



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Standing Committee
on
Resource Stewardship

Ministry of Transportation
Consideration of Main Estimates

Thursday, March 5, 2020
9 a.m.

Transcript No. 30-2-5

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Second Session**

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UCP), Chair
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP), Deputy Chair
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),* Acting Deputy Chair

Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
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Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UCP)
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Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UCP)
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* substitution for Joe Ceci

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Also in Attendance

Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)

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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Participant

Ministry of Transportation
Hon. Ric McIver, Minister

9 a.m.

Thursday, March 5, 2020

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

**Ministry of Transportation
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Chair: I'd like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Transportation for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have all MLAs introduce themselves for the record. Minister, please introduce the officials that are joining you at the table. I am David Hanson, MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul and chair of this committee. We'll start to my right.

Mr. Yaseen: Muhammad Yaseen, MLA for Calgary-North.

Mr. Getson: Shane Getson, MLA for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Smith: Mark Smith, MLA for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Ms Lovely: Jackie Lovely, MLA for the constituency of Camrose.

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

Ms Rosin: Morning. Miranda Rosin, MLA for Banff-Kananaskis.

Mr. Loewen: Todd Loewen, MLA, Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. McIver: Ric McIver, MLA for Calgary-Hays and the Minister of Transportation. With me at the table are our new deputy minister, Rae-Ann Lajeunesse; Dale Fung, our executive director of Transportation's finance division; and Tom Loo, assistant deputy minister of construction and maintenance. As well, Crystal Damer, assistant deputy minister, and a number of other officials are in the room.

Mr. Eggen: Good morning. My name is David Eggen. I'm the MLA for Edmonton-North West.

Member Loyola: Rod Loyola, Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Sabir: Irfan Sabir, MLA for Calgary-McCall.

The Chair: Thank you, everyone.

I'd like to note the following substitutions for the record. David Eggen is substituting for Joe Ceci and acting as deputy chair. Jackie Lovely is substituting for Pat Rehn.

Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard*, and the committee proceedings are being live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

Hon. members, the standing orders set out the process for consideration of the main estimates. Standing Order 59.01(7) establishes the speaking rotation while the speaking time limits are set out in Standing Order 59.02(1). In brief, the minister or member of Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf will have 10 minutes to address the committee. At the conclusion of his comments we begin a 50-minute speaking block for the Official Opposition, followed by a 20-minute speaking block for government caucus.

The rotation of speaking time will then alternate between the Official Opposition and the government caucus, with individual speaking times set to five minutes, which if combined with the minister's time, make it a 10-minute block. Discussion should flow

through the chair at all times regardless of whether or not the speaking time is combined. Members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their rotation if they wish to combine their time with the minister's time. If members have any questions regarding speaking times or the rotation, please feel free to send a note or e-mail to either the chair or committee clerk.

A total of two hours has been scheduled to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Transportation. The scheduled end time of today's meeting is 11 a.m.

Ministry officials may be present and at the direction of the minister may address the committee. Ministry officials seated in the gallery, if called upon, have access to a microphone in the gallery. Pages are available to deliver notes or other materials between the gallery and the table. Attendees in the gallery may not approach the table. Space permitting, opposition caucus staff may sit at the table to assist the members; however, members have priority to sit at the table at all times.

If debate is exhausted prior to two hours, the ministry's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule, and the committee will adjourn. Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and the clock will continue to run; however, the timer for the speaking block will be paused.

Any written material provided in response to questions raised during the main estimates should be tabled by the minister in the Assembly for the benefit of all members.

The vote on the estimates and any amendments will occur in Committee of Supply on March 19, 2020. Amendments must be in writing and approved by Parliamentary Counsel prior to the meeting at which they are to be moved. The original amendment is to be deposited with the committee clerk, and 20 copies of the amendment must be provided at the meeting for committee members and staff.

I now invite the Minister of Transportation to begin with his opening remarks. You have 10 minutes, sir.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Chair. Good morning. I'm pleased to be here to present Alberta Transportation's 2020-2021 estimates. I have already introduced the folks at the table, so I won't do that again, but I'm grateful for their attendance as well as the other department officials who are here.

Moving people's goods and services is the core responsibility of Alberta Transportation. What we do and how we do it touch the lives of Albertans on a daily basis. Whether it's travelling along our highway network, using public transportation, relying on clean drinking water from modern water systems, to depending upon the vast array of goods and services that move across our province, Alberta Transportation plays a role in all of that.

In Transportation safety is a top priority. My department works hard to ensure that our thousands of kilometres of highways are safe for Albertans to travel and those who drive on our highways do so in a safe and competent manner, and that includes making sure our driver training program is working properly. We are committed to providing Albertans with high-quality service for driver road tests. We recognize that Albertans have faced significant delays in getting road tests, so we've taken action to reduce wait times and increase the number of road tests available. My department has taken action to improve driver examination services, including hiring and training more than 127 government driver examiners and licensing approximately 35 driver examiners to deliver additional testing services and reduce wait times. As you know, we are reviewing the current government-run system, that was implemented last year, and we are developing options for a long-term, permanent solution.

We are also strengthening the rules for recently licensed truck and bus drivers. The new mandatory entry-level training – MELT

for short – requirements are here to stay for all class 1 and class 2 drivers. It includes mandatory standardized driver training curriculums that have set hours for in-class, in-yard, and in-vehicle training. MELT is being implemented across Canada, following the lead of the United States. I'll also tell you that the U.S. has recently announced a two-year extension on full implementation to MELT to all states to develop the systems they need to have in place to administer training and to track drivers who will need to take the training. Safety is and always will be our number one priority.

However, jobs and job creation is another big factor as we develop our budget priorities. Our capital plan recognizes the role that public infrastructure has in attracting investment and the creation of jobs. Major projects such as the Calgary ring road mean long-term employment for those in the construction sector. A well-maintained highway network improves the flow of goods and services throughout the province and protects and creates new jobs in the private sector.

In developing this plan, we used the guiding principles of safety, fiscal responsibility, focusing more investment on maintaining existing highways as compared to new infrastructure, and selecting projects with the potential to be supported by alternate funding or financing. The question I had to answer in developing this budget was: new or renew? Do we move ahead with new capital projects, building roads and bridges, or do we look after what's already in place through renewal? The question, as always, is both.

But this budget reflects our commitment to move our emphasis – this is the first year in a several-year emphasis move – to maintaining and repairing our highway network of 31,400 kilometres, the equivalent of nearly 64,000 lane kilometres, which includes 28,000 kilometres of paved road, of which almost 2,500 kilometres are four- and six-lane divided highways, along with 4,500 bridge structures, which include bridges, overpasses, and culverts. In the Budget 2020 capital plan we are shifting our focus to allocate more funding to rehabilitate and maintain our existing highway network, and this is a gradual shift, that you'll see take place over two or three years, in our focus. Currently the deferred maintenance on highways is \$335 million, and the average age of pavement in Alberta is 15 years.

We will also be able to maintain stable and consistent funding, we believe, to support the supply of asphalt concrete pavement, ACP tonnage, in grading quantities. ACP is used in paving work to create strong and smooth road surfaces for safe and efficient travel. Over the past few years there have been inconsistent ACP qualities, which can create challenges for industry in planning their people and their equipment that they require to do the work for government.

This increased investment and focus on maintenance and rehabilitation, we believe, will help us preserve and enhance the existing provincial highway network and help reduce the need for expensive reconstruction in the future. We will reprofile funds for approved projects in some cases to match planned construction schedules without increasing the capital plan. Stable, predictable funding will allow us to continue to reinvest in our existing highway network to support job creation and economic growth.

Our overall capital plan includes funding for the Calgary ring road, \$459 million for the southwest portion and \$897 million for the west portion of the Calgary ring road. We also remain committed to the expansion of the southwest Anthony Henday Drive in Edmonton, with funding of \$67 million earmarked for that project. Our capital program includes funding for Deerfoot Trail improvements in Calgary, expansion of highway 1A between Cochrane and Canmore, completion of the Peace River Bridge, and twinning of the east and west portions of highway 19 between QE II and highway 60 in the Edmonton region.

Recently I was pleased to announce a cost-sharing agreement with the municipal district of Greenview and the county of Grande Prairie to twin a section of highway 40 south of Grande Prairie. This agreement allows this project to move forward quicker. In fact, preliminary construction work such as utility relocation and land clearing could begin as early as this summer. This is a perfect example of how partnering with our local and regional counterparts can get things done quicker in some cases. In the future we need to think creatively about how to fund projects if we want to move them forward quickly. We are open to considering new ways to finance some new capital infrastructure projects in a way that is fiscally responsible and respects the taxpayer.

9:10

We have dedicated \$1.2 billion over three years for the rehabilitation of existing highway infrastructure. Through this investment and the reprofiling of funds, we will be focusing on increasing the highway rehabilitation budget and stabilizing the overall trend of road condition deterioration by 2023-24.

The average age of our 4,500 bridges is 40 years old, with many bridges approaching the end of their useful life; 27 per cent are more than 50 years old, and 21.5 per cent are in what we call poor condition.

We will invest in our slide repair budget to proactively manage slides before significant damages occur on the highway and prevent more expensive repairs in the future. Slides occur when the ground underneath a highway shifts, damaging the road and creating unsafe conditions. I have to say that this is my second tour as Transportation minister. One of the things I've learned is that every hill in Alberta not called the Rocky Mountains is moving, and sometimes that causes us trouble when we're maintaining roads.

Over the next three years we will maintain or increase funding for a number of grants. For example, the strategic transportation infrastructure program, or STIP, will receive \$61.4 million over the next three years. The STIP amount includes new funding of \$25 million in year 3 for new projects. This will allow us to continue to provide grants critical to rural and small urban municipalities, to sustain local transportation infrastructure, and to promote new and existing local resources in the agricultural sector.

We are also continuing to provide funding for the Alberta municipal water/waste-water partnership, the water for life program, and the First Nations water tie-in program. The funding in these programs also helps to leverage federal contributions, allowing more water projects to be funded.

We will continue our commitment to both Edmonton and Calgary for LRT projects, with \$75 million in provincial funding.

Our emphasis on improving our highway network effectively connects people. It also increases the movement of goods and services, enhances the tourism sector, and results in more jobs.

Alberta Transportation, like all ministries, is faced with the task of balancing wants against needs. We must examine the way we do business and look at new and innovative solutions to raise revenue without breaking the bank. Alberta Transportation is exploring options for major capital programs. Capital projects cost a lot of money, and I am determined to make sure that we can afford to pay for these important projects with minimal impact on the taxpayer. We will be doing some things differently than in the past because that's what the world demands of us. We are looking for ways to be innovative. We are looking for ways to partner with other people in Alberta as we identify projects that are important to Albertans, that will have a positive effect on jobs, on the economy, on the quality of life for Albertans as they go about doing their daily business.

