



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature  
Second Session

Standing Committee  
on  
Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Bill 213, Traffic Safety (Maximum Speed Limit for  
Provincial Freeways) Amendment Act, 2021

Wednesday, March 17, 2021  
7 p.m.

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**Legislative Assembly of Alberta  
The 30th Legislature  
Second Session**

**Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills**

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Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC), Deputy Chair  
  
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)  
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP)  
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Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)\*  
Rutherford, Brad, Leduc-Beaumont (UC)  
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)  
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\* substitution for R.J. Sigurdson

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Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)

**Bill 213 Sponsor**

Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)

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## **Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills**

### **Participants**

Ministry of Transportation

Ranjit Tharmalingam, Assistant Deputy Minister, Planning, Finance and Technical Standards

Des Williamson, Executive Director, Technical Services, Technical Standards



7 p.m.

Wednesday, March 17, 2021

[Mr. Ellis in the chair]

**The Chair:** Good evening, everyone. I'd like to call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills to order and welcome everyone in attendance.

My name is Mike Ellis, MLA for Calgary-West and chair of the committee. I would ask that members and those joining the committee at the table introduce themselves for the record, and then I will call on those joining by videoconference. We'll begin to my right.

**Mr. Schow:** Joseph Schow, MLA for Cardston-Siksika.

**Mr. Orr:** Ron Orr, Lacombe-Ponoka.

**Mr. Turton:** Searle Turton, MLA for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Good evening, everyone. Chris Nielsen, MLA for Edmonton-Decore.

**Dr. Massolin:** Good evening. Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and director of House services.

**Mr. Huffman:** Warren Huffman, committee clerk.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

The members joining us via videoconference. Maybe I'll ask Member Irwin to go first, please.

**Member Irwin:** Janis Irwin, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you.  
Member Lori Sigurdson.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Good evening. Lori Sigurdson, Edmonton-Riverview.

**The Chair:** Thank you.  
I see Member Dang.

**Mr. Dang:** Good evening. Thomas Dang, Edmonton-South.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.  
Member Getson.

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

**The Chair:** Thank you.  
Member Amery.

**Mr. Amery:** Good evening, committee members. Mickey Amery, MLA, Calgary-Cross.

**The Chair:** Thank you.  
Member Glasgo.

**Ms Glasgo:** Michaela Glasgo, MLA, Brooks-Medicine Hat.

**The Chair:** And Member Rutherford.

**Mr. Rutherford:** Good evening. Brad Rutherford, MLA, Leduc-Beaumont.

**The Chair:** All right. Thank you very much.  
Official substitutions for the committee: Mr. Ron Orr for Mr. R.J. Sigurdson.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. Pursuant to the February 22, 2021, memo from the hon. Speaker Cooper I'd like to remind everyone of the updated committee room protocols, which encourage members to wear masks in committee rooms and while seated, except when speaking, at which time they may choose to not wear a face covering. Based on the recommendations from the chief medical officer of health regarding physical distancing, attendees at today's meeting are reminded to leave the appropriate distance between themselves and other meeting participants.

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Next we'll go to the approval of the agenda. Are there any changes or additions to the draft agenda?

Seeing and hearing none, could I get somebody to move the agenda, please?

**Mr. Nielsen:** So moved, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Nielsen. Mr. Nielsen will move that the agenda for the March 17, 2021, meeting of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills be adopted as distributed. All those in favour, say aye. On the phone or on videoconference? Thank you. Any opposed? Hearing and seeing none, that motion has been carried.

Approval of minutes. Due to the tight turnaround time of this meeting in addition to the budget estimates meetings that have been occurring, the draft minutes from the Monday, March 15, 2021, meeting have not yet been prepared, and approval of them will be deferred to our next meeting.

Next we'll move on to item 4 on our list, the review of Bill 213. That's the Traffic Safety (Maximum Speed Limit for Provincial Freeways) Amendment Act, 2021. We have a presentation by MLA Searle Turton. He is the MLA for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Hon. members, Bill 213, Traffic Safety (Maximum Speed Limit for Provincial Freeways) Amendment Act, 2021, was referred to the committee on Wednesday, March 10, 2021. In accordance with Standing Order 74.11 the timeline means that the committee's report to the Assembly is due on March 25.

At this time I'd like to invite Mr. Searle Turton, the MLA for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain, to provide a five-minute presentation, and then I will open the floor to questions from committee members.

At this time, Mr. Turton, the floor is yours. You have five minutes. Thank you, sir.

**Mr. Turton:** Excellent. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much to the committee members for being here tonight. First of all, I want to say that it's an absolute privilege to be here to talk about Bill 213, Traffic Safety (Maximum Speed Limit for Provincial Freeways) Amendment Act, 2021. Although I've only represented the constituents of Spruce Grove and Stony

Plain as an MLA since 2019, I represented the citizens of Spruce Grove as a city councillor since 2010.

As a constituency on the edge of the Edmonton capital region I can attest that we are people always on the move. Many of my constituents work in Edmonton or other places across the province, and they travel to and fro. I know that many people, including my constituents, would like to get to their destination in a quicker and more efficient manner while ensuring that they remain safe in doing so. This is not just a desire but a possibility, a possibility that engineers thought of and prepared for when designing some of our safest highways.

