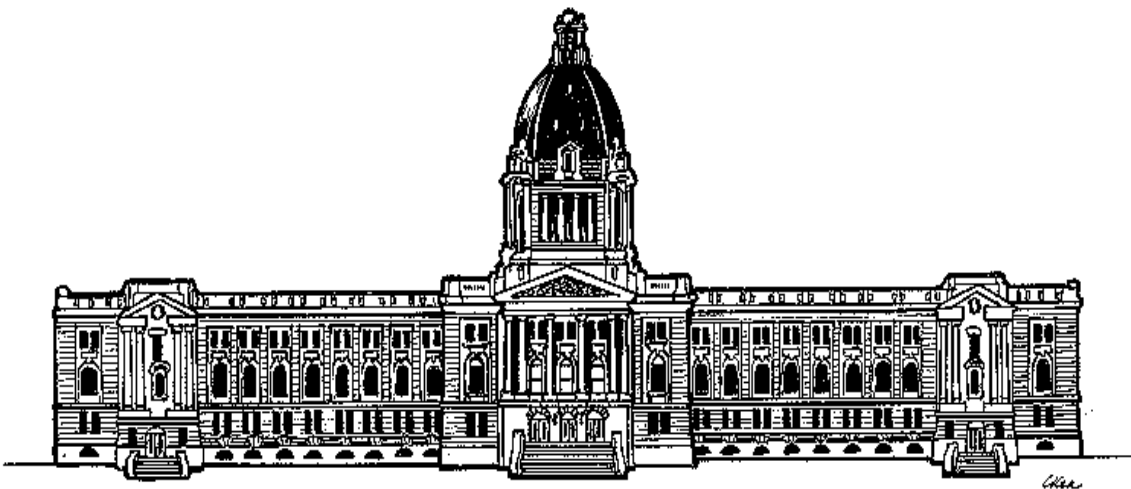




# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY**

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## STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY

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Moosomin

Mr. Trent Wotherspoon, Deputy Chair  
Regina Rosemont

Mr. Fred Bradshaw  
Carrot River Valley

Ms. Jennifer Campeau  
Saskatoon Fairview

Mr. Larry Doke  
Cut Knife-Turtleford

Mr. Bill Hutchinson  
Regina South

Ms. Victoria Jurgens  
Prince Albert Northcote

[The committee met at 19:01.]

**The Chair:** — It now being 7 p.m., we'll call the Economy Committee to order. I'd like to welcome the members. We're joined here by committee members, Larry Doke, Jennifer Campeau, Victoria Jurgens, Fred Bradshaw. And Buckley Belanger will be joining us as well tonight.

Tonight we're dealing with vote 16, Highways and Infrastructure, central management and services, subvote (HI01); and vote 17, Highways and Infrastructure Capital. Minister McMorris is here with his officials. And I would invite the minister to introduce his officials and give your opening remarks.

**General Revenue Fund  
Highways and Infrastructure  
Vote 16**

**Subvote (HI01)**

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And that's what I will do. I have quite a long opening remark, but before I get into the opening remarks, introduction of the officials. To my right is Nithi Govindasamy who is the deputy minister. To my left is Jennifer Ehrmantraut who is the ADM [associate deputy minister] of operations. Sitting behind but in no particular order — I'm not going to try and go left, right, or anything else — but sitting behind me is Ron Gerbrandt, the ADM of design and innovation; Blair Wagar, recently joining the ministry as ADM of planning and publicity; Wayne Gienow from executive . . . is the executive director of corporate services; Doug Hansen, executive director, northern region; Gary Diebel who is the director of finance services branch; and Cathy Lynn Borbely, who is the director of strategy, business, and planning.

Those are the officials as well as there's a couple I think from my office, and my chief of staff as well. But between all of us, we should be able to answer all the skill-testing questions the member from Athabasca has. Before we get into those questions, though, I do like to have a number of opening comments here.

Since our government came to office, we made transportation a priority. This is because of the central role transportation plays in our economy. When you think about the key sectors of the economy including agriculture, mining, energy, forestry, and manufacturing, they all have one thing in common. Virtually every sector of our economy has an export orientation. Some two-thirds of all the goods and services we produce are ultimately destined for markets in other parts of Canada, across United States, and increasingly around the world. The ability to move vast amounts of product and commodities over great distances quickly, efficiently, and cost-effectively is critical to our prosperity.

Transportation has an important social function as well. We use the transportation network to travel between communities, to commute to work, to get to school, and to access health care and other vital services. It's no wonder then that transportation has always been a top of mind issue in Saskatchewan.

Our government has made record investments to give the province the transportation system it needs and deserves. This year is no exception. The Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure budget for the fiscal year is \$664.5 million. That number includes 50 million in unspent appropriation carried forward from last year. Nevertheless, the 2014-15 budget represents nearly a 7 per cent increase from last year's budget of \$156 million, excluding that 50 million I just previously talked about. The budget includes a \$405.2 million investment in transportation capital.

In 2011 we had committed to investing \$2.2 billion into our transportation system over four years, and we're on pace to exceed that target. This year's budget will bring the total to date under that commitment to \$1.8 billion. This budget will allow us to continue supporting our municipalities and third party programs. It allows us to continue to address the infrastructure deficit by aggressively maintaining and repairing the highway system. And it allows us to invest in upgrades and enhancements that respond to the challenge of growth and prepare the province for more growth in the future.

