south trade corridor. I knew this question was going to come up. With respect to 2.2.1, the north/south trade corridor, the operating expense shows a \$16 million decrease; the capital investment, a \$140,500,000 increase; and the capital investment funded by lotteries is a \$65 million decrease. This north/south trade corridor is a long-range provincial initiative that will provide a continuous divided highway route that will go from the border at Coutts to the B.C. border west of Grande Prairie. The key objective – and I may be covering some of the other items that you raised here with respect to safety on the north/south trade corridor – is to provide the safest and most efficient highway corridor to accommodate increased international trade and tourism flowing to the United States and Mexico. Without doubt, our markets are going to grow in the United States and Mexico.

**8:46**

Just as an aside, the issue with roads and moving product to market. We can do all of the manufacturing we want in the province of Alberta, but if you don't get the gadget to market, you don't create a sale. If you don't create a sale, you don't create wealth. If you don't create wealth, you have nothing to tax to pay for education and health. So the creation of wealth is paramount. You can't create that without getting to the market, and increasingly it is going to be more just-in-time delivery. That's not to bring something very, very new and innovative to you, but it's paramount that we get the product to market. Okay?

The highway is within our control. The ports are not within our control, and quite frankly that's where we're losing the highest percentage of sales. We're the most inefficient country when it comes to transporting our goods as compared to the other G-7 countries, and it's getting worse. So that's where part of the problem is. If you've been following some of the statistics coming out of the States, you'll see that they'll be generating a surplus of about \$200 billion by the year 2010. So they're going to be in the market for more value-added products, and we will have an ability to deliver just in time many of our products.

In Mexico, a huge investment in education, and if you watch, many of the communications companies in the high tech are building their manufacturing facilities in Mexico. We're going to have to partner and do business with that country as well.

Now, in the operating expense the project costs for the sections of

the north/south trade corridor that were constructed within the cities were budgeted as operating expenses as opposed to a capital investment since we as a government did not own the highways in those cities. But now we will be taking over the highway. We'll be maintaining it. We'll be building it. As a result, we're showing it as a capital expense in our budget.

The policy on priority setting and secondary highways. What we're committed to do and have done with rural municipalities is we've partnered with them and consulted with them on their planning and also on the kind of priority-setting they did in terms of what they found to be the most important secondary highways they would like to have paved in their county or municipality. We do have a rule that before a secondary road is paved, they must have at least 200 vehicles per day.

MS OLSEN: To be a secondary road?

MR. STELMACH: No; to be paved. A lot of these secondaries were designated back in the late '70s, early '80s. If I remember correctly, some municipalities, depending on the density of the population, designated secondaries at just about – what? – seven-mile intervals. Some municipalities have all of their secondaries paved, but others don't, depending on the sparsity of the population.

There will be some secondary roads, I'm sure, that will receive a final pavement that may have less than 200, but these will be roads that conduct a whole bunch of seasonal truck traffic especially. I can't pick one right off the top of my head. We look at the necessity of moving goods and services, so there may be some changes here and there, but generally speaking, we look at that target. The other is to tie regions of the province together. We look at that as well in terms of developing a good trade route.

The other thing – and we don't have much say in it – is that many of the companies have set up large grain handling facilities outside of the traditional small villages and towns. They've just plunked them out in rural Alberta. Yes, next to a railway but not necessarily in a village. Unfortunately in some of those situations there was very little consultation with the province, but we're now obligated to look at what secondaries have been designated and see if those secondaries that lead to these facilities require pavement.

Given the fact that we will be taking over secondary roads officially, both maintenance and construction, we're still committed to the municipalities, to listen to their priorities. So if the municipality prioritizes the secondary for either rehab or new construction or paving, we certainly will take that into consideration, because the local municipality is the one that I feel really knows best the kind of needs that they have to deliver on.

The secondary highway takeover is going to generate about \$85 million for municipalities. They're going to save 25 percent off the paving, plus we will be doing all of the maintaining. So that is why there are some differences in the budgets here: they won't have their responsibility. We feel for a couple of reasons that really the secondaries should form part of the provincial highway network in the future. The reason we say that is because a secondary highway is the same colour as a primary highway. It's got the same lines. It has a different number. It pretty well has a three-digit number as opposed to a primary, with a single or double-digit number.

As well, we have had different regulatory regimes applied on secondaries. I used this example a number of times. If you take secondary 831 from Lamont north to Fort McMurray and if you are a trucker, you phone Lamont and say: "Well, what's your road ban?" "Oh, 90 percent." So you load pipe to 90 percent and drive through the county of Lamont. You cross the river and into the county of Smoky Lake. Their road ban may be 85 percent. Do you stop,

unload pipe, throw it in the ditch? Do you turn around? There's basically no difference in weather conditions. It's just an imaginary line on a map, a different municipality, and many times no really significant scientific reason for the change in the road ban, only that it's our municipality and this is how we set our road ban. There were four municipalities that had secondary 831 going through them. So this is going to lead to a much better regulatory regime and a smoother transport of those goods.