Now, first of all, I want to explain very clearly what this bill is not. Contrary to some members of the public, this bill is not an arbitrary speed limit increase of 10 kilometres an hour for provincial divided highways across the province. That irresponsible approach and blanket legislative change on a provincial-wide highway network would be impossible for anyone to support, including myself.

I think that it is vitally important for this committee to understand that under the current legislation there is no mechanism to increase the speed limit past 110 kilometres an hour on provincial freeways regardless of how safe the actual highway is. The substantial change in Bill 213, as shown in section 3 of the bill, will revise the maximum speed limit on provincial freeways located outside of urban areas from 110 kilometres an hour to 120 kilometres.

The 2018 Alberta Transportation highway geometric design grid shows that there are two categories of highways in the province that allow speeds of 120 kilometres an hour and another three categories that allow for speeds of 130 kilometres per hour. However, in both of these categories the maximum speed limit the Department of Transportation can assign to these specific roads is currently only 110, under the current legislation. In a hypothetical scenario, if the safest eight-lane freeway imaginable, with the highest engineering standards, was designed and built within Alberta, it would still have that arbitrary speed limit of 110 kilometres an hour placed on it regardless of the actual safety level of that particular freeway.

It's important to understand the difference that this legislation will make in relation to the status quo. Today when a speed limit is contemplated on the freeway, the maximum speed limit of 110, as described in current legislation, is the absolute maximum speed that can be issued under perfect conditions. From that point other factors are taken into consideration – traffic congestion, weather, general safety, et cetera – and a final speed limit is set based upon all the extenuating factors that will allow motorists to travel in a safe and reliable manner. Bill 213 does not change any aspect of that process, with the only exception being that the starting point is now 120 kilometres an hour before other factors are taken into consideration.

If conditions exist that lead the experts at the Department of Transportation or the Minister of Transportation to recommend that the speed limit should be reduced from 120 to a lower speed, it would follow the exact same process that today's highways follow when their current max speed is lowered. As everyone on this committee is aware, there are countless provincial freeways that today, due to extenuating circumstances, have their posted speed limits lowered, and this I strongly support. The same process of accountability and protecting Alberta motorists would continue under Bill 213, allowing speed limits to be lowered if the conditions warranted. Now, there is a possibility that even if this bill is approved by the Legislature, every road affected under Bill 213 in the province will continue as is, with no change to the posted limit, if there are concerns from the Department of Transportation or the minister. However, in the future, if design criteria continue to

improve for new highways, Alberta will be able to react accordingly.

In conclusion, I want to stress that Bill 213 will give flexibility to our Transportation department and the minister to set appropriate speed limits which will balance the need for goods and residents to travel around the province while ensuring that our motorists are safe as they do so. It will allow Alberta to have the same flexibility with speed limits that other provinces like B.C. have and that many U.S. states currently have, with added safeguards of ensuring that the Minister of Transportation has the final say in setting speed limits. With an ample two-year window before full implementation, Bill 213 has struck a good balance between providing quicker commutes for Albertans while ensuring their safety on our road network.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Turton. Thank you for those remarks.

We will now open the floor for up to 20 minutes of questions from our committee members, as is convention with this committee. This is a government member's bill, so we will now go to the Official Opposition. I have Member Irwin first on the list for a question, followed by a short supplemental.

Member Irwin, go ahead, please.

7:10

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, MLA Turton, for being here today. You know, I think one of the biggest concerns is, of course, around safety. MLA Turton, you mentioned some of the changes in B.C. We know that B.C. raised its highway limit in I think it was 2014, and in the years following, fatal collisions increased by I think it was 118 per cent, something like that. The government, of course, ended up reverting.

I know you've kind of alluded to the fact that there's the possibility of, you know, switching back if they find that there are issues, but don't you think the risk of fatalities is pretty high? What do you expect to be the impact? I just want to hear a little bit more about, I guess, the research you've done. Have you spoken with safety experts?

**Mr. Turton:** Yes. Thank you very much, Member Irwin, for the question. I guess a couple of quick comparisons. I'm very thankful, actually, that coming out of the gate, we were talking about the B.C. example. In the B.C. example 16 of the highways actually had lowered speed limits. It's very important to understand what those highways are. Actually, out of the 16 highways, 14 of the 16 wouldn't even actually qualify under changes taken under Bill 213.

For example, on some of the highways in B.C. that were lowered – we're talking about Boston Bar to Jackass Mountain – they were already lowered from 100 to 90. Some of those highways in those categories were going from 90 to 80. Most of the highways that were actually affected were two-lane mountainous roads, steep terrain, sharp turns, and actually would not qualify under the very select criteria that we have under Bill 213, which is only provincial divided highways outside of urban areas. Actually, out of the 16 highways that were affected by the recent speed limit changes, only two had their speed limits dropped from 120 to 110.

Now, for anyone that's driven, for example, on the Coquihalla, that is an actual highway that would qualify as a provincial divided highway here in Alberta, and its speed limit is still at 120. The government of B.C. has stated that there haven't been any issues on it because it's actually designed at that higher level.