Before I get into how we will be investing this money, I want to address some efficiencies and cost savings in this year's budget. Like all government entities, we are constantly reviewing our programs and services to look for areas to save money. The ministry is reducing its use of consultants for policy and standard development work that isn't directly related to on-road construction. This will save us nearly \$800,000.

We're winding down the airport maintenance assistance program, saving 100,000. I want to be clear that this does not impact the community airport partnership which I will talk about in a few moments. The airport maintenance assistance program provides very small operation and maintenance type grants. Ending this program will save the ministry about \$100,000. We will also cease operation of the Riverhurst ice road. All of these savings are being redirected to on-road maintenance.

The document released on budget day also referred to some changes we were contemplating to opening and closing dates and hours of operation of our ferry services. Based on some concerns that we've heard from stakeholders, as well as MLAs, [Member of the Legislative Assembly] we are re-evaluating the service provided to Saskatchewan residents and will not be making any changes in hours or start or end dates at this time. Ferries will open as soon as ice and water levels allow and will operate under the same hours as they did last year.

Having said that, I'd like to provide the committee with an overview of our plans for this year. While our highway system tends to get most of the public and media attention, Saskatchewan transportation needs are multimodal. Air travel and aerial applications are important to the energy, mining, and agriculture industries. Air travel plays an important social function in health and law enforcement. Funding of the community airport partnership is continued for this year at \$700,000. This program provides grants to municipalities for capital improvements to smaller airports.

Our shortline rail system provides an alternative to trucking or

shipping and provides an important connection to the mainline railways. Historically, Saskatchewan's shortlines have moved grain. Now they're starting to diversify to oil and other commodities. Funding for the shortline rail sustainability program is provided through the Grain Car Corporation and is continued at \$900,000. Both of these programs are cost sharing, meaning they'll leverage a total of about \$1.4 million and \$1.8 million in our airport and shortlines respectively.

We're also committed to assisting municipalities to meet their transportation challenges. Since coming to office, we've provided urban and rural municipalities with record levels of revenue sharing and significant support for roads over and above that.

Through the urban highway connector program, we provide funding for the operation, maintenance, and rehabilitation of urban roads that connect to provincial highways, to the provincial highway system. Total grants for the urban municipalities increased by 500,000 to \$8.4 million this year. This includes partnering with Regina to replace one of the bridges over Pilot Butte Creek on Victoria Avenue East.

Last year we increased funding for the municipal roads for the economy, or MREP program, by \$2 million to \$25.5 million and are continuing funding at that level this year. This program provides funding for the Clearing The Path initiative, heavy-haul roads, and bridges and culverts on RM [rural municipality] roads.

In terms of provincial highway system, we have two priorities: renewing and rehabilitating our existing highways and investing in new infrastructure that responds to the needs of a growing province and advances the Saskatchewan plan for growth.

In terms of rehabilitating existing assets, our government has focused on reducing the infrastructure deficit since coming to office. We've made record investments in repaving highways and replacing or fixing bridges, culverts, and other structures.

We'll continue that work this year. We're going to invest \$250.6 million, just over a quarter of a billion, to upgrade existing infrastructure. This includes \$118 million for rural highway upgrades across the province, \$95 million to upgrade about 300 kilometres of provincial highway, and 37.6 million for bridges and replacement of five major bridge rehabs and numerous culvert replacements.

This year we're investing \$37 million to build, operate, and maintain highways, airports, and the Wollaston Lake barge in northern Saskatchewan. This includes some repaving on Highway 106, completing grade raises on Highway 123, and about 25 bridge and culvert projects.

Of course the main focus of our government is advancing the Saskatchewan plan for growth and ensuring that the remarkable growth Saskatchewan is currently experiencing remains a permanent condition. This year we will invest just over 113 million in major projects that support the growth plan. For the most part, these are multi-year projects that will greatly improve safety, increase the capacity of the transportation system, and drive economic growth. We'll continue to work on the new Estevan truck route. We'll continue the

pre-construction work for the twinning of Highway 39 from Estevan to Bienfait and Highway 7 from Saskatoon to Delisle. We'll continue the planning work for the twinning of Highway 6 and 39 that was committed to in the Speech from the Throne.

Work will also get under way on some important new projects as well. Recently I announced two projects to upgrade poor condition thin membrane surface highways to super grids. This will improve safety and result in more robust engineered roads that can accommodate heavy traffic or heavy truck hauls. We'll implement two pilot projects this year on Highway 361 between Alida and Highway No. 9, and Highway No. 47 north of Stoughton. We will start work on the twinning of Highway 16 from Saskatoon to Clavet. We'll also start planning work on a series of passing lanes on Highway No. 7 from Delisle to Rosetown. And we'll take the first steps in what will be the largest transportation infrastructure project in this province's history. We're going to start the pre-construction work, including some land acquisition, on the Regina bypass project.

When it comes to building the infrastructure our economy needs, this government and this ministry have a record to be proud of. Since 2008 we've made 267 kilometres of major highway improvements, we've upgraded over 1000 kilometres of rural highways, and we've repaved 2300 kilometres. Altogether we've improved 8600 kilometres of provincial highways and roadways. That's the equivalent of travelling from Regina to Mexico City by road, round trip.

With the 2014-15 budget, we've invested \$4.1 billion into our transportation system since coming to office. These investments made shipping our exports more efficient and cost-effective. They also improve safety. They improve the investment climate in our cities and towns. They make it easier for our citizens to enjoy our quality of life, and that ultimately is what the growth plan is all about.