As well, at the moment we're working with the municipalities and working out the kind of standards for grass-cutting, weed control, snow removal, crack-filling, et cetera. I think that probably in a couple of months we'll bring most of the negotiations to a close. The outstanding portion, though, is still centred around the policing, and we're working very closely with the RCMP. The RCMP is the provincial policing authority on all highways, and this will continue, but we will also be consulting with them in terms of how we're going to work with them in terms of enforcing some of the weights, dimensions, and many of the moving violations on those roads.

The authority of special constables on secondary highways will be phased out no later than perhaps September of 2001, but we'll be continuing to negotiate with Justice and Infrastructure and the municipalities.

8:56

I want to jump ahead to the areas of traffic safety and policing. I have to admire the RCMP for doing the traffic collision study done from Wetaskiwin south to the American border and to the B.C. and Saskatchewan borders. Clearly that study indicated that given the limited resources we have, we can't put police everywhere at any moment. It's impossible. Where do we focus those resources? The study indicated that the number one reason for fatalities and collisions in the province of Alberta is failing to stop at stop signs or going through red lights. The second is the whole issue of not paying attention to the road. I'm repeating myself for Colleen; I was at the same convention she was at.

The issue of not paying attention of course has many areas of concern, and there are many reasons for not paying attention. The first things that come to the minds of people could be cell phones, applying makeup, shaving. You know, hitting trucks parked on the side of the road tells me that somebody is not paying attention.

As well, in rural Alberta the higher ratio of fatalities and injuries is also related to the fact that fewer rural Albertans wear seat belts, and minor rollovers have resulted in fatalities and also serious injury. When I say minor, you know, at a slow speed a vehicle rolls over and it happens to roll over the occupant as they fly out of the vehicle because they don't wear a seat belt.

The other issue is centred around drunk driving. I heard some very good news today – maybe some lawyers don't like it – a little note from British Columbia that the Supreme Court did not wish to hear a case that was brought forward from B.C. in terms of the administrative licence suspension. They said that they don't have time for it, that it's not really a significant national issue, I guess. That, I hope, is going to reduce the number of drunk drivers and give the police another instrument to use on the road. They have also told us, this being the RCMP, that it takes quite a while to process a drunk-driving charge because many times they have to haul in the driver. It takes a number of hours, and in the meantime something else could be happening. So this administrative licence suspension is something that they really supported. We'll monitor it, and I hope that it reflects the same kind of reduction in drunk driving as we've seen in the provinces that adopted that policy a number of years ago.

The issue of speeding was way down the list in the study. Now, there are some people that will be looking at that information that

they've compiled and, as I said before, starting to focus the resources. In the cities, as you know, with all of the cameras that we have at stop lights, the red-light cameras, there's hardly a complaint. There are nice big signs saying: camera up ahead. There's a tremendous reduction. You know, people actually stop. They've been forewarned, and if you go through, somebody is going to take a picture of you. So that has worked very well for us.

The other question was with respect to the aboriginal school in Edmonton. [Mr. Stelmach's speaking time expired]

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Once again, I hate being in this room, but I'm happy to be in the Infrastructure estimates, so take one and leave the other.

I would like to start, Mr. Minister, by thanking your staff. I certainly appreciate the fact that we can call and get answers. They're very pleasant. I've had two constituents call me and sing the praises of Mr. Boddez, so you'll get that in a letter. Anyway, I would like to thank your staff, not only your staff here in the Legislature but out in Stony Plain and Barrhead as well. When we call, they're most accommodating to my constituents and to me as well, so kudos to them. It truly makes my job easier when we can get information. I don't think we've ever abused that either. So I thank you for that.

I have quite a few questions to ask tonight. I'd like to ask: if we don't have time, can I possibly give them to you at the end?

MR. STELMACH: Yes.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you. I appreciate that.

I'd like to start with Milk River. As you know – and you and I have talked about this before – I am very concerned. I think the wrong decision has been made to go on the west side. It's going on the west side now; isn't it? I'd really like to see a definite reason why you changed the plan from going on the east side. I've heard all kinds of things from the community. It has split this community. We have people saying that it was political influence rather than what was practical, that many farms are being disrupted, will be lost, whereas going on the other side, there would have been a hill and a graveyard that would have been affected. I know that those people are very distraught. They're now looking at legal action.

About the executive summary that I got. I think that's all you got. If there's a more complete study of Milk River done, I haven't seen a cost analysis that includes the price of the farms, buying them out, moving the railroad, all the things that it is going to take to change the route of that highway to the west side over the east side. So I urge you to rethink it, because this has split this community, and that's sad. It's a wonderful little community. I was down there this summer.