When you look at, for example, the driving environment of Alberta, you have vast prairie landscapes, very similar to most of

the states down in the United States, with Montana and Colorado and Wyoming and Nebraska. We have large prairie landscapes. We don't have the same type of extreme driving conditions like they have in B.C., with mountainous roads, sharp turns. It's a very different environment. It also should be noted that other than the Coquihalla in B.C., Oregon, Washington, and California all have similar, you know, topographies and also don't have highways that go up to 120 kilometres as a cap, but most of the other states east of those four jurisdictions do. That's very important to know.

It's also important to realize that, again, this isn't an arbitrary speed limit increase. This is actually simply increasing the cap that the highway can be set at in terms of having a speed limit under perfect, ideal, safe conditions. If there are any issues from a safety perspective that would prevent that highway from existing at 120, it's up to the minister and the Department of Transportation, using the same safety protocols that we have today, to lower the speed limit accordingly. It's my absolute belief that there are vast stretches of provincial divided highways here in the province that would not have the higher speed limit of 120 because of the very safety concerns that you're talking about, Member Irwin.

I guess, back to B.C., it's a very different experience that they have there. Also, when I talked about the flexibility that B.C. has, B.C. has the higher cap already in place, and that is how the Coquihalla can actually exist at a 120-kilometre speed limit. If you could somehow magically grab the Coquihalla and dump it in the middle of Alberta, the speed limit would instantly arbitrarily go to 110 because our cap is 110 regardless of how the highway is designed.

**The Chair:** Well, thank you, sir.

Member Irwin, a quick follow-up, please.

**Member Irwin:** Yeah. I don't want to put words in the member's mouth. Just to be clear, then – let's use the QE II as an example – is it your belief that there would not be an increase in accidents or an increase in fatalities on, let's say, highway 2?

**Mr. Turton:** Well, it would be my belief that the same processes to maintain safety on our highways, the same regulations, the same criteria that exist on our highways today would exist if Bill 213 happened. If it was the belief and, you know, if analytics and science and all the appropriate safety protocols show that highway 2 can't handle a higher speed limit, it would simply stay at 110. That would exist for any highway in the province. The Minister of Transportation and the Department of Transportation have the final say in setting the speed limit for whatever they want. It's just that the cap, the highest speed limit that they could actually set it to under absolutely perfect conditions, would be 120 if Bill 213 was actually passed.

**The Chair:** We'll go to Member Glasgo next. Go ahead.

**Ms Glasgo:** Hello, Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain. I just wanted to, first, say thank you for the work that you've done in putting this forward. As a rural MLA, somebody who drives to Edmonton often, I certainly have driven on the QE II a few times as well as highway 1 between Medicine Hat and Calgary. I've heard from a lot of people anecdotally, you know, that if you're driving the speed limit on that highway, you're driving too slow; there are going to be people flying past you. The reality is that Albertans are always in a hurry. We are a get 'er done kind of province, and it seems that we think we can drive faster than maybe we should sometimes.

I'm curious, MLA Turton: why did you choose to pursue a bill on this topic? There's so much going on right now in the world. I

was surprised to see this come forward, but at the same time I'm just curious as to why you chose this as your private member's bill.

**Mr. Turton:** Yes. Thank you very much, MLA Glasgo. I guess the main reason why is that in my provincial riding, my constituency, my residents, thousands of them, drive on divided highways, both to Edmonton and around the province, every single day. For anyone that's actually taken the time to drive down to Calgary or from Calgary to Edmonton, you know that the average driving speed is actually much higher than the posted speed limit, yet it is easily still within the design criteria of those exact roads. My initial intent was to make sure that there was alignment between the actual speeds that drivers were driving and the actual design limits of the highways that they were driving on, just to kind of tighten those up so that there wasn't a larger discrepancy.

Obviously, as part of my bill I wanted to put in additional safeguards by having the Minister of Transportation and the Transportation department have the final say on what those speeds are. It's not an arbitrary blank cheque or autobahn per se, but I do think that, if passed, there will be vast stretches of provincial highways here in the province that will be able to experience a higher speed limit, still maintain appropriate levels of safety, and be able to move goods and services around the province more efficiently.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

A quick follow-up, please, Member Glasgo.

**Ms Glasgo:** I appreciate that very much, Member Turton. You kind of led into it. You said that you created a role for the minister in this bill, and I'm just curious as to why you thought it was important to clarify the role of the minister.

**Mr. Turton:** Yes. Well, thank you again for the follow-up question. This was a key part of the bill and how I wanted to craft it. I know that the minister does have the ability to set the speed limits, but I wanted to be redundant. I wanted to make it so abundantly clear that this was not a blank cheque, that it was not just arbitrarily going to increase the speed limits regardless of the consequences, that there are going to be checks and balances. Honestly, the safety precautions that our Department of Transportation and Minister of Transportation have currently maintaining safety on our highways: I wanted to make sure that that was maintained even if Bill 213 went through. That's why I wanted to double down on making sure that Albertans were aware of the minister's responsibility in setting those speed limits but also to act as an appropriate check and balance.