Thank you from that time for my remarks. I want to thank my officials, and I look forward to hearing the questions that come from the members of the committee.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Minister. The floor is now open for questions. I recognize Mr. Belanger.

[19:15]

**Mr. Belanger:** — Well thank you very much, Mr. Chair. We've got a bunch of questions. We've got a long evening of course, and we've got some . . . And I'm going to also have my colleague from Cumberland come and ask some more specific questions for his area, so I'll kind of give the minister a heads-up of what's happening with him.

But I want to talk about the highways program overall. We've been hearing a lot about the lean project through Health. Obviously we understand that there's other ministries that are looking at the exercise as well. So I'm assuming Highways is also part of the overall lean strategy that the government has employed with of course a lot of the attention on Health. Is that a correct assumption to take, that within this budget there is a lean or lean-specific exercise? And if there is, what are the activities and what is the cost to the budget itself?

**Ms. Ehrmantraut:** — Jennifer Ehrmantraut with Highways. So for lean, we've been on the lean journey since 2008, and we have spent \$426,000 on lean consultants. For that we have \$3.5 million in savings. That includes working on 51 different lean projects across the province. So we have a lot of lean projects. We have value-stream mapping that goes on where we take a look at our processes from beginning to end and we eliminate the waste.

We also have 14 5S events, and what a 5S [sorting, set in order, systematic cleaning, standardizing, and sustaining] event is, is we go into our shops and our different satellite areas and we sort. We separate the needed from the not needed. We make sure we are eliminating clutter. We set in order. We make sure we're organizing and labelling, setting boundaries and limits. We sweep. We make sure everything is cleaned inside and out. We standardize. We keep maintenance checklists and make them visual so that everybody understands and can see them. And we sustain, which we make sure we continue to have those improvements going forward.

Of our repair depots, the nine repair depots that we've taken a look at, the benefits that we get for that is we have fleet longevity. We improve our condition of our fleet because we're making sure that we spend more time on it and what that does is it makes sure that our equipment is on the road longer. For our maintenance shops, we've went in and we've taken a look at 23 maintenance shops. And what we've done is we've decreased, by going through these events, by sorting, by setting in order, sweeping, shining, and sustaining, we decrease the time spent on servicing, on circle checks for our vehicles, and we decrease the amount of time we are doing washing our vehicles. And what that does, again, is that makes sure that our vehicles are on the road so that our crews can spend more time doing what they do for the people of Saskatchewan.

**Mr. Belanger:** — So I'm assuming that as a result of the exercise these are all . . . All this is taken to account. And I guess the question I would ask is that, which consultant do you use? Is it the same consultant that the government uses overall? And are they the ones that determine the value of the savings that you've expressed through some of the initiatives that you just mentioned?

**Ms. Ehrmantraut:** — We've used two different consultants. We've used Westmark Consulting and we've used OTI [Organization Thoughtware International Inc.] consulting from Ontario. And those two . . . Westmark we've only used on four projects. Only 8 per cent of all of our 51 lean projects we used Westmark. And we've used the OTI, they were the ones that we brought in to do a lot of our 5S events to gain the knowledge. We only used them on 16 projects. We do most of our internal work ourselves. Sixty-one per cent of the time, or 31 projects, we've done with our own forces. And we are the ones that are determining what that value and what those savings are throughout the ministry. And again we've netted \$3.1 million in savings.

**Mr. Belanger:** — So when you talk about the actual figure that you've saved this year, I think it was 400-and-some thousand that you mentioned — correct me if I'm wrong — but that doesn't include the time of the staff or the civil servants that were engaged. Those are all in-house costs that you'd normally

incur and those are not added to the overall savings value that you speak about. Is that correct?

**Ms. Ehrmantraut:** — That's correct. We don't take into account the time of our staff doing their work. What we do is, that 400,000, that's the cost of consultants since 2008, not the cost of savings. The cost of savings . . . The savings that we have overall is 3.5 million; net savings, 3.1 million. And that's cumulative since 2008. So when we bring these consultants in for one year for a small fee, we will continue to gain, continue to have these savings year over year over year.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Could you tell us since 2008 . . . I'm not sure if you're able to break it down. Just general numbers, you know, would be fine. But for the last six years or five years, 2008, what is the value in terms of (a) the costs of the consulting process? How much have we spent on those consultants for each of the last six years?

**Ms. Ehrmantraut:** — In total we've spent \$426,000 on the consultants, the two different consultants. We do the majority of work in-house.

**Mr. Belanger:** — That's over the last six years?

**Ms. Ehrmantraut:** — It does come to, if you want to average it out, it could come to 72,000 a year, a very minimal amount on a 600-plus million dollar budget.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Okay. And the other question in relation to lean itself, when you say you do a lot of the in-house, I understand the breakdown. You do a lot of the in-house. How many staff are actually committed to the lean process within the department itself?

**Mr. Govindasamy:** — My name's Nithi Govindasamy. I'm the deputy minister for the ministry. We've had a number of staff that have been trained over the years in lean, but we've got two staff who are dedicated to doing program review and lean. So they spend about a third of their time on lean activities.

**Mr. Belanger:** — When you say a third, are we talking about obviously a lot of travel time throughout the whole province? So two-thirds they do their current job and a third of the time they do the lean work. So is there travel costs attached to that?