With the information I've received from you, just looking at it like that, I think the wrong decision has been made. Now, maybe there's a piece of this I haven't seen, that I can't get. I'd really like to see the real cost-benefit analysis that includes the part about buying out those farms. I'd like to weigh out the reality of uprooting generations of people from a farm as opposed to maybe interfering with somebody's vision of a dinosaur at a travel information station. I urge you to rethink that one.

I want to speak for a moment about highway 794. The first third of that was done: through Sturgeon county. My understanding of it is that the next third will be done and then the final third. As you're probably aware, there was a bus accident on it last week – it was a

bit foggy – interestingly enough, at the very spot where a woman has been asking the county to put up a sign that there are children there, that it's a bus area. The county isn't moving on it, but I think that as of April 1 your department will be taking that over. I know there are criteria for signs, that it has to be a curve or a hill or where trees block the vision. This spot doesn't qualify for it. When we're widening highway 794, we might look at a different access to that farmer's home and the three mobile homes that are near it.

I'm hoping that when the design for 794 is done – I know that for the first third the community had input into it. The engineer said to me that this was the most agreeable community they've ever had to work with to build a highway. That tells you the demand there was for fixing that highway. That is nothing that should surprise anyone in this room who has heard me for seven years.

That one spot just north of Rivière Qui Barre was the scene of an accident this past week. Some of my family members were involved in it. Not that that makes a difference. No matter who gets hurt, it affects all of us. I'm looking forward to the completion of 794.

I want to speak for a moment about Queen Street school. You and I have spoken about that before. It's a tremendously old and inefficient building, and from my understanding it is slated for modernization, but the reality is that that wouldn't be practical. I know that the school board is asking for Grove Meadow school. They could sell the location at Queen Street school. They have a buyer for it; it's in the downtown area of Spruce Grove. Grove Meadow could be built. I know that is their request. That's their number one priority this year.

9:06

Interestingly enough, there was to be a sod-turning about four years ago, and political powers that be – it was stopped, which I don't think is very fair, but the reality is that it happened. Now, whether it's true or not, I have had a few different people come to me from the community and say that the Member for Stony Plain has said that over his dead body would that school be built. Now, I would like to know what influence any MLA, much less a member of the Crown, would have on the building of a new school. So I am asking you: how does a building get built? What are the priorities? I would like to know . . .

MR. WOLOSHYN: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Point of order, and that would be what?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Standing Order 23(i) or (j), imputing motives. The school that she is referring to – and she has never been so far off base in her whole life as she is today.

MRS. SOETAERT: Are you saying that you never said it, Stan?

MR. WOLOSHYN: That is correct.

MRS. SOETAERT: Okay. I'll get somebody in here.

MR. WOLOSHYN: You get anybody you want in here. The school was not built because it didn't have the numbers to warrant it. [interjections]

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, you obviously have a difference of opinion. I don't know, hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, whether bringing other people into the issues that you're attempting to deal with is getting you very far, but I would suggest that probably for decorum and efficiency purposes, it would be better to deal with your own issues without bringing other members into it.

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The reality is that I'm wondering how priorities are set in the building of schools and what influence people have on those, so I'm asking. There must be a procedure through the department.

AN HON. MEMBER: There is a procedure.

MRS. SOETAERT: I realize that, and you can talk after me if you like. It's a very close room, and I usually create some heat in here.

The reality is that that buzz is out in the community, so I'd like a real commitment from the minister that school building construction is based on the priorities that Parkland school division has set and not political influence at the upper level. So that's the commitment I would like from you. [interjections]

I would like to continue on with the issue of licence plates. I know that motion is coming up. I'm hoping your department has talked about it. I'm hoping that your government will support that motion. I've had a lot of . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members. Hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, we have a great debate going on down here, and some people have forgotten their manners as well as decorum. I wonder if the hon. members for Lesser Slave Lake, Edmonton-Norwood, and Stony Plain could resume their conversations outside the Chamber. It's a difficult room to work in, as the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert reminded us in the first place, but it's even more difficult when we talk. This is not family dinner.

I wonder if Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert could continue, without the aid and assistance of other members.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was asking about licence plates front and back. [interjection] Either way you want it. Here we go. That's what people have been asking for. [interjections] I just bet *Hansard* has a hoot reading it when I'm in here.

However, I want to speak about the overpass at Campsite Road. That's been a priority of the city of Spruce Grove for a long time. However, the one at Stony Plain went up before the one at Campsite, though the original switch was planned. So you can tell that I could start to feel just a little frustrated despite all the little manipulations of the powers that be. You know, I got elected despite no school and no overpass, so maybe this time that wouldn't be a factor in it. I'd appreciate that.