**The Chair:** All right. Thank you.

Member Dang, go ahead, please, sir.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Turton, for presenting today. I just want to go back to the idea sort of around road safety but not directly. I guess I've been looking into a little bit of the research here. It seems that with the increase in speed, even when we're doing things like these safety assessments, there is an increased number of incidents – right? – accidents on roadways, and then, in turn, we're seeing the research show that there is an increase in the number of claims against insurance. I'm wondering if you've talked to insurance providers, insurance organizations, or other groups and if you have a plan or have a thought on how this will affect insurance premiums and claims in Alberta.

**Mr. Turton:** Well, thank you very much for the question, Member Dang. I have talked to law enforcement agencies. They're going

through the contents of the bill right now. From my understanding in talking with the provincial heads of those respective departments, they're going to be coming out with actual positions, you know, based upon the discussions and their own internal conversations, and those should be coming out here in a couple of days and made public. I guess I would probably base my – when I was doing my research on B.C., for example, they showed that the Coquihalla is designed on the higher standard. Even though it has a speed limit set at 120 versus lower speed limits around the province of B.C., traffic accidents haven't actually increased, and that allowed people to traverse that section of B.C. much quicker.

7:20

When you look at the interstates down south, there are multiple states – I believe 16 of them – between, you know, California and almost Virginia that have higher posted speed limits than what Alberta currently has and are continuing to promote and expand those road networks, so there are ample opportunities to be able to compare Alberta's experience with other states and jurisdictions that have the higher speed limits.

But I really want to stress that this was not a blanket increase or looking at road design standards across the province as a whole. These are only on the widest, safest highways that we have here in the province in a prairie landscape. I didn't want to touch two-lane highways. I wanted only to focus on divided provincial arterials, and that really comes down to about five highways that would even be under the classification that would actually be affected by Bill 213. Highway 1, highway 2, potentially highway 3, highway 16, highway 43 to Grande Prairie, and highway 63 to Fort McMurray would probably be the only highways that are even remotely affected by Bill 213 because those are the only provincial divided highways outside of urban areas that are really around in the province.

But it's a good question. I know that there's been some robust debate, and I expect that over the next couple of days more stakeholders will be coming forth with their positions.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

A very quick follow-up, Mr. Dang.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Unfortunately, it sounds like Mr. Turton hasn't consulted with any insurance advocates or organizations or insurance companies.

The follow-up, I guess, is around the idea that a lot of the research is showing that there may be a risk of increased incidents or accidents on these roadways. I guess: have you factored in, when you're looking at these, if there will be an increase in commute times, or is it going to improve efficiency? Have you done any research on whether this will actually make a difference in terms of people's travel time?

**Mr. Turton:** Well, thank you, Member Dang. Obviously, the higher traffic speed will result in quicker commutes for Albertans right across the entire province.

Again, I want to stress – Member Dang, I know that you were talking about the safety perspective – that, again, the same procedures that keep Albertans safe today on our provincial highways would still exist if Bill 213 was actually passed by the Legislature. If there were any concerns or issues from a safety perspective that a certain highway, because of congestion or other safety issues, could not handle the increased speed limit, then it would be under the prerogative of the minister and ministry to lower that down. That's why I was saying in my initial speech that if there is ample evidence when the analysis is done by the department –

for example, if highway 2 could not handle the increased speed limit given the congestion or other extenuating factors on that specific highway, then highway 2 would remain at 110 kilometres an hour. That would not change if Bill 213 was passed. It's only highways that meet the highest safety levels that are currently in place by our Minister of Transportation that would actually be affected by a potentially higher speed limit.

**The Chair:** All right. Thank you very much.

Mr. Amery, go ahead, please, sir.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you to MLA Turton for being here tonight and answering all of these questions for us. Now, we're certainly hearing a lot of discussion about highway speeds throughout Canada, and I note that a lot of discussion has taken place with respect to other jurisdictions. The truth is that Alberta's highway speed limits appear to me to be in line with most other provinces in Canada. In fact, we've spoken a lot about British Columbia and the increase to 120, which was ultimately decreased on some of their highways recently. The question for you is quite simple. What are you hearing from Albertans? Why do you think it is the right time to propose a potential increase to highway speeds in Alberta?

**The Chair:** Go ahead, please.

**Mr. Turton:** Okay. Yes. Thank you, Mr. Amery. I guess a couple of questions. When you talk to most Albertans that have travelled the Coquihalla – that's at a 120-kilometre speed limit – the question always comes up: why is it that B.C. has access to higher speed limits for highways like that when those exact same highways, if in Alberta, would arbitrarily be set to 110 regardless of how the highway is actually designed? I know that my constituents have travelled down in the United States on the interstate system, for example. I mean, there are many states, most of the states actually, in the United States that have similar topographies as Alberta, same prairie networks, kind of state-level provincial divided highways, that are at a much higher speed limit than what we have here in Alberta. I think there is ample evidence based upon other jurisdictions that have experienced those higher speed limits while still ensuring the safety of their residents. I think that's an extremely important part.