**Mr. Govindasamy:** — Essentially lean is part of what they do in the ministry, and they have other duties including program review, etc. So there would maybe be some travel involved, but there's very little involved in terms of travelling around the province because we have staff who are trained in the province in all of our locations who can continue the lean work on their own.

**Mr. Belanger:** — What are the, again staying on lean itself, what are some of the initiatives or goals attached to the lean process itself? You obviously have two staff that are in place. You've said you've expended 400-and-some thousand in the last eight years. Kind of what's the next steps for lean within the department itself?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So lean is not a destination. You know, it's a continual improvement, work improvement. That's

the whole concept behind lean. It's not a start, finish; it's continual improvement. When you see areas that need to be improved, when you see inefficiencies, when workers within the ministry can see where we could do things better, these quality, these improvement process workshops that'll go on, and you'll improve the delivery of service.

So lean is ongoing, and that's why it's so important. The ministry has spent, you know, as Jennifer mentioned, it might be 72,000 spread out over the number of years. Most of it was in the upfront years, '08, '09, and '10 where we developed expertise within the ministry. You have to realize it's not the staff like it would be in a health care system, so it doesn't take quite the . . . It's not quite as extensive at all. But we've developed expertise within the ministry itself that can continue on the lean journey with quality improvement where we see fit.

So the goal is to continue to save taxpayers' dollars. And the savings that we can see by quality improvement doesn't come out of our budget; it goes back into roads. So instead of spending for example the \$3 million annually that we're seeing saving now, instead of spending it on, whether it's maintenance or stock in the different shops around the province, you know . . . Any of the quality improvement that we've seen, it's not to save money to turn back to the treasury. It's to save money that we can put more into the roads, whether it's maintenance, whether it's winter maintenance, summer maintenance, all of that. And we're going to continue to do that well into the future.

Our goal is not to be status quo forever. I mean that's not the goal. I mean the highway system, the Highways ministry . . . And you know, I can't speak a number of years ago. But until you initiate some of this quality improvement work, you just maintain doing the same as you've always done. And that, you know, is not . . . The goal of the ministry now is to look at how can we improve what we do and continue to turn money back into the roads as opposed to administration or opposed to stock inventory or opposed to maintenance on our equipment.

**Mr. Belanger:** — The reason why I'm asking the questions here . . . And I'm glad you mentioned the years between '08, '09, and '10. And I understand the lean initiatives in terms of the average per month and the overall value that was mentioned by one of the officials, but in '08 you had 1,672 in terms of your FTEs [full-time equivalent] and then in '10 you had 1,597 and then in 2011 it was reduced down to 1,510. So it's almost 160 FTEs lost over that period of the three years that you made reference to.

And that's why the question I was asking about lean. You've attributed 400-and-some thousand to the savings of lean over the last five, six years and yet we're seeing a significant drop in the FTEs. I'm assuming that 160 FTEs, which is different between '08 and 2011, would amount to more than 400-and-some thousand a year based on the information that I've received in terms of what lean was working towards. So I guess that's a question I'm asking when he talks about lean initiatives and they say they're ongoing in the department. So we see further evidence that we've seen more FTEs being cut. I think now we're down to 1,338.

So I can appreciate the ongoing challenge of trying to make sure your department remains efficient. I understand that.

That's always an ongoing concern and an ongoing task. But my question is that in terms of the costs of the department overall, we see a dramatic reduction of all the FTEs within Highways. Now I can't understand how that translates into a more efficient department. On one hand you lose 160 staff and in six years you've saved 400-and-some thousand, and you're saying the work was ongoing. So I guess I need you to clarify for me, and again I'm confused here. Why was there such a huge reduction in FTEs and yet we say under lean we've saved only 400,000?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So I think what I'd say is that it would be a wrong assumption to say that there's a correlation between implementation of lean and trying to get quality improvement and the reduction of staff within the ministry. There is an initiative by our government called workforce adjustment that all ministries are going through regardless of whether they implement lean or don't implement lean.

The work that we're doing with lean, for the most part, the vast majority of it is in the front line — front-line staff, at the shops, at the service, at the true service delivery point. There has been no loss of jobs in the front-line staff where lean has been implemented. Lean is to find efficiencies in the way our shops are run, in the maintenance of our equipment, and supply management on the front line, and there have been no job losses in that area.

What you're talking about, when you look at the FTEs since 2008 to 2013, is really part of a bigger government program called workforce adjustment. And I'll turn it over to the deputy minister. But it would be an absolute wrong assumption to tie those two together because again, lean, which is quality improvement, is at the front line where we still have the same amount of staff.

**Mr. Govindasamy:** — So I will attempt to supplement what the minister has just talked about. There's no correlation or relationship between becoming more efficient and finding better business models, including the lean approach to find efficiencies and savings, and the workforce adjustment reductions in FTEs that all ministries have had to undergo.

I will make a couple of observations. One is that in terms of workforce adjustment, while there has been a decline in the number of FTEs associated with the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure, this has been largely accomplished through attrition. There have been no layoffs included in this reduction. And as staff were leaving the ministry, as we reviewed the business of the ministry, there's been a need for less people overall. But that has no direct relationship with the lean efforts that we're doing.

I would also make the observation that as our budgets have grown and we have put out more projects out there, we've been able to continue to provide the same or a higher level of service and take care of some fairly large, major infrastructure projects with the reduced number of staff.