The other thing. The overpass at Century Road. It's interesting. Coming off the Yellowhead, to turn left to go into Spruce Grove, you have to be out on the road before you can see if anyone is coming. So I don't know how they'd fix that. I hate to criticize an engineer with years of experience behind him. But try entering Spruce Grove from that way and it's actually quite dangerous. You have to get your nose right out there before you can turn.

Utilization rate of schools. I had a meeting with the St. Albert Protestant school board, and their question and concern was that overall the school division has a low utilization rate, that doesn't necessarily reflect the needs of the community. For example, Bellerose comp is at about 110 percent capacity, and some of the other ones are at, like, 44 percent. So they've got this dilemma of needing to upgrade Lorne Akins desperately – it's in bad shape – and they've got the reality of crowded high school kids. They're very crowded at Bellerose comp. Now, I know, thanks to the work of your department and the help they gave and the school/parent council out there, they will be adding on a portable and a wing that hopefully will address their needs by this fall. So that's good. That resolved the Bellerose comp issue, but they still have older build-

ings, and their question to me was: how does government pick a school in St. Albert and a school here? Do they take one from each school division? How do you prioritize which schools get addressed in which year, and how do you divide that amongst the different school boards? So that would be my question to you about that.

One of the things that you said the MDs would be doing now that they're not doing: the maintenance. You're doing all the maintenance of secondary and primary highways across them. [interjection] You will be? Well, now, what about those MDs who have their own equipment and want to do their own? I believe there are a few, and I'm wondering how you resolve that, because I don't think it's fair to send them with their equipment and their employees, et cetera. So I would ask you how you are addressing that.

I am pleased to see that they're finally not allowing people to ride in the back of pickup trucks. I know you caught a bit of flak over it, but that's one thing you didn't catch flak on from me or any of my colleagues. So thank you for having the courage to go through with that.

Also, while I was at the Alberta Safety Council, one of the bigger owner/operators of the buses said that the reality of finding good staff at 9 bucks an hour is pretty tough, because when the economy is good, lots of people have work. They can't get qualified people to drive for 9 bucks an hour, and they can't afford to pay them any more; I mean, the realities of running a bus. I realize the budget of bus transportation is not yours, but I know you're also responsible for the safety. That's pretty precious cargo that these people are carrying every day, and I would venture to say that we want people keen for the job. I would think consistency on the job would be important in that one because of the reality of the safety of the kids and the disciplining of kids on the bus. That was my part of the speech, I guess, that day. So I'd appreciate your input on that.

One of the concerns that I think I wrote you a letter on was that in one of the MDs they were paid to go down a road and then had to lift their blade through a Métis settlement and then put their blade down again. Is there an agreement with . . .

MR. STELMACH: You wrote to me?

MRS. SOETAERT: Yes, I'm sure I did. You know what? I'll look it up, because I'm sure I sent it – about the reality of those agreements, because it was foolish to have separate equipment go out for the Métis settlement in the Lesser Slave area, I think.

9:16

MR. STELMACH: Where?

MRS. SOETAERT: In the Lesser Slave area, I think. But you know what? I'll find the letter, and I'll send it to you.

I do appreciate, Mr. Minister, your prompt reply with your letters, the information that we get from your department, and the very amicable working relationship that we have.

I've raised some of the concerns about the reality of how Spruce Grove's feelings about things are very, very sincere and very worrisome for me. I would appreciate your assurances, particularly on those issues. So I thank you for that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, do you wish to reply?

MR. STELMACH: Yeah. I'd like to get to the questions from the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. Maybe I'll cover some of the questions as we move along.

I just want to thank the hon. member for the recognition of our staff. I'm very proud of our staff. Many times they hear only the

negative, and it's very refreshing to hear someone give them a nice pat on the back and praise, so I thank you. It makes my evening.

I'm going to get to the questions that you had, but I just want to deal with some of the issues raised by the Member for Edmonton-Norwood. It was one about fatigue management, the compromise in terms of are the truck drivers going to be longer on the road and the comparison to the New England state and whether we're going to have additional problems with the north/south trade corridor.

With respect to truck safety. With the volume of truck traffic, that has increased in the province of Alberta, I would submit that our fatality and collision statistics certainly can be improved upon, but given that huge increase, I think the stats at least are trending the right way, and that is down. We met recently with the partners in compliance people. This is a group of truckers who are members of the trucking industry working in partnership with government, trying to establish an authority that will get more truck companies to participate in their group, setting out very clear goals and strategies and helping them to accomplish them in terms of truck safety. It means training in simple things like how you check your load before leaving, wheels, dealing with fatigue. Those are very important.

We are going to be providing some resources for them in partnership. We'll be putting some on the table, and so will the companies. I think we realize that reputation is at stake here. Also, numerous times the companies do their own audits in terms of safety. Those suppliers that are using those carriers are very careful, and they look at those audits very carefully to ensure that they're using the trucking company that's providing the safest service, because it's key in terms of their reputation as well.