Once again, I want to stress that regardless of how the highway is designed here in Alberta, the maximum speed that any highway can actually have in the province is 110 kilometres an hour. You can have 12 lanes wide, walls up on either side to stop every animal, absolutely straight without a single curve. It could be the best highway on the entire planet, and it's capped at 110 kilometres an hour, full stop. That's just what I'm trying to change, to have that cap increase from 110 to 120 kilometres an hour.

**The Chair:** All right. Thank you.

Mr. Amery, a quick follow-up, please.

**Mr. Amery:** Yes, Mr. Chair. Just a very quick follow-up. You mentioned or you identified earlier some highways in Alberta which may be suitable for a potential increase. I don't want to put any words in your mouth by saying that there will be an increase, but I understand that your bill allows for that potential to increase to 120. What is it about those particular highways that you've identified? What characteristics do they have which would support a potential increase in speed limits?

**Mr. Turton:** Well, again, thank you for that. That's actually a pretty simple question. The actual reason why I chose those specific



highways is that under the 2018 Alberta Transportation Highway Geometric Design Guide there are only five categories in the province that actually have been built to a design speed of 120 kilometres or 130 kilometres an hour, and that's why I wanted to focus on just those main arterials around the province. I didn't want to touch two-lane rural highways or smaller highways. I only wanted to talk about the biggest arterials with the highest design speeds and then use that as a base level to be able to calculate where the safest speeds are, but that work is really up to our Transportation department.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Nielsen, go ahead, please.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I must say that this bill has definitely generated some interesting discussion, friends that I've talked to, constituents, people that have reached out to my office, of course, with their views, and I'm sure others on the committee have probably seen a little bit around this as well. Looking at the bill, I do notice the coming-into-force date of June 1, 2023, which leaves a little bit of time for discussion. That's not necessarily a bad thing. I guess I'm wondering what you think of bringing in some stakeholders to, you know, give us some advice about, possibly, if we have to add recommendations or whatever and send it back to the House.

**Mr. Turton:** Sorry, Member Nielsen. Like, stakeholders as part of this process or stakeholders referred to in the two-year implementation period?

**Mr. Nielsen:** Would you like to see stakeholders come to the committee?

**Mr. Turton:** Yeah. Absolutely, I would be open to that.

I guess I just want to quickly talk about the two-year implementation period because, again, that was another very important check and balance that I wanted to include in the bill. I didn't want to give the impression that if the bill was potentially passed in the Legislature – I never want to presume the will of the House, but I wanted to allow ample opportunity for consultation with the broader community to take place so that if there were specific municipalities or stakeholders in a specific part of the province that had concerns about having potentially a higher speed limit, then it would allow ample opportunity for the Minister of Transportation and the Transportation department to take those into consideration and potentially keep the speed limit as it is. That's why, for me, it was very important to have the two-year implementation period, as talked about in the bill.

Regarding your first point, I'm totally okay with bringing in stakeholders.

**The Chair:** All right. We have about a minute left. Mr. Nielsen, go ahead.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Yeah. A quick follow-up, then. I guess, you know, I'm just mildly curious. I know you did say that you had the chance to reach out to law enforcement. I know I did, too. I haven't had the chance to hear back or anything. Maybe some of the other stakeholders you've had the opportunity to connect with?

**Mr. Turton:** Thank you very much for that. I guess a couple of entities and organizations that I took the time to reach out to for the formation of this bill, to kind of get their take on it would be AMTA, the Alberta Motor Transport Association; various municipal leaders around the province, both urban and rural; AMA as well as CAA.

SENSE BC was, I think, instrumental in some of their background, especially with their experience with the Coquihalla. I've reached out to AACP, the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police; the Alberta sheriffs commercial enforcement branch; both the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce and the Alberta Chambers of Commerce; as well as the former transport minister of B.C., MLA Todd Stone.

7:30

**The Chair:** Good. Mr. Turton, thank you very much. Thank you for your presentation. Thank you for answering questions from committee members. We are going to move on to our technical briefing. Mr. Turton, you are, of course, welcome to stay and listen. You, of course, are here as a guest. Thank you very much.

Next, committee members and those listening, we'll have a technical briefing by the Ministry of Transportation. We will now hear that technical briefing on Bill 213. We have Mr. Ranjit Tharmalingam. He and Mr. Des Williamson are here to present. The first is the assistant deputy minister, planning, finance and technical standards division, and the second guest is the executive director of technical services.

Gentlemen, I see that you are on the videoconference here. Thank you for being here and doing your presentation to the committee. You're going to have five minutes, followed by questions from the committee members. So, with that, the floor is yours. Thank you very much, sir.

**Mr. Tharmalingam:** Thank you, Chair. This is Ranjit Tharmalingam. I'll speak for that five minutes, and I'll have our technical standards executive director to answer specific questions.

First of all, the member talked about how we set speed limits, so maybe we can quickly talk about the high-level overview of how the department actually sets posted speed on highways. We do design highways for higher limits than what we actually post. We do typically – and this is very, very consistent with North American standards. Many jurisdictions do the same thing. For instance, the rural divided highways that the member talked about earlier, highway 1 and highway 2, are divided highways, urban highways. Highway 2 between Edmonton and Calgary would fit into the urban divided highway. They are typically designed for 130 kilometres an hour but posted for 110. Rural undivided highways like highway 9, for instance, or any other three-digit highway in the rural areas are designed for 110 kilometres and posted for 100 kilometres an hour.