Let's face it. Almost everything of value – not everything, but almost everything of value – in this world at some point in its life

rides on a truck, and those trucks ride on Alberta roads, so we take this responsibility seriously. We know that Albertans are depending upon us to deliver the transportation network – and I say “network” because one road doesn’t help unless it’s part of a whole network – maintain it, and keep it in a way that will support Alberta’s economy and the jobs that people depend upon.

I thank you for your time this morning. I’m pleased to answer any questions that you may have. [Mr. McIver’s speaking time expired]

The Chair: That’s amazing. Thank you, Minister. I guess you can chalk that up to experience.

For the 50 minutes that follow, members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. The timer will be set for two 20-minute intervals and one 10-minute interval so that you’re aware of the time.

Please proceed.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. If the minister agrees, I’d like to go back and forth with him. Is that okay?

Mr. McIver: I will be happy to accommodate the hon. member with the back and forth.

Member Loyola: With the back and forth. Okay. Sounds great. Thanks.

Minister, before I begin, I just want to say thank you very much for being here today and to all your staff. It’s always great to have this opportunity to delve deep into the Ministry of Transportation and to have all the experts in the room and knowledgeable people along with you, of course.

To begin with, I just want to bring together everything that I’m understanding about the estimates. According to page 140 of the fiscal plan you estimate that there will be a \$25 million cut – that’s a 6 per cent cut – to the Transportation ministry budget. This is what I’m seeing from forecast to estimate over the year, okay? We agree on that?

Mr. McIver: We agree with what’s in the budget and what’s printed in black and white. I agree with all of that.

Member Loyola: Okay. I just want to make sure. Summarizing what I see before me and what is important, that I want to really focus on today, there’s a \$19.2 million cut to highway maintenance, a \$3.8 million cut to traffic safety services. There’s a \$72.83 million cut to STIP and GreenTRIP grants and then a \$7.3 million cut to municipal and First Nations waste-water programs, okay? To begin with, I just want to first of all ask a very general, high-level question, which is: are you planning on introducing or amending any transport-related legislation and/or regulations as a way of facilitating these cuts?

Mr. McIver: Well, you gave about five examples here. We’ll get you more details if you want to go through each one of them. We kind of expect this question, and we’re happy to provide that detail, but I’m not sure that everything that you just called a cut actually is a cut, with all due respect.

Again, I think there were five or six things you mentioned. For example, STIP is not a cut. The previous government reinstated STIP here three, four years ago and put about \$100 million over three or four years into STIP. What’s in there reflects the years that the previous government had left in the program and the dollars from the previous government’s capital program that we had left in it. What we actually did was that we extended it one more year as part of our budget. We extended STIP for one more year with a \$25

million budget, which is the traditional amount that was always in STIP. I wouldn’t call that either an increase or a reduction, if you don’t mind, or a cut.

Okay. You talked about green transit incentives. The final call of approved projects was announced in December 2016, resulting in the program being fully allocated. Again, I wouldn’t necessarily call that a cut. If the project was a hundred per cent spent and no dollars were taken out of it, I’m not sure how you can call that a cut. The project had a beginning and an end, and it went to its logical conclusion, and it ended when all the dollars were expended.

Member Loyola: You’re not interested in renewing the program in any way, especially the GreenTRIP?

Mr. McIver: Well, Budget 2020 includes \$64.6 million over three years to fund GreenTRIP. The GreenTRIP program was fully committed in signed grant agreements, as you’ve asked me about in question period in the past. But you can ask it again here today, of course. It’s your privilege. The \$1.53 billion committed to Calgary for their LRT and the \$1.47 billion committed to Edmonton for their LRT: actually, we put that commitment in legislation in the last session of the Legislative Assembly. That’s coming up in future years also. At this point we’re going to meet the commitments on that GreenTRIP program to Calgary and Edmonton.

Member Loyola: Within that specific piece of legislation also is that the Minister of Municipal Affairs can decide to just stop the actual project. It’s actually written into the legislation.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. That is in our funding agreement. There is also a potential cancellation clause in the federal funding agreement. I consider that to be fairly standard. Our intention, I want you to know – and we’ve certainly made that clear to Calgary and Edmonton – is for them to build the LRT lines and for us to fund them to the \$1.53 billion and the \$1.47 billion. We feel an obligation on behalf of the taxpayers because none of this money is our money. It’s all the taxpayers’ money. We feel an obligation to make sure that if we’re spending that amount of money, it gets spent on what was committed to in the first place. We feel good about protecting the taxpayers that way while still giving the cities of Calgary and Edmonton assurance that they will get the full funding that they desire for their LRT lines.

Member Loyola: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

I want to take you back to the question, which was: are you planning on introducing or amending any transport-related legislation and/or regulations as a way of facilitating this change in allocation of monies to particular areas of the budget?

9:20

Mr. McIver: Well, I guess the big thing I’d point to is the budget itself. We intend to pass that. I guess you could call that a big piece of legislation.

Member Loyola: Of course. On top of that, though.

Mr. McIver: Nothing that comes to mind right now. I don’t mean to be at all flippant, sir. This is just – we could change our mind at any time if we see the reason for it.

Member Loyola: But as of right now you’re not planning on introducing or amending any regulations or any legislation?

Mr. McIver: Okay. Well, I think there are a couple of pieces that we’re kicking around in our minds about changing, but none of it occurs to me that’s directly . . .

Member Loyola: And what are those specifically, if you don't mind me asking?

Mr. McIver: Well, when we introduce it, we'll do it, but I'm just saying that – I want to answer your question here – as I flip through it in my mind quickly, nothing occurs to me that's really budget related.

Member Loyola: But you are considering making some changes to regulation, then?

Mr. McIver: Well, I said in my opening remarks that one of the things that we are contemplating changing – and I went on some length about us working on correcting the delays for people waiting to get a driver exam. I think we've made pretty good progress in doing that.

In my opening remarks one of the other things that I talked about was that we're considering what the permanent driver examiner system is going to look like, and when we make that decision – and we're thinking about it now, but we haven't made our determination yet – it's entirely likely that there could be legislation or regulations that need to change to accommodate that. That certainly comes to mind.

We have red tape reduction items that you might see in legislation coming up. I'm not sure whether you consider that directly related to the budget or not. Certainly, the red tape stuff: when we do that, our government's intention is to contain our costs, control our costs, but it's also, beyond that, just to make it easier for people, Albertans, to do their business.

Member Loyola: Minister, what I'm really after is: what are the changes that you are considering? I mean, you're telling me that you're considering making some changes to legislation and regulation, and I want to know what those are.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. I'm not going to tell you because that's not before us today. What's before us today is the budget and what we're going to do, and as we consider and roll out . . .

Member Loyola: Yeah, but in order to facilitate this budget . . .

Mr. McIver: Listen, I'm trying to be as respectful to you as I can and to meet the obligations of today and certainly am not trying to hold back on you, but you'll appreciate that no government that I'm aware of will tell their opposition everything they're thinking of before they've decided to do it, and this government likely won't either, sir. I don't mean to be in any way impolite to you. You're asking a question that's probably not appropriate and probably not before us as part of the committee. What's in the budget, we're defending, and I'm happy to answer questions about it. What's not written in the budget: I can't wait for question period or any other time you want to ask that question. I'm just not sure that belongs here today, sir.

The Chair: I'd appreciate it if both the minister and the member would direct through the chair. It's starting to get a little . . .

Mr. McIver: Thank you for that reminder, Chair. I will conduct myself accordingly.

Member Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Member Loyola: Okay. Mr. Chair, through you, what I'm interested in, then, is that you spoke about, in your opening remarks, how

you're planning on doing some things differently. I don't know if that's an exact quote or not.

Mr. McIver: That's close enough to be accurate.

Member Loyola: You want to be innovative, and you want to partner.

Mr. McIver: Yeah.

Member Loyola: Okay. So in order to facilitate what you're looking at doing there in terms of spending in the capital plan and moving forward on infrastructure projects, will you require making any changes to regulation?

Mr. McIver: Quite possibly.

Mr. Loewen: Point of order.

The Chair: Point of order noted.

Mr. Loewen: We'll go with 23(b) and (c), speaks to matters other than the question under discussion and persists in needless repetition. We already went through this exact same thing here just 30 seconds ago, and the member continues to go down the same path. He's talking about matters that aren't in the estimates, and he persists in needless repetition of those same comments and questions. I would suggest that the member move on and get with the estimates, the things that we're actually dealing with here today.

The Chair: Thank you.
And a rebuttal?

Member Loyola: Mr. Chair, the reality is that the minister is presenting a budget where specific line items he is addressing – he is stating that he wants to innovate and that he wants to partner, and I'm just following down that same path on his opening remarks. I'm just asking him questions based on his opening remarks. If he's presenting it here as a part of his presentation on the government estimates, why shouldn't I be able to follow up on it?

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Loewen: Chair?

The Chair: Okay, but briefly.

Mr. Loewen: Yes. If the minister talked about his wife and kids, that doesn't give the member the right to ask questions about it. He can say whatever he wants in his opening remarks, and that doesn't open up the members opposite to talk about anything other than what's in these estimates.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We've been through this at a number of other budget estimates, and I'll just remind folks that this is the member's time. How he chooses to use it, I guess – I would personally prefer to follow line items, refer to line items, and get as many answers out of the minister as I could if I was in that position. The minister, again, is not obligated to answer any questions.

So to the member: use your time as you see fit, I guess.
Go ahead.

Mr. McIver: I could expand a little bit on what I said, Chair, if that's okay with you. One example of doing things differently that we've talked about publicly – in fact, we did a media conference on it a couple of weeks ago in Grande Prairie, and I talked about that

in my opening remarks – is that we had a bridge project that’s really important to industry as well as the citizens. It’s backed up every day south of Grande Prairie, and it’s largely felt that it is holding up economic development and not only threatens the viability of some of the current businesses that are there, but potentially it could hold up the consideration of big investment that could provide more jobs and opportunities for Albertans there.

It wasn’t in our capital plan, but interestingly enough the MD of Greenview and the county of Grande Prairie came forward and said, “We’d like to partner with you and contribute to this project,” and we believe that will give us an opportunity to move that project forward in the schedule in a way that we haven’t done in the past. If indeed that agreement requires us to change legislation or regulations to accommodate that and make it legal and above board and everything, then we will of course change that, the regulations and the legislation, to make what we think is a very positive agreement for Albertans legal and meet all the standards that we’re required to meet.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Minister. That’s exactly what I was after, okay? Thank you.