[19:30]

**Mr. Belanger:** — Well I certainly want to point out that it, at the face of it, when you have the reductions in FTE and yet we talk about lean, I think they are connected. From my

perspective, I believe that they're strongly connected because obviously, when you look at highways themselves, when you see some of the contracts not being done on time and we see some of the payments not made on time and see some of the work being delayed, I think that's directly attributed to the fact that there is some inefficiency within the department because we don't have enough staff in place to make the process operate as efficiently as possible, which I am assuming is part of the lean mantra or the purpose of having lean to begin with.

So my point being is that if you have lean on one side saving you 400-and-some thousand dollars, but FTE reductions on the other side causing you a great amount of stress and more money, then I think they are connected. That's the only . . . So I guess I can reword my question: has the FTE reductions over the last number years, as I have identified that here, have they hampered the Department of Highways from properly doing its job and being accountable for the dollars it spends, not only to the contractors but to getting the work done on time? Has that compromised the department overall?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Well the answer is no, it hasn't. And I think the member should know that, you know, if . . . So if we're implementing lean, which is quality improvement within the ministry, and then you set an example of contractors that aren't getting their work done, for whatever reason, in a calendar year, that has nothing to do with lean. They're separate contractors doing the work.

And you would, the member opposite should know that the weather and there's so many other factors that play into it. There are contractors that, you know, if they want to implement lean within their own organization, that's up to them. But the work that we're doing through lean or quality improvement is within the ministry. It doesn't dictate as to whether a contractor gets their work done or not get their work done.

And it's also important that the member . . . because he said cost savings at 400,000. The cost of the consultants were 400,000. The savings have been well over \$3 million on an annual basis. And I need to give the member opposite . . . because I don't think he's had really much experience with lean as to what lean is about. And I certainly have, in my previous file as the minister of Health and now as minister in Highways and Infrastructure, I'm no expert or authority on lean. But I've been to quality improvement workshops. I've been through 3P [production preparation process] design work at the children's hospital, at Moose Jaw's facility. And I've also, you know, seen some of the work that's been done within the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure.

And a classic example is work that was done in the Rosetown maintenance shop. Now I want to see if he can try and draw this into that work isn't getting done out on the highways. But in the Rosetown maintenance shop, a quality improvement process was done. They looked at what their inventory was, what they had in the shop within the whole yard, and they found that they had a lot of stuff that didn't need to be there. And in fact they took out 26 large garbage bins of stuff they didn't need, which allowed them then to have more equipment in the shop itself, have more use of in the yard because they were getting rid of a lot of the waste. That's what lean is. It gets rid of the waste to allow you to do things more efficiently. It doesn't have

anything to do with a contractor that's bid on a job as to getting the job done, you know, in September or October.

This work that we are doing is internal to the ministry, to its shops, and this is just one example. And as Jennifer mentioned, there's a number of quality improvement processes that have gone on, mainly at the front-line level, to try and increase efficiencies so that we can in this case better use the facility, better use the yard without having to add on or build a new shop because it's too full or too cluttered. We're able to get rid of waste that is not productive to us, delivering these services that we need to at Highways.

So I would disagree with the premise of the question simply by saying, we truly believe, I truly believe that the elimination of waste and doing things more efficiently has created more money going into the highways than what we would have been at if we had not implemented some of these strategies back in 2008.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Well I disagree with you, Mr. Minister, on every front of your argument. My point, my point is that if I look at this from the situation of . . . The best analogy that I can do is that you say lean is about efficiency. And I am saying that the FTE reductions that you've had in your department has undone a lot of the good work that the front-line workers may have done as a result of the lean initiative.

So on one hand, okay, lean is separate. You talk about the efficiencies in certain plants. I understand that part. But as a result of the staff reductions, you're having delays and you're having other issues of contractors not being paid on time, the work not being done on time. So I think that's not being efficient.

So my point being is that on one hand we are talking about lean saving 400-and-some thousand dollars or 72,000 the last three years. I'm arguing, countering back that your loss of 160 FTEs is actually hampering the department from being efficient in delivering roads and projects on time and paying the bills on time. That's my point.

So again I guess I would ask, the question is, that with the FTE reductions happening in the department, are there inefficiencies that were created as a result of these vacancies that are costing the department money and time?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So I'll start by answering and answering some of the premise of this question, then I'll turn it over to Jennifer to give another example on the bridge permitting office which is again, very real numbers show the quality improvement that's gone on.

But the member tends to go back and say that, because of the implementation of lean, there are jobs that aren't getting done in a timely manner or are extending into another year. And I know what he's referring to, he's referring to the CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] story of Geoff Leo saying that some of the projects aren't getting done through the calendar year or taking longer, and what percentage that was.

And it was an interesting media scrum that went on that day because the member himself was out in the media scrum after

where the one reporter said, well how many jobs were not done on time, every job done on time, or was any of the jobs delayed when he was the minister. And his answer was no, there were no delays. And to the reporter who said, well I think you're wrong because there were and we do have the documentation. Now he said there was no delays in any of the work jobs being done when he was minister, which was just factually not even in the same ballpark. So to say that now that we're implementing lean that some jobs aren't getting done and it's because of lean, you know, there's just no basis or premise for that kind of conclusion.

With that, I'd like to turn it over to Jennifer though who will talk about, you know, the one quality improvement which, had we kept things the way we were, we would have delays in the bridge permitting program, especially with the increase in numbers. This is a quality improvement initiative which I believe is helping people that are in the trucking industry get permits that they need on a timely basis.