The main reason we do this reduction in posted speed is to allow for a factor of safety and some buffer in terms of safety reasons. A small component of that we consider in terms of future expansion or future classification of a highway if we want to increase that into a different classification. For instance, highway 2 between Edmonton and Calgary has a number of interchanges to access the highway; however, at the south end of that highway there are a number of at-grade accesses and cross-median accesses as well, so it is a work in progress in terms of converting that highway into a full freeway. We would like to make sure we design those things for an ultimate classification of that highway, so we allow to design for a much higher standard without necessarily spending a significant amount of money in the future to upgrade it.

Another thing I just wanted to mention in terms of other factors that impact the posted speed is that the operation of the highway is important, the volume of traffic that comes through is important, the type of traffic is important. When you have more truck traffic volume, then the differential speed plays a role in terms of safety, which is very important. Also, as I mentioned, the number of access points for traffic to merge into the highway is important because safety in terms of merging is also important to us, to make sure that

is controlled and has adequate merging distance to speed up to get into it. The other couple of things to mention also are the collision history – if you want to increase the posted speed, I think we will have to look at the collision history of that segment – and also we need through engineering analysis to predict the impact on safety of changing the speed limit.

Finally, and I think some members mentioned it, we certainly look at talking to stakeholders and getting their feedback, whether it's RCMP locally or the MD and other municipalities or counties, to make sure that their input is there because sometimes the design manual doesn't necessarily look into some of the unique issues that would be involved for that particular segment.

The member did talk about the freeway. Absolutely; in the Highway Development and Protection Act it defines a freeway as a multilane controlled highway with controlled access. In other words, in our design guidelines it talks about the freeway providing the most restricted access of free flow and traffic.

I may be running out of time here. I think the last one that I just wanted to mention, Chair, is the other jurisdictions. B.C. is the only province, as far as we are aware, that has a higher limit in Canada. Certainly, they did that in 2014, and with their study in 2018 they reduced, with the exception of the Coquihalla highway, which is the only one right now.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Great. Well, thank you very much, sir, and you timed that perfectly.

We'll now open the floor to questions from our committee members. First on the list I have Member Lori Sigurdson. If you'd go ahead, please, for a question and a follow-up. Thank you.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, thank you very much, and thank you for the presentation. I'd like to understand what kind of studies, research that the ministry has done regarding speed and how it relates to traffic injuries.

**Mr. Tharmalingam:** We have, and I'll ask Des, our executive director, to speak to that, please.

**Mr. Williamson:** Certainly. In the Traffic Safety Act the minister can modify the speed limit for any piece of highway from the standard designated, say 100 kilometres per hour. This is often done due to engineering analysis that we've done for that piece of highway, and it does consider the factors that Ranjit had mentioned previously such as what the operating speeds are, what the collision history is. We certainly do site-specific, speed-related studies. We have not done a formal study of what the absolute maximum speed limit should be, 120 versus 110 versus 100, in any formal way. We have looked at certain segments of highway, but we have not done it in general. So the most recent information we'd have would be the B.C. experience.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Follow-up, Member Sigurdson?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yeah. I'm just sort of curious about that information in terms of when people are going faster. Do they have more accidents? Are there more injuries? But also what about the roadways themselves? With the increased, you know, velocity of the vehicles is it tougher for road maintenance, then? Does it cost more for road maintenance? Does it have any impact on sort of the wear and tear of highways?

**Mr. Williamson:** Yes. That's an interesting point. As we haven't tried 120 kilometres an hour in Alberta ourselves, it seems

reasonable to expect that we might want to maintain a higher standard of road surface condition, fewer potholes, less rutting. That seems to be a reasonable expectation, but that said, we do pay more attention to our busier divided highways anyway.

**The Chair:** All right. Thank you.

We'll go to Member Getson. Go ahead, please, sir.

**Mr. Getson:** Yeah. I appreciate that, Mr. Chair.

If I mess up your last name, I apologize in advance, sir. Tharmalingam. Did I say that correctly?

**Mr. Tharmalingam:** That's correct, yes. Thank you.

**Mr. Getson:** Probably close enough. Thanks for your tolerance on that.

So just a recap here from what I understand, sir, and I might have to dust off my old TAC manual and see if I'm getting this correctly. The ultimate design that we have right now is 130. The main concerns are the intersect points that are going to reduce those speeds, and it comes down to stopping distance, stopping time for traffic flows, and the last part I had for the concerns was going to be on the interface between heavy truck traffic and light automotive. That's correct? Those are predominantly the elements that you're concerned with?

**Mr. Tharmalingam:** That's fair. Those are the factors we consider as we look at the posted speed.

**Mr. Getson:** Given that circumstance – I'm not sure if you've looked outside the U.S. – again, looking at the major corridors, the ones that actually have a higher tolerance, so, you know, the 130-, 140-kilometre operating range, what would we significantly have to change if that was the case to make sure that design tolerance was still there given that 120 really isn't a far reach? What I'm coming down to is: what would be the cost benefit, in your opinion from what you've seen so far, of raising the speed limit to gaining either marginal amounts or, like you said, some of the offsets for having segments where you wouldn't have to look at the grade separation?