Mr. McIver: When you got specific, then I could answer the question. With the generalization, I couldn’t quite zone in on where you were going.

Member Loyola: Okay. Well, the cost-sharing agreement specifically to twin highway 40 is of interest to me, and I’m wondering: based on your capital plan right now, are there any more projects that you’re planning right now to move in this direction in terms of cost sharing?

Mr. McIver: Well, let me say this: yes and no. That’s not an evasive answer. The fact is that I can’t put my finger on one right now where we have an agreement, but we are open to agreements in other areas where we can move things up the capital plan without making the taxpayers pay more for our capital plan than they are now. If and when we find those projects and we make those agreements, we are certainly open to more cost-sharing agreements. Should they come forward, then we will certainly entertain those, and we may well bring them forward if we think we can do it in a way that’s positive for Albertans. We haven’t got any other agreements per se right now, but I think that we’re saying that we’re open to that possibility, and we’ll proceed with what we think is in Albertans’ best interests as these opportunities arise.

Member Loyola: Okay. Thank you very much, Minister.

This same twinning of highway 40 was actually announced by the then Premier in Grande Prairie in December 2018, I believe. All the monies were going to be provided by the government, so the taxpayer dollars were going to be going to the twinning of highway 40. Now you’ve reannounced it, saying that there’s going to be a cost-sharing measure. Under the previous government it was going to be fully funded by government, and now there’s going to be a cost sharing. Why was that decision made?

Mr. McIver: Well, first of all, I’m not sure whether the previous government actually – they announced a lot of things they didn’t put funding into. A lot of things.

Member Loyola: Well, the money was allocated in the budget.

Mr. McIver: Even if it was, then I would say to you that you should probably be congratulating us for making a better deal than the previous government made and getting a cost share and saving the

taxpayers, you know, up to half or so, whatever the percentage be, of this project.

Member Loyola: But if money is coming from the people of Grande Prairie still through some other avenue, they’re still taxpayer dollars that are going into it. The taxpayer would have paid for it through taxes that have gone to the Alberta government, but now they’re going to be paying it through other means, through other ways. It’s still taxpayer dollars, yet you’re saying that you’re actually saving money.

9:30

Mr. McIver: And I’m happy to let Albertans judge whether our cost-share agreement was better or worse than whatever your government might have done. I would say that I call it a win. You can call it something else – it’s okay with me – but I call it a win. I call it a co-operative way of us providing infrastructure for Albertans in a good way in tough fiscal times. One of the things or reasons why we are taking a hard look at our plan is because of the severe debt we were left in by the previous government. This is a way for us to get the infrastructure built while still trying to balance the budget and deal with the deficit. I call it a win. You’re certainly welcome to call it something else.

Member Loyola: Okay. Thank you very much, Minister.

I’d like to go on to you discussing in your opening remarks the MELT program. You mentioned that it is here to stay. I wanted to cover one more time – and I know I asked this in the previous government estimates, but I just wanted to reconfirm with you that there will be no exemptions under the MELT program under your government or under your watch.

Mr. McIver: No. MELT is here to stay. I’m sure somebody is going to put a piece of paper under my nose right now to give me the exact date. While I think I remember, an old guy I knew when I was younger told me that a short pencil is better than a long memory, so I’m going to depend on the short pencil here.

MELT came into force in March 2019. It’s mandatory, and from this point forward anyone that wants a class 1 or 2 licence is going to have to go through and pass the MELT requirements.

Member Loyola: Okay. So no exemptions, absolutely no exemptions?

Mr. McIver: No more exemptions.

Member Loyola: Okay. On this issue, of course, it’s really important, and I’m sure I don’t need to even suggest it to you that the Humboldt families are really concerned when it comes to this issue. With all due respect to them, I want to know if you have been consulting with the Humboldt families to get their input on basically making Alberta highways safer.

Mr. McIver: Interesting timing that you should ask that question. When we were having this discussion a few months ago, I had about nine or 10 of the Humboldt families in my office to discuss this. Interestingly enough, when you say “consulting with” – I’m going to be careful how I answer that – they know that they’re welcome to give us advice any time they want, and I think we have an open invitation from them to ask for their advice whenever we want. But one of the Humboldt parents was in my office last week along with another person to give us some advice, and we listened carefully and respectfully to them. I thought that was a helpful conversation.

Member Loyola: Perfect. I'm glad that that's happening. Would you please, then, table a record of the meetings and consultations that you've had with the Humboldt families?

Mr. McIver: Not likely.

Member Loyola: Why not, Minister?

Mr. McIver: It was a conversation we had. They wanted to give us advice. We took their advice. They are private citizens that came in, and if private citizens want to talk about their advice, their discussion with government . . .

Member Loyola: So you're unwilling to table a record of consultation with them?

Mr. Getson: Point of order.

The Chair: Point of order noted.

Mr. Getson: Under 23(b), "speaks to matters other than . . . under discussion"; 23(c), "persists in needless repetition" of items other than under discussion; and given the nature of the questions during question period and past history from the hon. member across from me, "uses . . . language of a nature likely to create disorder." We all have been touched greatly and are concerned about the Humboldt crisis. There have been steps that have been taken in place. On a personal note, I find it reprehensible that we keep dragging that tragic incident out to potentially grandstand here in this place when we're talking about estimates and what we're doing with public safety, et cetera.

Honestly, it sits pretty hard with me, having young children that ride on buses, participate in sports, do all these different events. To keep bringing that up when we're taking positive steps and, to go even further, to assert that our hon. minister at the end of the table has not taken that into consideration in any of his decisions that have taken place given the amount of debate that's taken place – I would submit that potentially the member can move on and maybe leave that very sensitive subject alone.

The Chair: A rebuttal?

Member Loyola: It's exactly because it is a sensitive issue that we want to be able to cover it. Albertans are concerned about the safety on Alberta highways, and we want to make sure that we're addressing that issue. A number of people were drastically affected by what happened in Humboldt. They should have an avenue and an open door. I'm glad that the minister is saying that he is meeting with people. All I'm asking for is a record that he has been consulting and if he could table that record or not. Now, if he doesn't want to, that's his prerogative. That's okay. Fine.

The Chair: Thank you very much, and we'll move on here. I tend to agree with Mr. Getson. I think the minister has answered very clearly in question period. He's answered very clearly today. It is not his prerogative to table documents of meetings with private citizens, and I think we should move on to budget-oriented questions.

Thank you.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much.

Mr. McIver: I'll just say that the disadvantage I have – and I'm okay with the disadvantage – is that while private citizens meet with me, they're free to say anything they want. They don't have to protect my privacy because I'm not really entitled to any when I meet with them. They, on the other hand, are entitled to privacy,

and they get to decide whether they make those meetings public, not me. I'm just trying to defend their privacy. They can say anything publicly that they want, and that's perfectly okay with me.

Member Loyola: Okay. Thank you very much, Minister.

Based on what is written on page 218 of the fiscal plan, you estimate that a total of 65 jobs will be lost out of the Department of Transportation. My first question. I'm sure that, as happens in other ministries, positions are phased out, but I'm wondering: how many of the 65 that are planning or that are estimated to be cut are positions that are being phased out?

Mr. McIver: I would say to you that we expect to find the reduction of 65 FTEs mostly through existing vacancies and retirements; in other words, through attrition, without layoffs, if you will. That's our objective, to minimize the number of people we have to say goodbye to and maximize the number of vacancies that occur through the employee's own decision. We think that's the most decent way to do it if we have to do this.

Member Loyola: Okay. Based on where you possibly see these positions being cut from, which programs will be affected?

Mr. McIver: Well, let me just say that we're streamlining our organizational structure to help increase efficiencies and focus on Alberta government priorities without compromising safety or services to Albertans. Reductions, wherever possible, will be achieved by consolidation of responsibilities in non front-line staff. We're trying to use good management methods to still provide all the services to Albertans that they deserve while living within our budget constraints. I don't mind telling you that when you've got fewer people accomplishing the same things, you've got to be creative.

The Chair: That's your first 20 minutes. You've got another 30 minutes.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. McIver: You've got to be creative, and our staff have been wonderful with how they're performing.

Member Loyola: Yeah. I'm sure that they're doing a wonderful job indeed. My question, though, is: do you see any adverse effects to the programs that will be delivered because of the cut of 65 positions from the department?

Mr. McIver: No. We don't intend to have any adverse effects on the programs that we deliver. We are determined to provide Albertans with the level of service and the quality of a transportation network that they have the right to expect from their government, and we in no way have said that doing a lesser job is acceptable. We're looking for ways to deliver a good job like we believe the government does.

Member Loyola: I think it's a conservative adage to do more with less, right?

Mr. McIver: Well, sometimes it's a family adage, too. Albertan families, of whatever political stripe they are, have had to do more with less in the last few years, and we think we're consistent with that.

9:40

Member Loyola: Thank you, Minister.

As we already established at the outset, there's a \$3.8 million cut to traffic safety services, so the development and delivery of

transportation safety programs, traffic safety initiatives, and overseeing of the 511 Alberta system. Of the \$3.8 million that you've estimated will be taken out of traffic safety services – well, first let me ask this. How many programs does the department run? Like, what's encompassed within traffic safety services? How many programs are we talking about?

Mr. McIver: Well, we do advertising, we have community mobilization consultants, and we have grants for organizations for traffic safety programs, those types of things.

Member Loyola: Okay. Then with the \$3.8 million that will be taken out of traffic safety services, of those programs or grants, what will be affected?

Mr. McIver: We're making adjustments in most areas. For example, we are maintaining \$500,000 a year for grants to organizations for safety programs focusing on reducing impaired driving. We're maintaining our grant funding to Mothers Against Drunk Driving and Students Against Drunk Driving, the two biggest ones and the most effectual ones, we think. It's no criticism against the other programs, but we think that these are – impaired driving is the cause of many injuries and deaths in Alberta.

Member Loyola: So in previous years how much . . .

Mr. McIver: I'm sorry. I was . . .

Member Loyola: Yeah. I just want to have an understanding. From year to year in the past how many dollars were allocated to the granting system, then, this particular granting system? You're saying that this year there will be \$500,000. How much was there last year?

Mr. McIver: We'll find that for you. Just give me a second here. Okay. About a million dollars last year and about \$500,000 this year.

Member Loyola: Okay. You were saying, then, that there are two organizations only, or are there more organizations that receive through this grant?

Mr. McIver: Well, those are the two major ones. We also are trying to get the message out to Albertans on safety in other ways. One place where we cut back . . .

Member Loyola: Okay. But let's focus on the grant programs just for right now. I just want to get a better understanding. I would like to know how many organizations . . .