**Ms. Ehrmantraut:** — So as the Saskatchewan economy continues to boom, so does the number of truckers who need permits to be able to travel on our roads. So about 15 years ago, we had about 2,000 requests a year, you know, coming in to Highways. And what we do in Highways is we take a look at the weights and the loads of the bridges and we do the bridge permitting part in tandem with SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance].

So in 2006 to 2009, we saw an increase from 8,000 to 9,000 permits. And that's really what prompted us to really look at this through a lean lens because we knew when you're seeing those kinds of increases, we knew that this wasn't sustainable doing things how we were doing them, that we wouldn't be able to keep up with the permits without adding additional staff to do that.

So what we did was we took a look at the bridge permits, how we were doing it. and we looked at efficiencies. We tracked how many people were doing permits across the side of their desk, and there was about eight bridge staff doing processing permits off the side of their desk in addition to their regular duties. They'd run back and forth to the fax machine when a fax came in from SGI. They would have to go into a back room and take a look at the bridges — our bridges, the municipal bridges — to see, you know, to see what the loading on each bridge was to see if they could handle that load. So I think it was over, they actually walked over a kilometre a day, each one of them, when they were doing bridge permits to be able to manage this process.

And so what happened was we leaned the process out. We took a look at where the fax machine was located, where the maps were located, and a lot of it seemed like common sense. But people don't have time when they're running back and forth making sure that they can respond to these urgent requests that are coming in a very timely manner.

So after that lean process, we are very happy to report that we've gone in 2009 from 9,000 permits a year and now we're able to handle 29,000 permits a year without increasing the staffing complement. That is what lean did for the ministry. And it was because of going through that lean event that we

were able to sustain that and make sure that we were able to continue to deliver and make sure that those permits came on time so that the truckers of Saskatchewan could be on the road and be doing what they do and making sure that our goods got to export.

**Mr. Belanger:** — The other question I have, just in terms of staff losses overall, you'd referenced the FTE reductions. But are there any staff being seconded to the Executive Council or any other department?

**Mr. Govindasamy:** — The answer is no. There are no staff seconded to Executive Council.

**Mr. Belanger:** — The other issue in terms of the FTE reductions that we spoke about earlier, and I wouldn't mind referencing them just for the record: 1,672 down to 1,597; down to 1,510 in 2011-2012; down to 1,464, 2012-2013; 2013-2014 down to 1,372; and 2014-2015 down to 1,333. So that's almost a loss of, from the high in 2008, almost a loss of 340 FTEs overall. Those FTEs, are they all positions that were not filled or people that retired? What was the makeup of the 340 FTEs over the last six, seven years that we've lost?

**Mr. Govindasamy:** — So I had talked about the FTE reductions earlier, and I had mentioned that all of those FTE reductions had taken place through attrition. There was nobody actually laid off, as far as the numbers that I have with me are concerned and the people that I have checked with. There were no layoffs in the ministry. They are mostly all people who had retired or voluntarily left the ministry.

**Mr. Belanger:** — So we've lost 340 people in the last six years of people retiring and no positions being filled. Nobody has exited Highways as an employer and joined the private sector as consultants. We have had none of that. Is that correct?

**Mr. Govindasamy:** — That's not quite correct. When people leave, they either retire completely or they go and find other work. And they may well have been people who have left the Ministry of Highways and gone on to do other work in the private sector.

**Mr. Belanger:** — And you would count those that have left to find work in the private sector as vacating their current position and then you not filling them. That's one of the 340 people that you made reference here.

**Mr. Govindasamy:** — That would account for the vacancies, yes.

[19:45]

**Mr. Belanger:** — Now in terms of the private contractors themselves, in terms of contracts, what is the department now outsourcing to private contractors? I'm assuming a lot of the engineering work is being outsourced, but what other services is Highways outsourcing to private contractors?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So that's kind of a broad question, and if you want to kind of narrow it down into one specific area after, we can do that. And I'll probably let the officials take it as you get more, kind of want a more detailed answer in a specific



area.

But the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure contract out an awful lot of work. I mean, pretty much all the capital, the new build is contracted out. And you know, you'll see that on any of the major construction, for example, the new overpass on No. 1 Highway and the GTH [Global Transportation Hub] would have all been done through a private contractor.

Certainly a lot of the engineering, more of the engineering all the time is being contracted out. And there's many different levels under, you know, I can say the word engineering, but there's many different levels or subsections of the engineering, whether it's geotechnical or, you know, design, just straight-up design work, all of that. We still have some in-house, but the vast majority is contracted out on the engineering.

On the maintenance side, there's a real variation of that as well. We do a lot of the light maintenance in-house through the ministry. And maintenance is not just in the summertime, but it's maintenance in the winter, snow removal. Maintenance in the summertime would be sand seal coating, for example, that type of thing. We do some of that ourselves. We contract out some of that.

Maintenance on some of our highways, for example, where I was born and raised, it's the Ministry of Highways that do Highway 306, for example, which is partially TMS [thin membrane surface] and partially gravel surface. And Ministry of Highways do that. We have examples though where it's a gravel highway and we have the maintenance contracted out. And I think the member would be familiar with that. In some of our northern regions, we contract that out.