The compromise in terms of higher fuel costs: are they going to be on the road longer? If they're on the road longer, they just burn more fuel, so I would think they're probably more apt to be hauling more weight. You know, that's where we would have to be more diligent in terms of the measurement of the weights.

I did not drive through New England myself, but there's a significant difference in the load factor. I can't remember the statistic quite correctly from when I was in agriculture, but I believe the load factor in California at that time was maxed at 80,000, and we were at 120,000. As a result, yes, less load on the truck but more trucks on the road. That's the debate we're having through the Ministry of Justice and also intergovernmental affairs . . .

MRS. McCLELLAN: Relations.

MR. STELMACH: Oh, relations. I have rural affairs; you have relations.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Sad but true.

MR. STELMACH: . . . in terms of working out an agreement on what would be the common load factor in Alberta and the States. In talking to the Californians, they said that they wanted to keep the weight down as much as possible to restrict the amount of goods coming to California because the lighter the load, the more cost for volume of what's hauled. So it's more of a trade restriction than a safety issue. I think we will be able to resolve those issues. The heavier load does not necessarily mean that there's some safety issue attached to that.

The hours of service: the number of hours of service a driver can work is limited by federal regulation. Drivers are required to keep logbooks. Hours of service are enforced by the department. There is a proposal to clarify and to simplify the hours of service rules. There is a committee that's been meeting on that, but we are supporting the change in the rules.

With respect to fatigue management, a fatigue management program should be available as a pilot project by late summer. The purpose of implementing fatigue management is to ensure that drivers pull over and rest when they are tired, not just when they're obligated to do it by regulation. This will add greatly to highway safety, because I do believe some of the accidents are a result of fatigue.

I will deal with the question with respect to the aboriginal school in Edmonton. Presently in the Edmonton public system 57 out of approximately 200 schools are operating at less than 50 percent capacity. So more than a quarter of the schools: less than 50 percent capacity. The students for the proposed aboriginal school would all come from the Edmonton public region, which means that those schools that would be feeding students would be emptier as a result of those students coming to one central school.

The requests received for new school construction are in the area of \$500 million to \$550 million, and in this particular area it wasn't a request for a new school in terms of building a new school; they were looking at leasing a facility. The cost, if I remember correctly, would be about a million a year for 20 years, so that's \$20 million. I think if you were to invest \$20 million over 20 years in a building, you'd probably get more value out of it than in this particular case.

9:26

Now, there are some good examples of leased space like we have downtown in Centre high: 2,000 students, with approximately 1,600 students completing their courses. These are fourth and fifth year high school students. There are some very strict rules that are put in place for those students to attend. The performance and the achievement is quite good for those students in fourth and fifth year. Centre high really adapts to the needs of the students. Many of them are working. Some of them are alone in this city. They are here from as far away as the province of Manitoba, Ontario. We toured that school, and we did talk to some of those students. Being able to complete their high school program in a setting which allows them not only to work some hours a day but also to complete their studies helps them not only to complete grade 12, but it enables them then to proceed further in any other postsecondary institution of their choice.

There's about \$40 million this year in the new school construction. Getting to the priorities, utilization is of course a key factor. I know that we are revisiting the whole utilization formula. That was one of the key recommendations coming out of the School Facilities Task Force. I'm certainly not going to prejudge what the decision will be. All I know is that we have to look at what the issues are in urban Alberta and also in rural Alberta. In rural Alberta attaining some of the high utilization we're asking for means closure of schools and in many cases transporting students great distances, and that's not, I believe, appropriate. What is considered an appropriate length of school bus ride? I don't know. I know I spent many hours on a school bus, and, I mean, I'm here.

MRS. SOETAERT: It was the bus driver. Didn't you say that you learned most of what you needed in the bus? I heard that in a speech.

MS OLSEN: What did you learn, Mr. Minister?

MR. STELMACH: I don't know whether it was academic or not. [interjections]

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, I think you're going to drive either the chairman or the *Hansard* staff crazy. There are about five

people entering into a conversation, and we are still in committee. I wonder if the minister could continue without all the help he's receiving.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With respect to the Calgary board of education, I do have to say that the Calgary board is looking at rationalization of their underutilized schools. Seven of their schools that are underutilized are being closed. There are some issues. You know, to close an inner-city school, what happens to the land? It's considered almost to be park area, et cetera. How do you deal with the ever increasing expansion in outlying areas and the needs? So the Calgary board and the city of Calgary are working together.

We as the Department of Learning have representation with ASBA, ASBOA, which is the Alberta School Business Officials Association. We have CASS, which is the College of Alberta School Superintendents, and facility planners. I might have missed somebody else: ACSTA. Those particular groups. I know they've had one meeting for sure, if not two, and they will be proceeding on utilization. That's key.