Mr. McIver: Do we have a full list of who's got grant programs? Just MADD and SADD. Those are the two.

Member Loyola: Those are the only two?

Mr. McIver: That's correct.

Member Loyola: The only two. Okay. Then are they going to be expected to basically cut it in half, because you're going from a million to \$500,000?

Mr. McIver: No. Neither one, as I understand it, took a reduction. They both got the same funding this year as they got last year.

Member Loyola: As they got last year?

Mr. McIver: Right.

Member Loyola: Okay. Moving back, then, to the other programs – that was the granting program – there's also the advertising. How much will the advertising budget be cut by?

Mr. McIver: I'll wait for the numbers: by about a million dollars, by a lot. We have virtually eliminated or severely reduced paid advertising. We're using alternative approaches. We're putting a lot more effort into social media, pushing messages out to Albertans, and we think we're on the right track there, not because we said so but because the world has gone that way. A lot more Albertans get their news through social media. We're trying to reach them that way and push out safety messages and reminders and that kind of stuff.

We're also trying to use – don't listen, you media folks behind me – earned media by doing events that the media will report on that are of interest that remind people of safety. Earned media is that we try to do events and media conferences and things like that over time where we think that we can get the message out to the public while reducing our expenditures.

Member Loyola: Okay. Then between the granting program and the advertising – sorry. You said that there was a million dollars that you are going to be cutting from the advertising budget?

Mr. McIver: Approximately, yeah.

Member Loyola: Approximately. Okay. So that's \$1.5 million. Now, I'm after where the other \$2 million are going to be cut from.

Mr. McIver: Well, we have two community mobilization consultants, one in northern Alberta and one in southern Alberta, that deliver local traffic safety campaigns and initiatives. We had eight.

Member Loyola: Oh, you had eight?

Mr. McIver: Yeah.

Member Loyola: Those eight positions have been reduced to two positions, then.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. We emphasized the places of Alberta that are oftentimes hardest to reach, so we maintained those services in northern Alberta and southern Alberta. Those weren't staff; those were contractors. Nonetheless, it does answer your question about where we're spending less money.

Member Loyola: Okay. So we're going from eight to two there. Where else are we going to see any reductions?

Mr. McIver: Paid advertising, again.

Member Loyola: Yeah. We covered that one, sir.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. Just give me a minute here.

Member Loyola: Sure.

Mr. McIver: We'll try to find the answers to that stuff.

Certainly, you see where we reduced discretionary spending within the department, which I think you would agree makes sense.

Member Loyola: But would you agree that moving from eight consultants to two consultants in trying to get words out on safety on our highways would be a negative?

Mr. McIver: Oh, we've got to get it out differently. That is what it comes down to. If we didn't do anything else, it might be, but if

we're as effective as we hope to be with getting our message out other ways, it doesn't have to be a negative.

Member Loyola: Okay. But, I mean, when you have an actual individual in local communities providing the information, reaching out to people, it's a lot more effective, in that people will learn about that, than actually reading it on a social media post. Wouldn't you agree?

Mr. McIver: I think it's different for different people, respectfully. I don't mean to be argumentative. I think different people learn different ways and pay attention to different things, so I'm not sure one answer fits all Albertans.

Member Loyola: But moving from eight to two . . .

Mr. McIver: It's a reduction. We're balancing our budget. We've got hiring restraints. Frankly, we're trying to deal with the massive overspending and budget that we were dealt at the beginning of this. We're trying to deliver these traffic safety services while being fiscally responsible, and this is the way we've chosen to do it, and we feel good about it.

Member Loyola: You feel good about it?

Mr. McIver: Yes.

Member Loyola: Okay. Well, if you feel good about it, that's your prerogative.

Okay. In terms of the 511 Alberta system, is that going to be impacted in any way by the cuts from the traffic safety services?

Mr. McIver: Okay. I'm looking for details here. Certainly, 511 is still up and operating, both on the phone and on the Internet and the apps. I was looking to see if we had any reductions in – no reductions, so it says. Okay. There you go: 511 is whole.

Member Loyola: Okay. Can we get the number on how much it costs to run the 511 Alberta system?

Mr. McIver: Do we have that broken out anywhere? We don't have that broken out per se.

Member Loyola: Okay. Could you agree to table that, Minister?

Mr. McIver: We will get that to you.

Member Loyola: Okay. I appreciate that, sir.

Mr. McIver: No, no. It's a fair question.

Member Loyola: Okay. I'd now like to move on to highway maintenance. As we established at the outset, according to your subtotal on item 5, highway maintenance, on page 199 of the '20-21 government estimates, there's going to be \$19.2 million cut from highway maintenance. I'm interested in knowing, of that money, how much will be cut from your fund to upgrade dangerous intersections.

Mr. McIver: I don't think any of that is safety related. The improvements to intersections are not funded through the maintenance and preservation budget.

The other thing that you will probably be interested in is that we are reporting on that differently in the last couple of years, so what actually looks like a reduction in maintenance and preservation and repair of roads is actually an increase. You deserve an explanation of that, and I intend to give you one. The new accounting standards

say that some of what we do on preservation and maintenance actually adds to the value of the road, which means that the capital assets of the province go up, so the accountants tell us that we have to report that part of what we used to called repair and maintenance in our other capital repair budgets. Consequently, that number isn't – and we may have to in future years consider renaming those budget lines because of the accounting changes that have taken place.

But, on top of that . . .

9:50

Member Loyola: Okay. May I stop you, Minister?

Mr. McIver: . . . we added \$25 million a year in major maintenance, which is actually highway repair and maintenance, in a different budget line.

Member Loyola: Under which budget line?

Mr. McIver: Under capital.

Member Loyola: Okay. That makes sense.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. Okay. It's \$25 million a year over three years in major maintenance under the capital plan. Some preservation activities are now funded under the capital plan, under major maintenance, instead of the operating budget. It's an accounting exercise that we were required to do for the accounting people, that make rules that we have to follow. Your question is pretty reasonable, I would say, based on that, but the fact is that we haven't reduced the amount we're spending fixing the roads. It's actually a little bit more than it was.

Member Loyola: Okay. You're actually just taking from another line item.

Mr. McIver: We were required to put some of it, by the accounting rules, into another line item. I wouldn't say that we take it from another line. We are actually required by the accounting rules people to put it in another line item.

Member Loyola: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

Mr. McIver: Frankly, why would we do that? It kind of leaves us open for you to criticize that. We'd have probably preferred to leave it where it was, but we're following the rules. As a result, we're required to explain this to you publicly, which we're happy to do.

Member Loyola: Thank you.

Okay. The last time we sat together going over the government estimates, you had mentioned to me that there is a top-10 safety-challenged intersection list. Does that list continue to exist? Have you modified it in any way?

Mr. McIver: I could tell you what it is now.

Member Loyola: Sure. Let's go through that if you don't mind. I just want to compare it to . . .

Mr. McIver: All right. This is based on the collision data, the most recent. The highways 39 and 60 intersection was improved last year. It was number 1 on the list. Number 2 on the list is highway 2 and township road 204. It's been improved in the last two years. The third one is highway 2 and township road 210, improved in the last two years. The fourth one is highways 2 and 651, which is scheduled in 2023 for improvements.

Member Loyola: Interesting. The last time we sat down, you said that it was for 2022, so you're putting it off for one year, highways 2 and 651.

Mr. McIver: Assuming you're right – and I'm certainly not assuming you're wrong – if that's the case, then, yes, that would be the answer.

Member Loyola: Okay. Let's continue, please.

Mr. McIver: Just for the record we consider all of our intersections to be safe.

Member Loyola: Of course.

Mr. McIver: If people follow the rules of the road and are sober and are not texting and stop when they're supposed to stop and are going the prescribed speed and driving within the limits . . .

Member Loyola: If you don't mind, I'd really like to get back to the list, Minister.

Mr. McIver: . . . we don't think we have any unsafe intersections. However, these are the ones with the most collisions . . .

Member Loyola: Which you have labelled as the 10 safety-challenged intersections?

Mr. McIver: Yeah. That's correct.

Member Loyola: Okay. Let's continue.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. We think they're all safe; nonetheless, collisions occur, so we look at them to see if we can make improvements.

Member Loyola: We were at highways 2 and 651.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. Number 5 is highway 16A and Lake Eden Road, which has been improved in the last three years. Number 6 is highways 623 and 814, which has been improved within the last year. Number 7 is highway 12 and 67th Street in Stettler, which is scheduled for work in 2021. Number 8 is highways 28 and 63 and 829 – I guess the three all come together there – and that's scheduled for work in 2022. The next one is highways 11 and 20, which has been improved in the last two years. Number 10 is highways 901 and 817, which has been improved in the last two years.

Member Loyola: Almost verbatim since October 29, 2019.

Mr. McIver: With all due respect, the reason that makes sense is that that was only four or five months ago, and this probably gets updated once a year based on the most recent. Consequently, because of the schedule with which we did the budget last year, that's probably why it's almost verbatim what you had last year.

Member Loyola: Thank you, Minister.

I'd like to ask about your capital spending this year as Budget 2020 also serves as the government's third-quarter fiscal update. As you're aware, you tabled a late budget in October because of the timing of the election. On page 159 of the fiscal plan you estimated that the capital plan spending in your ministry would be \$1.79 billion, but just four months after tabling Budget 2019, you've come forward with a new estimate for spending this year, at \$1.62 billion. That's a very large slippage for just four months, perhaps even historic in relative terms. My first question is this: during the

fiscal year was your ministry part of any co-ordinated process to find in-year savings?

Mr. McIver: Yes. I don't know if you'd call it a co-ordinated process, but we certainly worked to cull – we actually try to be co-ordinated with our ministry. In-year savings were important to us and will continue to be important to us, where we can, to get to a balance in our first term after where we started out.

Member Loyola: Was Transportation in any way, shape, or form asked to reduce spending over and above the cuts projected in Budget 2019?

Mr. McIver: We looked for savings in operating, yes, and we found some. Some of that you see in the budget today, I would say, through some of the FTE reductions and other things that you've talked about today.

Member Loyola: In reducing, in capital expense for this year – again I'm referring to page 159 of the fiscal plan – it's estimated that at \$170 million in just four months. That's roughly a 10 per cent slippage.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. And that's – I'm going to get the details in a minute here, and I would suggest to you that in general terms that's fairly normal. I wouldn't necessarily call it slippage. Lots of times we do something similar to what your government did; we reprofile projects. If you don't get a project completely done before the snow sets in, then you push the money out into the next year's capital plan and do it when you can in the spring. I think that's pretty normal. If there's something other than that – I'm looking to see if that is. But a chunk of a capital plan every year will probably be unfulfilled because of the vagaries of rain and snow and other stuff that gets in the way of construction, people doing construction work.