Mowing, for example, we contract out. And we do that through a number of different avenues. Some are private sector that will bid on RFPs [request for proposal] for the mowing. Sometimes it's an RM or municipality will combine with another RM and do sections of highways that run right through their RM. They have the equipment already, and they'll bid on a tender. So there's quite a wide range of services that are contracted out for sure. Some of the services are joint, done by ministry or contracted out, but the big major projects such as the major capital projects have been contracted out for decades.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Yes. I want to focus on the engineering aspect first of all. In terms of the engineers I guess I'd like to do a comparison between the time that you assumed office in '07, as to how many engineers are still with the department. And the second point is, how many are we now contracting? What's the contrast of them working for the government versus today how many are not working for the government; they are considered outside or external engineering contracts?

**Mr. Govindasamy:** — Thank you for the question. I just want to make a couple of observations with respect to the use of engineering consultants by the ministry. It's been my observation that our use of consulting engineers from the private sector has increased for several reasons. One of the things that the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure is doing right now is we're engaged in a number of very large, sophisticated, complex types of projects. And because we are an export-based economy and we do have what the world wants —

Jennifer said, food, fuel, and fertilizer — investing in transportation capital is absolutely critical for the growth plan, and we find ourselves basically in the new era of transportation investment.

Using consultants from the private sector is actually a good thing for us because it allows the ministry to access specialized knowledge in areas of practice. For example, if when we get into major overpass development, as was mentioned earlier, some of the projects have never actually been done in Saskatchewan and this kind of expertise is not easily findable either within the ministry or even elsewhere, so consulting engineers perform a very valuable service for the ministry.

So the scope and complexity of our project base is increasing. We are actually planning several overpasses and looking at major twinning projects, more passing lanes, etc. These kinds of projects have not been done in the past and the level of sophistication has improved substantially. So utilizing engineering consultants, many of whom are now based out of Saskatchewan, is actually a good thing because it allows us the flexibility, brings in new expertise and experience which they have gained in other parts of the country or internationally, allows us to be able to deliver projects that the public wants.

**Mr. Belanger:** — I just wanted to point out that in terms of the discussions, has there been any basic analysis of the cost attached as you contract more and more of the work out? Has there been any analysis as to . . . And I appreciate there may be certain sectors and certain expertise required at some of the more complex jobs that you might not be able to have somebody in-house for. I understand that. You know, I don't think there will be a lot of those positions where you can possibly hire somebody, you know, for the department that, for example, has overpass expertise.

But has there been any analysis done between having general services provided by engineers within the ministry versus contracting it all out? Where is the better value for the taxpayer, in your opinion as one of our senior officials?

**Mr. Govindasamy:** — So my apologies. We had to take some time to consider the question and respond in an appropriate way. So I think it's fair to say that when we're trying to compare costs overall between in-house expertise or in-house help within government versus somebody from the private sector, we ought to always look at comparing the right kinds of costs, essentially an apples-to-apples comparison which is not always easy to do retrospectively in government. If there was a cost associated with the particular engineering discipline, then normally what governments tend to do is to basically look at the salaries of the person, the pension that the person may have cost, in terms of staff costs. What would not have been taken into account in that type of costing exercise — as an economist I can vouch for that — is that all the fixed costs would not have been included. The sort of overhead costs associated with a particular employee would not have been included.

So to go back and try and make this kind of assessment as to what engineering costs are or were with full-time employees or part-time employees within the ministry, with the costs of engineering services that are being delivered to the ministry by outside private consultants isn't always an easy type of an

apples-to-apples comparison.

So having said that, we did attempt to try and look at what kind of costs generally speaking engineering consultants, you know, as a comparison, as a ratio of total costs . . . And we do notice a slight increase from about 11 per cent in the '80s to about 13 per cent in the last . . . 2008-09, up to about 13 per cent in '13-14.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Now you're saying that you're gaining 13 per cent of value when you go to a private contractor versus an in-house employee. Is that what you're saying?

**Mr. Govindasamy:** — No, what I'm saying is that from 2008-09 to 2013-14, the value of engineering consulting services as a proportion of total expenditures has increased from about 11 per cent to 13 per cent.

**Mr. Belanger:** — I understand that. That's good. I understand that's the whole notion that I've looked at when you look at the value of having an employee within Highways versus contracting it out. Now comparing apples to apples, there's . . . And I'm not going to mention some of the, you know, the people that have spoken to media, spoken out against this whole process, that don't like the notion of losing their jobs and seeing the government contract more of their jobs out. They obviously think that the outsourcing is a way to get rid of the employees. But they complain and they argue that it's going to cost the government more to go to the private sector. So that whole argument in terms of again, dollar for dollar, in terms of getting value for Highways, there are many people that would disagree that going to the private sector actually increases costs.

So there was a Ministry of Highways briefing note that was obtained by CBC's iTeam, and it says that the majority of the engineering work is now delivered by consultants. And the ministry's explanation was that outsourcing was going to reduce costs. But the heavy construction industry representatives are saying that engineering costs have almost doubled. So when questioned about this, I think the response was that people within the department didn't know that the costs of engineering were on the rise. So again using apples to apples, why is engineering costs dramatically rising when we could . . . [inaudible] . . . have a lot of those arguments that the people make that employing people within Highways is much cheaper than outsourcing these jobs?

[20:00]

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So as Nithi had mentioned, we do see an increase from 11.2 per cent in 2008-09 to 13.8 per cent this fiscal year. So there is an increase in what we are spending on engineering costs as a total of our budget. It's not doubled like the construction association said. That was anecdotal. We have the numbers here to prove that that was wrong.