By the time we get the utilization recommendations forwarded to us, we'll have most of the audit complete on the 1,460 school buildings. Then we'll be able to collate all of that information and start rolling out a long-term plan both in preservation and new school construction, with the goal of being as equitable as possible across the province, because that's important.

Okay. In terms of safety, I'm very high on walking the talk. That has been very positive. Really what that is is allowing parents to walk the route to school with the students and just highlighting what dangers there may be on that route. I'm also proud to say that at this time we are trending down in terms of the vehicles rendered out of service in the school bus inspections. In the PIC program the last inspection done, last quarter, was zero. Okay? If we can maintain close to zero, that I think is an excellent goal. It can't get any better than that.

I do realize the issue you had put on the table with respect to dependable drivers: who can you hire? The easy thing for me to say is: well, we fund school boards. I know there are some pressures there today because those bus drivers have to compete for qualified people, trained staff, and also they are paying considerably higher fuel prices now. We'll keep working with the school boards. We promised the contractors that we'll look at some options as to how to deal with this situation.

There are other things that came up. One is centred around the training of drivers and also the S3 endorsement. Most of the school boards do enforce the S endorsement, but there are some that don't. We want to work with those to see if we can get a common standard right across the province of Alberta.

With respect to fatality rates and injury: what are we doing? The province of Alberta is probably a bit unique. I don't know if I can give you any real scientific evidence on some of the reasons our fatality rates are unacceptable, but we do travel greater distances from community to community compared to some of the other provinces. I would say we are more affluent, with faster vehicles. We want to get there faster than what may be legal. We are also looking at the number of inexperienced drivers, no matter what age – we're just talking about inexperienced drivers – and looking at the graduated licence program and introducing that into the province of Alberta. Again, if it's anything like the administrative licence program, if we can get those same results: a 30-some percent reduction, as Ontario has seen, in collisions; I don't know about fatalities, but certainly collisions. Their insurance rates have really dropped considerably in Ontario as a result. That would go a long way in reducing some of those fatalities.

In terms of seat belts and the use of seat belts, you know, we'll just have to monitor that and enforce it. When I think of my own constituency this last year, we had a young lady who left four kids behind. In her case it wasn't a seat belt; it was just driving out of the yard early in the morning with her husband, not thinking anybody would be out that early in the morning on a country road, and not stopping at a stop sign. Boom. The same thing with another lady crossing highway 16. These were all stop sign violations. Now, whether they stopped and didn't see, I don't know. But stopping violations are the most serious, and we'll have to really concentrate on that.

9:36

With respect to Milk River, I will give you a response to Milk River only because it's part of the budget, not Milk River itself but the north/south trade corridor. As I said before, that was a very difficult decision for our department and for me personally, but we had to bring the decision to a close. We had to make it.

It didn't matter which side of the highway we went on, we would be uprooting families. As you mentioned, on one side there was a graveyard, and there is also a secondary highway on the other side. There is a sewage lagoon. The community was worried about another interruption on the secondary highway leading into Milk River. But I made a commitment to the families there that we will be working with them and be fair and equitable in how we acquire those purchases. We personally visited the landowners ourselves just to get a feel for the land and for the homestead.

The reason it was difficult is that I know people have lived there many years, and you can put yourself in the same shoes. In my particular case, I'd probably be feeling the same way. I'd hate to be uprooted from the same yard where we've lived for a hundred years.

We'll continue to listen. There were more areas where we'd be intersecting land on the opposite side, considerably more.

MRS. SOETAERT: But not farmsteads. Just land.

MR. STELMACH: I don't remember farmsteads, but a lot of partitions of land and stuff like that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Do we have unanimous consent to allow the minister to finish this particular series of questions?

No? It's okay. Unanimous consent means that we have to have everybody.

Thank you, hon. minister.  
Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I'm not sure I feel comfortable that you've answered the question around the aboriginal school. What I heard you say – and please correct me if my interpretation is wrong – is that you would have preferred to put the money into building a school but that it's not a priority and because 25 percent of Edmonton schools have a utilization rate less than 57 percent, then this just isn't a viable alternative at this time.

I'm quite concerned. You talk about equity, and sometimes initiatives that are undertaken by communities and are community-driven are going to fare much better than initiatives undertaken by government.

I'm going to give you an example. There are schools up in the northeast part of this province that haven't graduated an aboriginal high school student for 20 years; some, if ever. We're looking at the ability right now of having a very well-renowned PhD from the aboriginal community come in as principal of an aboriginal high school, and we don't have a building for that.

We talk about commitment to crime prevention. We talk about being willing to give back religious and sacred artifacts. The Premier is willing to wear his headdress into the Legislature. There is a huge problem here, quite frankly, in terms of priorities. I'm concerned that if we as legislators really mean what we say and if we really believe in what's coming out of our mouths, this is one of those times when biting the bullet isn't such a bad idea.