Member Loyola: Based on everything that I've discussed so far, can you explain the steps that you're taking in your ministry to address what are some obvious planning and forecasting challenges?

Mr. McIver: Well, the weather is probably number one. We don't know when it's going to rain or snow or freeze. That's probably one of them. I can't think of an example right now, but occasionally there are times when we put a project out and the bids don't come in in a way that we expect, and we sometimes can make a decision to say: we're paying too much . . .

The Chair: Ten more minutes.

Member Loyola: Ten more minutes. Thank you.

Mr. McIver: . . . so we're going to go again with another bid. Environmental approvals and buying land, accumulating the land you need to build a project can slow us up.

Other approval processes that we're not in control of through federal or provincial environment departments: we cross a waterway, and sometimes the feds, through the department of fisheries and oceans, jump in and say, "Wait a minute; you've got to do it our way." These are vagaries.

Moving utilities: we have to co-ordinate that with the utility company because, as I'm sure you would appreciate, if you leave people without their electricity or water or Internet or whatever utility they're using for a few months, they kind of notice and get unhappy. Co-ordinating those things sometimes takes longer than we can control.

Member Loyola: Okay. Based, then, on all these factors that you've just finished discussing, can you share with this committee right now the list of projects that have slipped or that were delayed or deferred?

Mr. McIver: Do we have a list of things that were reprofiled into the next fiscal year? We're looking for that.

Okay. Highway 2A twinning, highway 697, the La Crete Ferry replacement, highway 40 grade widening, that we talked about a little bit earlier – in fact, you pointed that out; thank you for that – have been pushed into future capital plans, for example.

10:00

Member Loyola: Would you be willing to table the list, then, of the projects that have slipped or have been deferred, however you want to label it? Would you be willing to agree to that?

Mr. McIver: Yeah. I think that we will be happy to.

Member Loyola: I'd love to have that information.

Mr. McIver: No, no. It's not a problem.

Member Loyola: Okay. I'd like to move on to photoradar, Minister. Photoradar has been a topic of popular discussion in the province for decades. Your predecessor undertook research that determined photoradar had only extremely minimal impact on safety, hence the decline in fatal collisions, and released that research publicly. He also took some steps to rein in on the cash cow and put Albertans first. You're in charge of the office of traffic safety and set the rules on the use of photoradar in the province. Can you provide this committee with an update on your work on that file?

Mr. McIver: On photoradar, well, let me just say that as you rightly point out, the previous government did do a report on photoradar. It said that it makes a small contribution to traffic safety but is not being used in a way, always, to maximize traffic safety. Alberta saw a decline in collisions over the review's 10-year period. Of the decline, the study felt that a 1.4 per cent decrease in collision rates could be attributed to photoradar and that potentially a 5.3 per cent reduction in fatal collisions might be attributed to photoradar. But the other report also said that the information that the report had – right in the report it says – was not adequate to make a good judgment, interestingly enough. So it made the conclusions it could, but the report itself said that the data wasn't conclusive or that the study wasn't conclusive enough to make a good decision, which is why we put a temporary freeze on new photoradar. We're doing some consultations with municipalities and police, in the 23 municipalities that use photoradar, to determine what's the best way to go forward and to try to make sure that the emphasis is on the safety of Albertans more so than being on a revenue-generating basis.

Member Loyola: Thank you, Minister.

Would you be willing to table the list of the municipalities and stakeholders that you're consulting with on the issue of photoradar, then?

Mr. McIver: It's 23 municipalities, and we'd be happy to name them for you. It's not like it's not information that's publicly available and easy to find, but we will convey it to you that way. How's that?

Member Loyola: Okay. So we have an agreement. You will provide that information.

Mr. McIver: Sure.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Minister.

You're responsible for the Springbank dam project, and I'd like to ask for a bit of a status update here. When we were in government, we experienced some regulatory challenges, of course, and to be fair, your government had also experienced some regulatory challenges. Now, I think it's fair to say that new systems and additional resources were put in place by your predecessor to make improvements, and I understand that you've taken steps to build on that work. My first question is: are you confident at this point in time that you've got the right people, the right resources, and the right expertise to move this project along?

Mr. McIver: Yes, to the extent that we're in control of it. We actually have very good people that are doing very good work on it. We hired an outside consultant, as we said we would in the election, Mr. Ignasiak, and he's been advising us. Yes, we do, but as I'm sure you're well aware, we are not in control of this because we have to meet the federal and provincial environmental requirements, and we're not in control of their decisions or the timing of their decisions.

Member Loyola: Well, I guess it's mainly for the people of Calgary. Can you tell them with confidence that you have the Springbank project management team – you're confident in the team that you have for it?

Mr. McIver: Well, I'll just take issue with one thing you said. We think it's about all of southern Alberta, not just Calgary.

Member Loyola: Yes. Of course.

Mr. McIver: We feel that we have the right people. We've gone through some environmental impact assessments with the regulatory authorities. It was done in 2017. We've gone through a couple of SIRs, or supplementary information requests, from the provincial and federal regulatory parties. We are working hard to consult with First Nations and other indigenous people in the area. We've been asked to consult with First Nations and indigenous groups from, actually, across a wide swath of Alberta, and we are honouring that requirement.

Member Loyola: Good to know.

Mr. McIver: We've taken the advice from our consultant to make sure that if there are any delays in the regulatory approvals, they're not due to Alberta Transportation. We're trying to be as prompt and responsive as we can.

Member Loyola: Thank you, Minister.

Do you mind if I go on to the next question? Thank you, sir. I'd like to ask about land acquisition for the Springbank project. In roughly March 2018 your predecessor announced a small breakthrough and acquired a number of parcels for this project, and I'm wondering if you can provide an update on your land acquisition activities. Since your government has taken office, how much additional land have you acquired for this project?

Mr. McIver: I'm not sure. I know that the department has spent \$39.2 million to date on land, acquiring 963 of the 3,600 acres required, which is about 25 per cent.

Member Loyola: That's in total over the length of the project?

Mr. McIver: That's in total. I haven't actually asked for it broken down. The total project footprint is 3,600 acres. I would actually ask for this broken down politically, by when it happened. All I know is that if we get the approvals, what we haven't bought willingly, we'll have to use expropriation for.

Member Loyola: Would you be willing to provide that information, then, to acquire the information and provide it to the committee?

Mr. McIver: Hold on. Yeah. Okay. Yes, on completed transactions we will. There are negotiations on an ongoing basis, including right now. Land negotiations on individual parcels and stuff, of course, are confidential until they're completed, but on the completed transactions, we'll try to get you a list of what was done before the election this year and after the election this year.

Member Loyola: Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair: One minute.

Member Loyola: Okay. One minute.

I'm just going to ask this question. You may have time, but if not, we'll get back to it. Many Albertans are starting to learn about the 2020 budget, and one of the things that has aggravated people is the decision your government made on the fine surcharge. You increased the fine surcharge from 15 to 20 per cent, and a huge portion of the revenue your government is expected to bring is coming from a tax on a tax on photoradar. In effect, you're doubling down on the photoradar cash cow to fund your corporate income tax handout. My first question is: why did you decide to do this, Minister?

Mr. McIver: Well, as you well know, there is no corporate tax handout of the extent that you and your colleagues continue to repeat, knowing that it's not true. That's the first thing.

Member Loyola: But you increased the fine surcharge from 15 to 20 per cent.

Mr. McIver: Second of all, that's a Justice and Solicitor General question, and I invite you to pose it there.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. Sorry to interrupt.

We'll now move to a 20-minute rotation for the government caucus, starting now.

Ms Rosin: Very well. Thank you, Minister. I'll kick things off from our side. I will start the discussion by talking about highways, which, obviously, are a huge portion of your mandate. Line item 5 on the estimates provides an overview of funding for highway preservation and maintenance in Alberta. I'm wondering if you can tell us which projects are being prioritized under this line item in your 2020-21 budget and how you are ensuring that we can keep up with the maintenance on all of our roads.

Mr. McIver: Well, highway preservation and maintenance is a long list of items, some of which haven't been decided yet. I have to tell you that I can't really give you that list largely because some of the items that we will repair and maintain this year haven't presented themselves yet. Some have jumped out in the form of big potholes or other things, and other ones are hiding with their big potholes and cracks and things until spring, when the frost comes out of the ground. It's an annual event when we get all these surprises, and then we run out and evaluate which of the surprises are the most negative for Albertans and try to make it a priority to fix them.

So, with all due respect, as the frost comes out of the ground, optimistically as we speak, hopefully, and not in two, three months from now, we'll determine a large part of what the repair and maintenance is that we do this summer. We have no way of predicting what's going to move, but safety is always a top priority for us. Another priority is highways with high volumes. Other safety considerations: you know, how many kids on school buses are there, a lot of large trucks that people might consider to be more of a safety issue, slides, cracks, all that kind of stuff. Unfortunately, the list hasn't been written yet, and it can't be written yet because the spring thaw hasn't occurred fully yet.

10:10

Ms Rosin: All right. Makes sense to me.

My other question is specifically in regard to a highway in my riding. I'm sure you recall that we had a big announcement last budget, which came as a very welcome surprise to many people in Banff-Kananaskis, that we were widening the 1A highway through Morley. Anybody who's driven through there knows that it's winding and that the lack of shoulders seems to result in a near vertical drop-off into the ditch, so it was great news that we're widening that to make it a bit safer. Last budget we allocated \$27 million towards this project, but in this budget I see only \$16.5 million, which is a \$10.5 million reduction in the budget for this project which we previously announced. I'm just wondering if the timeline has changed, when construction will start. What's changed with the status of this project?

Mr. McIver: This is an important project and probably should have been done before. The last time I was Transportation minister, I negotiated the agreement to widen the 1A with our good friends at the Stoney Nation, and the NDP government let that agreement lapse, unfortunately. When we got back to government, we got busy right away and re-engaged the nation and signed a new agreement, so now we can get it done, get past the unfortunate lapse in the first agreement.

This is the schedule and the money by which we think we'll be able to get it built. In this case there's no change in the timeline of the project per se, but there is uncertainty in that there is some land exchange that the federal government has to approve, and we're not in control of how soon or how fast or how slow the federal government approves the land exchange. Consequently, what you've got in the budget is our best estimate of the timeline. Nine million dollars was advanced and provided in 2019-20 due to project progress, and the total funding of the project is 76 and a half million dollars. We will endeavour to get that built as soon as we can within the limitations of the federal approval schedule, that we are not in control of.