7:40

**Mr. Tharmalingam:** Yeah. I think that in terms of looking at increasing the speed limits, it's clearly important for us to look at the access points because as you merge traffic into ongoing traffic, there is certainly a safety concern. So we have to look at that. We haven't done any specific cost-benefit analysis study of cost versus the safety impact of it, but that's something certainly that we need to look at as well.

Another point that I think a previous member mentioned about it is something that we'll have to dig deep into – we don't have a lot of information at this stage – but certainly with the B.C. study it did indicate that the number of severe collisions increased. That's part of the reason, I believe, that they have gone back on a number of those highways. We need to look at what the impact is on insurance companies, whether that's for passenger vehicles, or on commercial traffic, what's the impact on that as well.

**The Chair:** All right. Thank you.

**Mr. Getson:** I appreciate that.

Thanks, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Nielsen for a question. Thank you.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. With my understanding of increasing speed limits, that that is also supplemented with a plan for enforcement of the speed laws there in conjunction with, of course, public education around it, obviously, Bill 213 doesn't directly discuss that within the bill. Is that something that could or should have been included within the bill, directing some kind of a plan around that? What are your thoughts on that?

**Mr. Tharmalingam:** Des, can you answer that one, please?

**Mr. Williamson:** Is this question addressed to Transportation staff?

**The Chair:** Maybe, Mr. Nielsen, you could rephrase it to help them out?

**Mr. Nielsen:** Sure. I guess what I'm saying is that with any kind of speed changes, there's probably a plan for law enforcement to work with that. Bill 213 doesn't really address that. So is that something that should have been included in this bill, or does it need to be included? What are your thoughts on that?

**Mr. Williamson:** As the member who initiated the bill suggested, this would be a tool that the minister and the ministry could consider. That being the case, if we were to consider a higher speed limit, we absolutely would consult with all relevant stakeholders, including enforcement. It is interesting that if you try to target a certain operating speed, what people are actually driving at, as one of your indicators of what you should post the speed at, the goal would be to maximize compliance. If we get that right and if all other factors align, potentially enforcement might become easier. So it's certainly a consideration in adjusting a posted speed limit.

**The Chair:** A follow-up, please, Mr. Nielsen?

**Mr. Nielsen:** Yeah. I guess, because you had said that you hadn't really looked at this before, then I assume this would have to be done in conjunction with the Justice department. Do you know if the Justice department would be prepared to deal with the increase in the speeds?

**Mr. Williamson:** We have not reached out to Justice on that matter so far.

**The Chair:** Mr. Rutherford, go ahead, please, for a question.

**Mr. Rutherford:** Thank you, Chair. I believe that in the presentation from the department they had mentioned that there are existing roads in Alberta that if reclassified could see an increase in the speed limit. I was wondering: has this occurred, and has it resulted in more collisions?

**Mr. Tharmalingam:** We haven't classified further, but I think the example that I could use is that if you take highway 2 between Edmonton and Calgary, there are a number of interchange accesses available right now, but there are also some at-grade accesses further, at the south end of highway 2. At some point if the highway is being widened, if the highway is being replaced, accesses being replaced with interchanges, there may be a potential for us at that point to look at freeway classification. Right now only portions of highway 2 are classified as freeway because there are some at-grade intersections. So at some point in the future, when all of them have been replaced with interchanges, it is entirely possible that we will classify that segment of highway 2 between Edmonton and Calgary as freeway. That would give us the opportunity to review and see whether there is a potential to upgrade the speed, but we are far

away from it at this stage because segments are still with at-grade intersections and median accesses.

**The Chair:** Mr. Rutherford, a follow-up, please.

**Mr. Rutherford:** Thank you, Chair. With data in regard to collisions, injury collisions and fatalities, do we know what the average speed is in those collisions already? I guess what I'm looking for is: are people already well in excess of the speed limit in these collisions? Just to try to get a sense of that as well.

**Mr. Tharmalingam:** Des, do you have that information?

**Mr. Williamson:** Speeding is certainly a factor in some collisions; however, for most of the ones that we have on the rural highway system, the most common issues we have are things like running off the road and making a left turn across the path of an oncoming vehicle. So speeding itself is not one of the highlighted main factors in causing collisions, but certainly speed has an impact on the severity of collisions, for sure.

**Mr. Rutherford:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Well, thank you.

Mr. Dang, a question and a follow-up, please.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the department for presenting. I guess my question is around some of the work that you've done in research on other jurisdictions and also in consultation with your own other government departments. I'm wondering. I know that you mentioned that you analyzed the number of incidents and things like that, but have you consulted with Treasury Board and Finance or other jurisdictions on how increased accidents or things like that affect insurance premiums for users of the roads, whether that's for commercial or noncommercial users?

**Mr. Tharmalingam:** We have very briefly connected with Treasury Board, and their response to us at this stage is that there might be an impact to the pricing of insurance, but we have to actually investigate further. At this stage these are very high-level discussions, if I may say that, so I think indications at this stage from Treasury Board officials are that there might be a potential for increase in the insurance premiums, and that may also impact the commercial trucking side of it as well. That needs to be looked at.