If we're looking at mentorship programs, if we want to see more young people in the aboriginal community, which is the fastest growing population in this country – those kids will be in line to be leaders 20 years from now. They'll be sitting around this table; they'll be sitting around other tables. They will be part of the leadership in this country.

What we're looking at is the potential for 600 kids to complete high school, 600 kids from the aboriginal community. To me \$20 million over 20 years is a drop in the bucket to what you're going to pay for each one of those kids if they end up on the other side of the system. I'm not quite sure how you're weighing the cost of that: \$20 million worth of capital versus the cost of many of those kids not making it in society.

I'm just wondering where the priorities are. If we really believe that education is a key component, if we believe in crime prevention, if we believe in addressing the issues of poverty, if we believe in all that – and I'm talking the global "we", the 83 of us that sit in that Legislature – we're going to miss the boat here if we say \$20 million is just too much money over 20 years. So I really have a problem with that.

I'm hoping that the hon. member for Slave Lake, who is also . . .

MS CALAHASEN: Lesser Slave Lake.

MS OLSEN: Lesser. No, not Lesser.

MS CALAHASEN: Lesser Slave Lake.

MS OLSEN: I'm hoping that the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake will in fact come to bat for the community and stand up and say that a building is a building and in this particular case will do a whole lot more good than it would damage.

I think the total cost overall of having an uneducated population is far more excessive. You just have to go over and look at EYOC, and that's the cost. Add the cost of every kid in there. Forty percent of those kids are aboriginal kids. I have difficulty with this whole process. It's not a lot of money when you look at the long term. Maybe we should figure out what the cost of 40 percent of that population in EYOC is right now.

My next issue is that when you look at what's happened in the northeast United States in terms of the truck traffic and their trade corridors, part of the problem is the large distribution centres that have emerged everywhere. They're off those main truck routes; they're in small towns. It's been great in creating employment. Huge companies will create large distribution centres. I could not believe the truck bays in some of these places; they're phenomenal. There's no reliable rail transportation around there.

As we diversify in this province – you talked already about, you know, the large grain distribution centres going into the small towns near the railway – I'm wondering if there's an overall plan to look at the potential for this kind of thing to crop up down the road and what the government's, I guess, response to that would be. If you have large distribution centres emerging along the trade corridor, you're going to have a tremendous amount of truck traffic that you might not have anticipated. So just a thought. We're looking at our future in terms of growth and density.

A couple more questions. The issue about having one highway to and from Fort McMurray has come up, and I'm not sure what the secondary highway – well, I don't think that's a secondary highway, because it's not paved. It's the highway that goes from Lac La Biche to Fort McMurray, and I can't for the life of me . . .

MR. STELMACH: Eight eighty-one?

MS OLSEN: Is that it? Yeah, 881. Okay. That's the alternative route. Is that targeted for rehab, or is that going to be paved?

MR. STELMACH: We're paving, yeah.

MS OLSEN: Okay. That was just a concern I had. There were a lot of issues brought up about the closure of the other road between Fort McMurray and Lac La Biche.

9:46

The traffic safety review. Did the fines go up with the new Traffic Safety Act, the overall fines for traffic violations and that kind of thing?

MR. STELMACH: Some did.

MS OLSEN: I can get the specified penalties list; I just couldn't remember whether or not that happened.

In the old Highway Traffic Act, sections 123(a) and (b), which are driving without due care and attention or driving without due consideration for others on the highway, I think it was a \$150 fine or compulsory court appearance. You talked about the review that the RCMP did, and one issue was driving without due care and attention. I'm just wondering if that might necessitate a compulsory court appearance as opposed to just the ability to levy a \$150 fine, if that might be another option in terms of looking at dealing with some of those.

I'm not necessarily certain that you need to come up with another section to prohibit using cellular phones. I think that's covered. I think that fine is absolutely satisfactory in that area. I'm just wondering if the increase in fine may have occurred or just a straight compulsory court appearance might be an option to go to.

British Columbia has an incredible Check Stop program. What happens is that the RCMP are paid by the province for that special duty work. Wherever you go on a Friday or Saturday night in Vancouver, Victoria, everywhere I went anyway – I was glad that I wasn't somebody imbibing alcohol. They're sure to get caught, absolutely sure to get caught. It seems to me they have a huge program there. In fact, one of the RCMP officers did say that this was a provincial program where the province paid for the officers' Check Stops. I don't know what the cost of that program is, but in terms of reducing drinking and driving, impaired driving, I think that's an effective tool.

I understand that my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar has some questions. One more prior to that. You talked about red-light cameras. You've seen reductions with the red-light cameras. Well, the red-light cameras are static, so people are always going to know they're there. They're not moving around like photoradar. I'm a huge believer in photoradar, as are most police officers that I know. [interjection] Well, I used to belong to a gang of 1,100.