Ms Rosin: Perfect. Good to hear. Yeah, you are absolutely correct that this agreement did lapse last time, and I know a lot of people were frustrated by that, so I'm very thankful – and I know a lot of people in my area are as well – that you've renewed this agreement and we're getting the work done.

With that, I will pass the rest of the time off to MLA Yaseen.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, and thank you, Minister.

Chair, if it's okay, can I go back and forth with the minister?

The Chair: That's up to the minister.

Mr. McIver: It's fine with me, Chair. Thank you for asking.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Minister, and thank you for all the work you and your team do about the fiscal balance that we're trying to

bring to this province. My first question is with respect to line 13 of the ministry's estimates, that lists funding for highway rehabilitation. Anyone who has driven a highway in Alberta nowadays is familiar with the potholes, which are a kind of prevalent problem right now. Specifically what highways will be receiving the pothole fixes this year or in the budget year?

Mr. McIver: Well, as I tried to express to MLA Rosin, some of the answers to your question will present themselves as the spring thaw happens and roads move. Certain other potholes and repairs that need to be done have already announced themselves. We actually have been out already doing some work because we thought it was serious enough on highways 16 and 16A. Certainly, I wouldn't suggest to anybody watching or listening that we think that we're done with that, because if I say that, they'll certainly remind me that we're not.

But all over the province there are freeze-thaw cycles that create more damage, there are potholes that come up, and there are slides. As I said in my opening remarks, we're making an adjustment over the next two or three years to move the pendulum, if you will – we're not going to stop building new infrastructure – a little more towards repairing the current infrastructure.

I would say that in the same way most of us don't paint our house every year – we paint it and let the condition of the paint wear down to where we would like it to look better and where it's not protecting the walls as well as we'd like it to, and then we paint it again – so it is with roads. It wouldn't ever make sense to pave your roads every year. It makes sense to pave them and let them deteriorate to the point that's reasonable, where safety isn't compromised, and then to improve them again. At some point it makes sense to actually put another inch or two of asphalt on and grind it down to rebuild the surface. It pretty much never makes sense to let it deteriorate to where you've got to rebuild the base of the road, because that costs about five times as much.

It's a balancing act. We go to great pains to try to get that balance right, so we continue. Like I said, we're making a bit of a – I think over the next two to three years – conscious effort to shift our emphasis somewhat towards repair and maintenance because we think it's the time in the average life cycle of the roads in Alberta to do that.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you.

I was happy to see line item 11.2 of your estimates, which shows the funding for Deerfoot Trail upgrades. Last budget there was some criticism of this government's commitment to upgrading Deerfoot Trail in Calgary as this road is the busiest, probably, in the province. Can the minister elaborate as to what's being done through this budget? I think you have . . .

Mr. McIver: Well, there was a promise by the previous government to do that, but there was actually no money earmarked for it. As promises go, that cheque would have bounced because there was no money attached to that promise.

However, the government and the city of Calgary have been working in partnership on a study of Deerfoot Trail, which should be finalized in 2020, and we are working in partnership with the city of Calgary to decide which improvements are the highest priorities within the budget that we have coming up in future years to do. We will do that in a co-operative way with the city.

We're reviewing also and haven't decided yet even how to procure it. That's discussion that's ongoing, about whether it's design-build or design-build or design-build-finance-operate. All these decisions are under discussion right now. As the report gets finalized and we continue to talk with the city of Calgary to

determine which sections of the roads need improving and which of the interchanges to get on and off the road need improving and other safety- and volume-related changes that need to be made – they're all of great interest to Calgarians and everybody in southern Alberta. As we get through that process, we'll be making more announcements.

Mr. Yaseen: Well, thank you. So this will be a collaborative effort between the government and the city of Calgary. It's good.

With regard to Transportation and their blueprint for jobs, mentioned under Roads and Bridges on page 153 of the fiscal plan – and I think you may have alluded to this before in earlier discussion – what is the ministry doing to further this initiative?

Mr. McIver: Well, we're considering advancing several high-priority network expansion projects to support economic growth. Again, as I said earlier, we're looking at which ones will have the best economic support for Alberta jobs and the economy and safety and quality of life. We're also interested, as I said to our opposition colleague, in looking for partnerships, where they might exist, where we can cost share in order to get more value for Albertans out of their tax dollars and as a result, we hope, get more roadwork done than if we went alone. We don't know yet whether there will be opportunities where we'll be able to move projects forward in the schedule based on a partnership arrangement. We are open to and actively listening for those opportunities should they arise.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you.

How important is the Ministry of Transportation in job creation?

10:20

Mr. McIver: Well, I tried to say in my opening remarks that in the economy most things of value ride at some point in their life on a truck, some only the first mile or kilometre and some only the last mile or kilometre and some the whole way. Without a transportation network, we don't have an economy. That's why, again, we're looking at our emphasis in order to go a little bit harder at repair in upcoming years. A single road is of limited use, but a network is severely valuable. We consider the kind of connectivity of the network, both within Alberta and outside of Alberta with Alberta's partners, to be severely important, particularly when we're such an exporting province. Albertans are hard-working and productive, and we make a lot more of almost everything than we can consume ourselves, so without a transportation network, our economy will collapse. We consider this a grave responsibility, we take it seriously, and we take great joy out of trying to make that work.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you.

Lastly, how will current projects benefit the goal of this initiative?

Mr. McIver: The goal of which?

Mr. Yaseen: How will current projects that you have benefit the goal of the initiative?

Mr. McIver: Well, again, we think it's partnership with local municipalities. We're trying to make sure that anybody that wants to create jobs for Albertans here – as you know, governments, generally speaking, don't create jobs. Governments can surely crush jobs, but government's real strength is creating the overall atmosphere where jobs can grow and flourish and opportunities can be there for Albertans. We're going to try to make sure through our transportation network that that's the case in Alberta, that someone that wants to open or expand a business here to employ more Albertans and create more economic benefit for Alberta families will see this as a good place to do it. While transportation isn't the

only key driver of that, it's certainly a key driver that cannot be ignored. We take that responsibility seriously, and we try to listen for advice, both from our in-house experts and from Albertans and outside people, about where we need to do work in the future.

That's why what we do is a bit of a constantly evolving decision tree, because sometimes opportunities arise that we didn't know about, and sometimes problems arise in the spring thaw that we didn't know about until the day after. It's an exciting place to work because it's so fluid in adjusting for the positive things in the future and overcoming the negative challenges that are inherent in what we do.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Minister.

That concludes my questions. I will pass on to Member Lovely.

Ms Lovely: Thank you.

Minister, I just wanted to start off by saying how grateful I am to be able to sit in for my colleague MLA Pat Rehn today. He was double-booked and not able to join. This gives me a good opportunity to publicly thank you for the time that you have spent answering my questions during question period and for the great strides that you and your department have made with the mess you inherited with the road-testing situation. You've met with stakeholders with me, you've answered those questions, and I just really want to thank you and your team for that hard work that you've been doing. It's, of course, been very stressful for all parties concerned, so thank you very much.

Mr. McIver: You're welcome. I've got a great team. I've got a great team . . .

Ms Lovely: You do.

Mr. McIver: . . . both in our government and I've got an amazingly great team in Alberta Transportation that try to make me look good. It's their efforts that really make the difference.

Ms Lovely: My community does appreciate the effort that you've been making. You know, we still need to get the motorcycle testing looked after, but we're getting there.

Mr. McIver: I don't know that there's ever going to be a finish line.

Ms Lovely: If we make some improvement, I'll be happy.

To my questions here. Line item 12 of the minister's estimates shows us the funding for highway 88. The highway has been in need of bridge repair since flooding washed out a couple of culverts two years ago. My question: with the \$65 million allocated to bridge construction, will highway 88 have any of that directed to it?

Mr. McIver: Yes. Boy, you're up to date, because this is new. The flooding just happened in the fall of 2019. You're right on top of it.

Looking back, our department did respond within a week of the washouts with temporary bridge structures in place to provide safe passage, perhaps not as convenient as what your constituents are used to, but since the flooding we've been working with both the federal and provincial regulators on approval for replacement structures, we've been cleaning the channels to prevent future blockages and flooding, and we've been busy designing new structures, procuring materials such as girders, relocating the temporary structure, and detouring the highway to provide sufficient workspace for the new bridges while maintaining safe traffic passage. The next steps will be to find a contractor to construct a permanent bridge. It's expected to occur this spring, and we actually

hope to have the new bridge built and in place and open by the end of 2020.

Ms Lovely: That is great news. Thank you, Minister.

I'll give you a minute to make your way to page 154 of the business plan.

Mr. McIver: Okay.

Ms Lovely: In key objective 1.3 from page 154 of the business plan the ministry mentions its objective to "streamline processes and reduce red tape to make life easier for hard-working Albertans and businesses." My question: what are some of the key actions your ministry will take during 2020-21 to cut red tape?

Mr. McIver: Well, we've done some little things that were not so obvious; for example, getting rid of some old rules and regulations that just don't belong anymore. For instance, there was a regulation on the books that restricted trucks carrying eggs from going down the roads without specific permits. It's since been determined by society that eggs are not evil and that trucks carrying eggs are not evil either. Nonetheless, that was a separate permit if you had eggs in your truck. We got rid of that.

More meaningful things that we've done are that we worked closely, for example, with the Canadian Association of Oilwell Drilling Contractors to get exemptions from some federal regulations on some of their larger vehicles. The reason that that could be done is that their vehicles, unlike most large vehicles on the road, are off the road 95 per cent of the time. For example, your average transport truck is on the road 95 per cent of the time. We found ways to exempt them from a bunch of permits, and in return for that, we required them to do things a little bit differently: drive at a slower speed, drive with a pilot truck, which they take with them anyways, and go at a slower speed. They probably do that anyways. It's so that we can maintain the safety while reducing the amount of paperwork that actually sometimes delayed their ability to start a new job after they finished the old job.

That was one way that we believe we were able to reduce red tape, reduce expense for business, which is important because that creates more jobs and more working days for people that depend upon that to look after their families. We're looking at the review right now of contractual requirements for contracts to the people that we do business with in order, again, to make it easier for contractors to do business with the government of Alberta.

The Chair: Okay. We will now move on to a 10-minute rotation for the Official Opposition.

Member Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Before we ended, I believe we were at you passing off the buck to Justice and Solicitor General on the photoradar.

Mr. McIver: Respectfully, it's not me that passed the buck. The fact is that one ministry is responsible for this, and it just happens to be that one.

Member Loyola: But you are the minister responsible for photoradar, yes?

Mr. McIver: For some of the rules and regulations around photoradar, absolutely.