**The Chair:** All right. A quick follow-up, Mr. Dang. Go ahead.

**Mr. Dang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for that answer. I guess, can you speak at all to whether you've consulted with other jurisdictions? I know, as we've discussed extensively today, that British Columbia has in some cases higher speed limits, or other jurisdictions would have the same or lower speed limits than us. Is there going to be a comparison, or have you done a comparison at all, about insurance with respect to our neighbouring jurisdictions?

**Mr. Tharmalingam:** We haven't gone that far into it yet, so unfortunately I won't be able to give you more info on that.

Des, anything that you feel that we have done that you could share?

**Mr. Williamson:** Sure. We do interact technically with other jurisdictions through the Transportation Association of Canada, and we do know that B.C. is, so far, the only province in Canada that has speed limits above 110 kilometres per hour. We are not aware of anybody else pursuing a higher speed limit at this time.

**The Chair:** All right. Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Orr next for a question and quick follow-up.

**Mr. Orr:** Yes. Thank you, gentlemen, for being with us. If the bill is passed, we're all aware that there's a two-year coming-into-force date. My question: is that two years a long enough time for the department to actually effectively implement the speed limit increase?

**Mr. Tharmalingam:** I think that two years is an adequate time for us to do a thorough investigation of impacts, whether it's on the safety side of it or on the stakeholders as well as with costs and other benefits. Certainly, I guess the simple answer is yes; two years is an adequate time.

**The Chair:** A follow-up, Mr. Orr, please.

7:50

**Mr. Orr:** Yeah. Following on the two years thought, do you have any estimate, then, of the cost? Will you have time to actually estimate the cost, or have you already an idea of what the cost to implement the increased speed limit on rural multilane highways might be to your department or to the government?

Thank you.

**Mr. Tharmalingam:** We will be in a position, certainly, to determine the cost. Unfortunately, I don't have any numbers to share at this stage.

**Mr. Orr:** Okay. Thank you.

**The Chair:** All right. Thank you.

We'll now go to the Official Opposition. I don't have anybody on the list.

I'll open the floor. Are there any questions from committee members? Hearing and seeing none. Okay. Well, thank you very much.

Gentlemen from Transportation, thank you very much. It was very kind that you would show up and give a presentation as well as answer questions from our committee members. Again, I want to thank you very much for your time on this matter.

Members of the committee and ladies and gentlemen, hon. members, having heard the presentations, the committee is now ready to decide on how to conduct its review of Bill 213. In accordance with our previously approved process, the committee may choose to invite additional feedback from up to six stakeholders, three from each caucus. Alternatively, the committee may also choose to expedite this review and proceed to deliberations. Does anyone have any thoughts on this? Mr. Schow.

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Nielsen brought something up in his question to the presenter today, Mr. Turton, regarding stakeholders. I think it's a valid question, whether or not the

presenter or sponsor of the bill would entertain that, and I would support that as well. I suspect that you have a draft motion that we would possibly invite stakeholders, and if you'd be willing to put that on the screen, we can have a look at it and maybe debate that further.

**The Chair:** Yeah. For sure. While the clerk puts a possible draft motion on the floor that would support hearing from stakeholders, I'm sure I'd love to hear from Mr. Nielsen on this.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Sure. Thanks, Mr. Chair. Yeah. I think that bringing in some stakeholders: great idea that might give us a chance to maybe hear from some other groups that, you know, could provide us with some valuable information, whether that be – and I'm reaching here for straws a little bit – hearing from tow truck drivers or something like that. I know that there are concerns on the highways around that, or other stakeholders, and I think that this will give us the ability to make a strong bill going forward.

**The Chair:** Well, thank you very much. They're still attempting to put the motion on the screen for committee members. While they're continuing to do that, I'll just open up the floor for any other comments.

Oh, they've got it up there. Okay. It was up there. I'm going to read what I think I saw up there. Mr. Schow moves that

the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills invite up to six stakeholders, three proposed by the government member caucus and three proposed by the Official Opposition caucus, to make presentations regarding Bill 213, Traffic Safety (Maximum Speed Limit for Provincial Freeways) Amendment Act, 2021, at an upcoming meeting and provide a stakeholders list to the chair by noon on Thursday, March 18, 2021.

Any questions? Hearing and seeing none, I will put the question to the committee for a vote. All those in favour, please say aye. On the video conference? Any opposed, please say no. Hearing and seeing none.

That motion has been carried.

Okay. Thank you very much. I guess we will now go to other business. Are there any other issues for discussion at today's meeting? Hearing and seeing none. Okay.

The date of the next meeting will be at the call of the chair.

Adjournment. Would somebody like to move to adjourn? Mr. Orr, quick to put up his hand. Thank you very much, sir. Mr. Orr moves that the meeting be adjourned. All those in favour, say aye. Anybody opposed, say no. Hearing and seeing none, that has been carried.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much. Committee members, thank you very much. Have yourselves a great evening. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 7:55 p.m.]