I would encourage this government to use photoradar. I do believe it is a safety instrument. I do believe that it does work. I don't believe it's a cash cow. I believe . . .

MR. STELMACH: On provincial highways?

MS OLSEN: Yes. I believe the cash is a by-product of a traffic safety program. Not that I spent a lot of time giving out radar tickets, because I didn't, but I do believe there's huge, huge merit in the program. It does work.

With that I'll leave it. Mr. Minister, I've taken a few moments of my colleague's time, and I'm just wondering if maybe you could answer me in writing or something.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, do you wish to respond either orally or in writing?

MR. STELMACH: Most of the response will be written, but I just want to clarify. I think the hon. member said that a quarter of the schools I talked about are 57 percent. It's less than 50 percent utilization.

I'm not arguing about the merit of the program. I think there's some opportunity there. On the other hand, we've got the empty space, so why not use some of that space? There may be a possibility of looking at it. We'll look at it. If it's a program similar to how Centre high works, it's got good achievement levels. But we'll be looking at it.

MS OLSEN: I'll be bothering you about it.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. . . . I'm sorry, Mr. Minister. Did you complete your . . .

MR. STELMACH: Well, they asked more questions, so we'll give them the opportunity.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay, but we do have other people who have indicated that they were interested in asking questions.

Was that what your hand was?

MR. STELMACH: I will say that we're supposed to bring this to a close in about five minutes, so if there are any outstanding questions that have not been asked, if they could be given to us in writing, we're more than happy to respond to them. I know some of our members didn't have much of a chance to ask, so we'd like to give everyone an opportunity.

I'd then just like to move that we rise and report.

MRS. SOETAERT: No, it's not 10 o'clock yet. If I may, Mr. Chairman . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Actually, if you have a motion – did I hear the motion or did I not?

MRS. SOETAERT: Could the minister at least answer some of our questions for five minutes before we adjourn? I'd like to hear an answer about Queen Street school.

MR. STELMACH: Oh, sure. You will hear it in four minutes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, if you wish to answer the questions, yes, you have time and you may do so. If you wish to listen to more questions, fine.

MR. STELMACH: Given that we have an agreement to bring this to a close after I answer the issue raised, questions with respect to Queen Street school in Spruce Grove.

I had the pleasure of visiting Spruce Grove with the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. Incidentally, thank you for

supporting us on riding in the back of pickup trucks. I thought the lunch was worth while for that.

The criteria as exist today on new school construction – and I say as exist today, because we are reviewing the utilization rates and how that will apply in terms of the decision-making. But there are enrollment pressures in the system, looking at the required changes for new technology in the existing school and also the need for ancillary space like gymnasiums, et cetera.

I didn't visit Queen Street school personally, but I think one of the things we'll be looking at is just seeing – after we get this inventory, we'll have all the ages of the schools and also the kind of modernization, et cetera, that will be required. Sometimes there will be a saw-off in terms of if it costs X amount to modernize, what is the cost of replacement?

In this particular area I know that the school is situated in a place, in a community where the town looks at the space as being valuable for a seniors' centre. That's one of the positive advantages of this department because, quite frankly, when Spruce Grove as a municipality came to see us, after a few minutes of discussion – well, at first they came to us talking about a seniors' drop-in centre, not knowing that we were talking to the school board. We asked them to go see the school board. The school board now has talked to the municipality, and I think there's some pressure there in terms of: okay, now let's work with each other to see how we both might meet the needs. I don't recall Parkland's priority list though. [interjection] Okay, but they would have to have it on their priority list.

9:56

MRS. SOETAERT: It's their top priority.

MR. STELMACH: As replacement or what?

MRS. SOETAERT: Replacement.

MR. STELMACH: Okay. That's where we're at today.

MRS. SOETAERT: So does a school board have that priority then? Like, you listen to their priority lists?

MR. STELMACH: Yes. You know, we look at their priority lists, of course again looking at some of the other criteria in terms of the utilization factor, some of their space requirements, enrollment pressures. In this particular case, the school audit will also tell us the condition of the building, all of the buildings. We rated them from – I don't know what point we started at, but they go as high as 1,100. So we did the schools. The first 33 schools were the worst, at let's say 900 to 1,000.

MRS. SOETAERT: These were across the province?

MR. STELMACH: Across the province. Across school boards. Yes.

MRS. SOETAERT: Okay. So you decide which ones are done. The school boards all put them in, and you decide.

MR. STELMACH: For modernization, according to the audit, unless the school board wants to close a particular school. They may want to close one because of low enrollment, and of course we wouldn't be proceeding with the modernization. Okay? Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I believe we'd like to rise and report.

THE CHAIRMAN: All right. The hon. Minister of Infrastructure

has moved that the subcommittee do now rise and report. All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

We'll reconvene in the Assembly in committee stage.

[The subcommittee adjourned at 10 p.m.]