Member Loyola: Okay. So the fine surcharge . . .

Mr. McIver: That's Justice.

Member Loyola: . . . and increasing it from 15 to 20 . . .

Mr. McIver: You can say that it's passing the buck, but in fact that's just the way government is organized. Justice is responsible for that.

Member Loyola: I understand that it is, but – okay. Then let's put it this way. How much input did you have into the increase in the fine surcharge from 15 to 20 per cent? Did you have any input to give?

Mr. Loewen: Point of order.

The Chair: Point of order noted.

Mr. Loewen: I think this would be under Standing Order 23:

- (b) speaks to matters other than
- (i) the question under discussion.

I don't see a line item for this kind of questioning as far as what part of input he had on a decision that wasn't his. I think the member could maybe ask a question that relates to this minister's ministry and the estimates at hand.

The Chair: Thank you.

Any rebuttal?

10:30

Mr. Sabir: It's not a point of order, Chair. I'm responding.

The Chair: Okay. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Sabir: The minister mentioned that there are some rules and regulations that fall under his purview, and if this is something that doesn't fall under his purview, the minister can choose to state so. So it's not a point of order. It's fairly a question that is within these estimates.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll reiterate that it is the member's time to ask questions. Whether they're relevant or not, I guess, is up to you and the use of your time. Again, the minister is under absolutely no obligation to answer any questions, so if you want to use your time in this way, feel free.

Mr. McIver: I answered the question. It's a Justice decision. You need to ask Justice about it. There is other stuff in photoradar that's our responsibility, and we'll be happy to try to answer questions about that.

Member Loyola: My question was: did you have any input?

Mr. McIver: I'm just saying that it's not our decision.

Member Loyola: So you had no input.

Mr. McIver: I have no authority.

Member Loyola: And you had no input.

Mr. McIver: I have no authority.

Mr. Loewen: Point of order. Standing Order 23(c), "persists in needless repetition." If you ask a question more than three or four times and you get the same answer and you're not happy with it, then you need to ask a different question.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Member Loyola: No answer.

The Chair: Do you have a rebuttal?

Member Loyola: There was no answer. This is regarding . . .

The Chair: As I've stated numerous times, Member, the minister is under absolutely no obligation to answer your question. You can ask as many questions as you like in your time period and how you choose to ask those questions. If you want relevant answers, I would ask relevant questions. The minister would be quite happy to answer any budget questions for you today.

Please proceed.

Mr. Sabir: It was not a point of order.

The Chair: Actually, it was a point of order.

Member Loyola: So then you're saying that there was no joint responsibility here between you and the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General in the increase? There's no joint responsibility.

Mr. McIver: My understanding is that there is no joint responsibility. That's a Justice and Solicitor General decision, which is why I've chosen not to cut the other minister's grass. I'm sure you or one of your colleagues will get a whack at that minister in due course, and I recommend that if this is of interest to you, you ask that question.

Member Loyola: Thank you.

Okay. Since we're making no leeway there.

Mr. McIver: Try to stick to Transportation; you'll get further. That's my recommendation.

Member Loyola: Well, you are the minister responsible for photo-radar, sir.

Mr. McIver: I have to stay in my lane, if we're going to go down that road of expression.

Member Loyola: Okay, then.

Mr. McIver: I don't want the Justice minister answering questions about roads that are my responsibility, and I will do the other minister the same courtesy.

Member Loyola: Okay. Thank you very much, Minister.

The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, critic for Indigenous Relations, has specifically asked me to ask questions regarding First Nations tie-in programs.

Mr. McIver: Which programs? Water tie-ins?

Member Loyola: Yeah, water tie-in programs. We've already established that according to your subtotal, item 5 on page 199 of the '20-21 government estimates, \$7.3 million will be cut to municipal and First Nation water and waste-water programs. I would like to know if any of the current projects with First Nations communities will be affected in any way by this \$7.3 million cut.

Mr. McIver: Well, there is no cut. Let me make that clear. There is no cut. The previous NDP government committed, if I remember, \$100 million to help tie-in First Nations and indigenous communities with water, and the previous government put an end to that program when the \$100 million was spent. We are honouring the previous government's commitment, including the end point, which is when the whole \$100 million is spent, and we're happy to do that. We think that we're able to do good work with that. But to be clear,

there is no cut. The previous government put an end to this program after the \$100 million were spent, and we're honouring the full program right up to the 100-millionth dollar.

Member Loyola: So you're not going to be renewing the program in any way?

Mr. McIver: What's in our budget is honouring the end that the previous government decided on the program after the \$100 million expenditure.

Member Loyola: Okay. I see. You're following through with a promise that was made by the previous government.

Mr. McIver: Yes, we are. Frankly, we were happy to.

Member Loyola: Okay. Perfect. I understand that it's a three-stage process that nations go through. There's a planning stage, there's a design implementation stage, and then, of course, the construction stage. I'd like to know which nations are at which of the three stages currently if you don't mind me asking.

Mr. McIver: Okay. Well, right now there are several projects under way. We're now working with the Paul First Nation and the Alexis First Nation on a project romantically called twinning phase 3. It's a First Nations portion of oversizing costs to the Capital Region Parkland Water Services Commission waterline to accommodate the Paul First Nation and the Alexis First Nation. It's \$498,000 in this year's budget.

We are working currently with the Dene Tha' First Nation for a waterline extension from High Level to Bushe River reserve. There's \$1.1 million in this year's budget to make progress on that.

We are also working with the Maskwacis First Nation, which includes, of course, Ermineskin, Louis Bull, Montana, and Samson nations. It's an extension of the North Red Deer River Water Services Commission system from Ponoka north to Maskwacis First Nation. On that we will spend \$11.202 million this year, \$1.227 million next year, and \$528,000 the year after that in '22-23. Also, in Maskwacis we have a feasibility study for a waterline extension – oh boy – for the NRDRWSC, North Red Deer River Water Services Commission, to Maskwacis, and no money this year but \$50,000 next year on that study.

The Mikisew Cree. We're working with them on a feasibility study to extend a waterline from the hamlet of Fort Chipewyan to Allison Bay reserve and to Dog Head reserve, not this year but next year. We have budgeted \$45,000 for that. Also, with the Mikisew Cree there's a waterline from Fort Chipewyan to the Mikisew Cree reserve, no expenditure this year, \$10,878,000 next year, and \$9,072,000 in '22-23. That will – yeah. That's what we're currently doing right now with First Nations under that specific program. Yeah.

Member Loyola: You would agree that it's a good program?

Mr. McIver: I do.

Member Loyola: Okay. Well, I can only hope that in the future the government will choose to put more money into and continue the program.

Mr. McIver: Well, we'll consider all things and how important they are for Albertans.

Member Loyola: Perfect. Thank you.

Mr. Chair, how much time is there left?

The Chair: You have two minutes, sir.

Member Loyola: Two minutes. Okay. I'll turn it over to my colleague for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Well, thanks. I would like to ask a couple of questions around flood mitigation. I know that you're the lead minister for flood protection, particularly around the Bow River. It's important for Calgary and, as you say, for southern Alberta in general. My first question is to ask whether there's money in Budget 2020 for the phase 2 flood mitigation feasibility study so that the project can be identified and selected.

Mr. McIver: Which project are you referring to now, sir?

Mr. Eggen: The Bow River.

Mr. McIver: Okay. Well, here's what's interesting. Chair, I'm going to wander a bit, and please reel me in if you think you need to. That's not really our project yet, but it's a fair question, and I'll try to, without wasting your time, explain why. It's Environment that decides what projects get built. Under the current and past governments the way the system works is that Environment decides a project has to be built, not us. After and only after they decide the project has to be built, then Environment steps back and they become the provincial regulator. They have to be a referee in the game.

At that point Transportation is on the ice, if you will, and plays the game for them. Our role is two roles. One is to be an advocate, to get the approvals done through both the federal and provincial regulatory processes. After we do that, only if we're successful, then we become the construction company for Environment. The day that the dam opens, we hand the keys back to environment to operate it.

10:40

Because it hasn't been decided what goes on the Bow yet, there's nothing in our budget yet. It's not our project. It's Environment's project until they decide there is a project. Only after they decide there is a project, we become both the advocate and the construction company.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Sure. Okay. Thank you. That's interesting. I didn't know that part of it.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now move on to a 10-minute rotation for the government caucus.

Ms Lovely: Minister, before the clock ran out, we were talking about key actions that your ministry has taken with regard to cutting red tape. Thank goodness you have addressed the egg issue. As a connoisseur of eggs I'm very happy to hear that they have safe passage and that that's assured. Thank you very much.

I think that you probably had a few more items that you wanted to mention, and I wanted to go back to that point to allow you to address to the group any more key actions that your ministry has.

Mr. McIver: Well, there are actually several things under way. One of the things that we've been working with industry on is what's euphemistically called the super-single tires, which is a single tire that's almost as wide as two tires. I guess the industry likes it because they only have to change one tire instead of two. Theoretically, it saves them – it's better for the environment. You use fewer tires, and I think it's supposed to be a little more fuel efficient. What we're working through with them is the fear that we

share about whether the super-single will damage the road and the bridges more than the two tires will.

What I think I understand – and believe me, this is all second-hand. I'm a butcher; I'm not an engineer, okay? But what I think I've heard from the engineers is that – this is part of our commercial carrier review that's under way – if both tires are fully inflated, perfectly inflated, and evenly inflated, then they're slightly easier on the road than the super-single, but if one tire has less air or more than the other, then the super-single is easier on the road than the two tires. It's a bit of a technical answer and, again, I'm getting it second-hand. We're trying to iron through all of that with industry.

We have agreements currently with 90 per cent of the municipalities in Alberta to use the centralized permitting system, known as TRAVIS, transportation, routing, and vehicle information systems. We're working with the industry on the super-single tires. We work with the municipalities on the permitting for oversize loads and long loads and overdimension loads and stuff that goes on municipal roads, and we've automated the process with them.

We're working on harmonizing across Canada with other provinces on weights, sizes, dimensions, axle weights, forms of vehicles so that when people come to pick up or deliver something in Alberta or just pass through Alberta, having picked up something in Saskatchewan and dropping it off in B.C., there's no extra paperwork done. Of course, that by extension supports Alberta industries and trucking companies. There's a great deal of work we're doing with the commercial carrier review that's under way right now. There always seem to be more details and opportunities popping up, and we're working with them.

Through the New West Partnership agreement, which includes the provinces of B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, we're working on regulatory streamlining further on weights and measures and dimensions.

What I tried to describe earlier about what we're doing with the Canadian Association of Oilwell Drilling Contractors: we've come to what I think is an agreement with Saskatchewan, where I believe that they are going to put in place exactly the same regulations that we have put in place. We did this in co-operation with them, so it's not like we're pushing our will on them. We worked with industry and our fellow province to do that because Alberta and Saskatchewan are the two that use this mostly. When we get that done, if indeed we're successful, which we hope to be, then Saskatchewan and I will hold hands, if you will, and go together to the federal government because even after we've both agreed, then we need their permission to cross that invisible line, the imaginary line called the provincial boundary. Even if both provinces agree this is okay, we actually can't cross the provincial boundary without permission from the federal transportation minister, so that's on our list of red tape, too.

Also working with other provinces on school bus safety and the federal government – there are a couple of studies going on right now, one in Ontario and one in another province, on that. What's interesting about that, amongst other things, is that while some people are focusing on seat belts in school buses – there are actually conflicting studies on whether they're more or less safe, but what there is no argument about is that when kids are most in danger on a school bus is when the child is not in the school bus. Most of the deaths and injury occur before the child gets in the bus or after the child leaves the bus.

My heart was broken yesterday to have an incident like that in Alberta where a child was hit outside of a bus. These are things that we need to continue to look at, ways to keep kids safe when we're getting them to and from school.

Ms Lovely: You know, Minister, I was actually outside when the seven police car escort was making sure the ambulance got to the hospital safely. I'm delighted to hear that your ministry is addressing – no one likes to hear that a child has been injured or worse, so I'm grateful for the work that you and your department are doing. Thank you.

Mr. McIver: Between that, which is obviously important, and other safety things, there's a whole range of issues that crop up between industry on sizes and weights and axle weights and also forms of trucks. For example, there's a maximum length of a truck.

I think that a red tape thing we've either done or are considering doing – and maybe somebody can tell me whether we've got that done yet – is that some trucks, to protect their vehicles, have what's often called a bush guard on the front of the truck. People that go in the bush use it to protect the grill of their truck. Of course, it's to protect the truck when deer and moose and stuff run out in the road. It could do tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of dollars of damage to a truck. While we don't want to hurt the deer or the moose, sometimes they don't make appointments with us before they cross the road, and sometimes the trucks can't possibly miss them.

Some of that stuff actually helps the industry, cuts red tape, saves their expenditures. It was passed to me that thus far this year we have deleted the requirement for over 5,600 permits through some of the red tape reduction work that we've done, and the red tape reduction minister tells me we're not finished yet.

Ms Lovely: Wow. That's great news.

Mr. McIver: We're happy to do more red tape reduction, but we have an advocate in our government that's pretty determined to have us do more red tape reduction also.

Ms Lovely: I'm happy to hear about the statistic and also wanted to comment how grateful I am that you're working in collaboration with other provinces, particularly our cousin beside us, Saskatchewan. I think that by working together, provinces are going to be able to achieve much more for the citizens that live within their boundaries, so thank you very much for your work.

My last question is: how will you measure the progress – and you've already given one statistic – that you make in cutting through red tape?

Mr. McIver: Well, we have an objective to cut our red tape in rules and legislation and regulations by one-third overall in government, so we've done a baseline count of all the regulatory requirements. It's now being established in order to measure the government's progress, and this is actually a little more complicated than we thought because what is a regulation and what isn't sometimes isn't quite so clear or what is just a rule and what's red tape and what's absolutely essential and can in no way be called red tape because it's required for safety. You know, we're going through sort of like referees, if you will, in trying to make these determinations because obviously you don't want to cut regulations that guarantee the safety and health of Albertans. Target reductions by year are 5 per cent this year, 12 per cent next year, 20 per cent in '21-22, and 33 per cent in '22-23.

You might say: why are we going so slow? We think that that's because of these determinations that need to be made to make sure that we're not cutting things that guarantee the safety and health of Albertans. We actually need to take a careful, safe, and sober look at all that stuff. We think it's actually in Albertans' best interest. It's in Albertans' best interest for us to cut red tape, and it's also in

Albertans' best interest, we believe, for us to be thoughtful about it and planful and to not have unintended consequences by taking away rules that are actually required.

10:50

Ms Lovely: Cause no harm. It's important for a government to be very cautious.

That's my last question. I believe that my colleague Mark Smith: you are up next for some questions.

The Chair: Forty seconds.

Mr. Smith: Real quick. Real quick. When can we expect construction to start on highway 19? You put \$66 million towards it.

Mr. McIver: Well, the one end was done.

Mr. Smith: When will the project be completed?

Mr. McIver: Completed? Well, it's in three sections: the east, west, and central. Budget 2020 includes \$66 million for the west section between the QE II and highway 60. The twinning of the west section is between range road 261 and highway 60, subject to acquiring the outstanding lands. Remember we talked about that, what causes us delays?

The Chair: Thank you very much. Sorry, Minister.

We'll now move on to the opposition caucus.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Through you I would like to continue to ask a bit about the Bow River flood mitigation, flood protection programming. Now, I understood and I appreciated you letting me know how the project moves from Environment to Transportation and then back to Environment at some point. But, I mean, considering what's at stake in regard to the potential for some version of the flooding that we saw in 2013 – and I did go down there to help try to clean up a bit in Elbow back then and saw the extent of the devastation and the exposure and the vulnerability of so many neighbourhoods in Calgary with any flood event. I'm just wondering: in this budget to what extent have you done preliminary planning work to be ready for the regulatory approval from another ministry to give you the green light to go ahead and start building the flood mitigation project that Calgary and southern Alberta needs?

Mr. McIver: I think I can answer some of this while staying in my lane, as we discussed earlier.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. As I tried to keep it, you know, fair.

Mr. McIver: We're certainly aware that there's a project potentially coming at us. When and if: we can't make assumptions. I think it's highly likely that Environment will make a recommendation, but I don't know for sure. I've got to stay in my lane and not make assumptions that way. But we're aware, and we feel like the team of experts that we have assembled and our well-qualified staff that are dealing with the SR 1 project now to get the approvals done through the provincial and federal program are getting good basic training for future projects that may or may not come at us, which may or may not include the Bow River. We have funding allocated to deliver flood capacity enhancement work at both the Jensen dam and the Dickson dam currently also, which are other projects, a little outside of what you asked, but you asked what other things we're doing. We're active on those projects as well for flood mitigation.

Mr. Eggen: At this time have you dedicated any resources for planning for the potential construction of the flood mitigation project that would . . .

Mr. McIver: No.

Mr. Eggen: . . . reside down the Bow River?

Mr. McIver: Only because there's no project yet. We can't in good conscience, but we are aware. The thing is – here's what's great: the people that are working on SR 1 now are essentially all trained up for another project, and they're well aware, I think, that if we have to put more work on their plate, we'll put more work on their plate. I'm blessed with very good staff that are very good at their job, and we will do what we have to do. I suppose that if a day comes where we need more people, we'll consider that when it comes, but we can't really add bodies and expense until we actually have a project. We'll be as nimble as we can as more work comes onto our plate.

Mr. Eggen: Right. I guess you can see where I'm going. I mean, in order to expedite . . .

Mr. McIver: I don't mind the question, but some of your questions aren't in my lane, and I'm trying to be co-operative with you . . .

Mr. Eggen: No. I understand.

Mr. McIver: . . . and answer the stuff that's within my area.

Mr. Eggen: Well, I guess, you know, the other part of it, besides building expertise and blueprints for plans so that you're ready to hit the ground the day that approval is granted for flood mitigation on the Bow River, I mean, the other obvious part of it is that this project might cost upwards of a billion dollars. Again, to what degree have you worked to ensure that we can find and have that money available so that we can start building straightaway? I mean, we talk about these one-in-a-hundred-year flood events, and through climate change and other modelling we know that these sorts of flooding will happen on a more regular basis here in the province, and we should get ahead of it – right? – because you lose a whole lot more than a billion dollars if we have another flood event that's even comparable to what we saw in 2013.

Mr. McIver: Well, sir, I would say to you that I don't disagree with your sentiment, and I want to know what is actively going on right now since we're the ones – it's something to be approved – that'll have to get it approved and build it. When the AEP asks us for support or technical questions within our bailiwick, then we, of course, co-operate and try to get them that information. I wish that what you just said was true, that when they decide, we can start building, but when they decide, then we first have to go through the approval process with probably the provincial and federal regulators again. These future projects will be under Bill C-69 rather than the SR 1, which is under the old federal regulation. The no-more-pipelines bill, Bill C-69, is not only potentially harder to get pipelines built under that, but it's potentially harder to get other things built also. But your sentiment that we need to go as fast as we reasonably can is one that, frankly, I agree with.

Mr. Eggen: Good.

Mr. McIver: The day that they tell us, should that day come, that we have another project to do, we will, to coin a phrase, spring into action as fast as we think we're able to and get on that, knowing that we're not in control of the timetable. It's under the control of

both the federal and provincial regulations, and we will work our way through that maze as efficiently and as fast as we can while obeying the law of the land.

Mr. Eggen: Great. I mean, perhaps you're underestimating your influence on, you know, making sure that flood mitigation for the Bow River is built in an expeditious way. We know that there was some opposition to flood mitigation upstream, and you as a senior cabinet minister supporting the Bow River flood mitigation project, I think, will help us to move this along as it should.

My second question is in regard to the blueprint for jobs, right? In the global fiscal plan, page 52, the government downgraded the number of jobs that you're expecting to create. It's quite a significant downgrade, I would suggest, of at least 15,000 jobs fewer. I just wanted to ask about your role in Transportation. The most important outcome of your business plan, outcome 1, is to create economic growth as well. Sorry. It wasn't 15,000; it was 20,000 fewer jobs that your government is now estimating to not create, I guess, in Budget 2020. What percentage or how many fewer jobs are as a result of decisions made in Transportation specifically? Have you done an economic analysis on this since it's job 1 on your business plan outcomes?

Mr. McIver: No. Well, we'd like to think that we're actually going to be part of adding to our ability to create jobs and maintain the jobs that are already here in Alberta. Part of a good transportation network actually is one of the things that should entice current Alberta employers to think about staying here and perhaps expanding and adding more jobs. The partnership that I talked about that we're trying to complete right now on highway 40 in Grande Prairie: I spent considerable time talking to some of the big employers up there. In recent weeks I've been up there three times because the employers are concerned about the bottleneck, if you will, on this bridge on highway 40, and they said that if we don't do something about that, it could hinder in the future their ability to expand.

The Chair: Sorry to interrupt, Minister.

I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise the committee that the time allotted for this item of business has concluded.

I would like to remind committee members that our next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 18, at 9 a.m. to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Treasury Board and Finance.

Thank you, everyone. This meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 11 a.m.]