Having said that, there was a bit of an increase. There is a bit of an increase. There would be a natural increase I think in those years from '08 to '13-14. I think you can just see the amount of work that there is in the province alone, the amount of engineering work that needs to be done in this province compared to, you know, prior to 2008 is significant. So we're seeing all those costs increase, including engineering costs. It's

extremely important, as Nithi said, that you compare apples to apples.

When we hire on a consulting engineer, all costs are in. Whatever that engineer and his firm are paying him as a wage, whatever they're paying him for accommodation costs, such as support back at an office, an office building, IT [information technology] — all of that is factored in when you talk about a consulting engineer that we hire on through the private sector, not to mention pension plan, health benefits, or anything else.

That isn't necessarily the case when we try and figure out what our costs are. We have some of those fixed costs as well. They're just factored into the overall budget, not specific to the engineering cost of a specific project. We would figure in what the time the engineer spent, average a cost on per hour, and that's how we determine what the costs were for engineering work done within the ministry. But I don't believe, as Nithi said, that's a fair comparison to hiring a private individual where all expenses are in.

So I would agree to a certain extent that the costs of engineering work has increased. It's shown out in our numbers, in our overall. It's nothing compared to what the construction association said as far as doubling. It has increased.

Having talked to the minister from Alberta, who I saw this last week, and ministers previous to that, but even just as important, having talked to the now deputy minister of highways in Alberta who had been the deputy minister of Highways in Saskatchewan for about four or five years, three or four years, his experience when he was in Alberta — and he went through that process because Alberta had gone through the same process that we have — he would say that there was an increase in engineering costs when the Alberta highways ministry moved from in-house to consulting engineers. But what they have seen, as they built capacity within the consulting engineers and the competition within the engineering firms, in Alberta has seen now a reduction.

So yes, there will be an increase, which I think we're experiencing, albeit a small increase. I think as we build capacity within the engineering profession and especially in the engineering firms, these projects, you know, when they're put out to tender then have a number of bidders on them, and I think we'll see our costs decrease over time. This has only been over the last number of years, but I think you'll see our costs decline, which has been the case in Alberta, according to the former minister. In fact, yes, I mean, we do have some numbers here. We can get into the numbers of what they're seeing now compared to back 10 to 20 years ago and their relationship of costs between the ministry and consulting engineers.

Having said that, I will say though I think it is a factor, somewhat a factor of the amount of work that is available here in the province. And right now there is a lot of work for engineers and engineering firms. I think, meeting with the consulting engineers, also APEGS [Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Saskatchewan], they'll all agree — which is the professional organization — will agree that the number of engineers working today in the province has greatly increased compared to seven or eight years ago. And even at that there is still more work than perhaps . . . I shouldn't say

that they can handle; they wouldn't agree with that. They can always do more work I'm sure, but they've seen quite a significant increase in work over the last number of years.

So that's a bit of a long-winded answer, but I think it's important that we put it into context. Yes, we've seen increases. We've seen increases for a couple of reasons, but we expect to see this levelling out and perhaps saving the taxpayers in the long term as we build capacity within the industry.

**Mr. Belanger:** — One of the gentlemen that I had discussion with a couple months ago, I don't want to really mention his name, but he mentioned to me that when we're talking about the highway contracts not being completed, there was some discussion around losing employees. There's some discussion around that contracting out is costing more, and that's probably where the Heavy Construction Association chimed in and certainly brought forward that argument. And this individual was telling me that it really isn't capacity when you're talking about highway contracts not being completed. It's the flow of money is what this gentlemen said to me. And of course a couple weeks ago I asked you in the Assembly about paying these bills on time.

So I guess the question I would ask to calm this gentleman's concerns, I guess, is that you look at the facts that half of last year's highway contracts were not completed. An internal ministry note says that the majority of engineering work is now being delivered by consultants. And of course the heavy construction industry rep says engineering costs have almost doubled. And then we hear further evidence, argument that these bills are not being paid on time. So as you hear this problem, then another problem, then another problem, then another problem, I guess the question I would ask you is, is the gentleman correct in saying that it's never about capacity, it's always about the flow of money when you look at the challenges of the Ministry of Highways?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So a lot of different . . . I think there's really kind of three different areas the critic talked on. He used the example that half the work didn't get done last year. To be more accurate is that, you know, and I don't know if it was half, maybe that is the number if it was 50 per cent, wasn't complete on the completion date. That means they could have completed it a day later, a week later, a month later, but the work got done. So it's not like all of this work carried into the next year. A lot of the projects were done in the calendar year except they were past the date that was agreed upon. And there's a lot of reasons for that. And generally weather is the biggest determining factor in that and there are some other factors as well.

He also mentioned the issue around payment and it was the reason why the work wasn't getting done because they weren't receiving their money. There are progress payments made as the project is moving along. So you know, as a contractor gets more work done there is a payment to offset that. Not all 100 per cent of the payment is delivered right away until the project is complete and we have sign-off by the contractor, for example, the engineer, and the ministry. We need certain things from contractors to make that final payment and sometimes that has been lacking.

But I would say that 90 to 92 per cent of the money that is

owing a contractor as they go through the job is paid. There is about 8 to 10 per cent withheld until there's agreement that the work is done according to specification and there is sign-off. If all that is done and the contractor is not receiving the payment, it's our problem then. And we're not saying that there aren't some issues in that front. And we need to work on making sure that final 8 to 10 per cent, once there's sign-off done, that payment is done on a more timely basis. There are some agreements or contracts that are outstanding for a couple of years simply because we can't sign off on it because we don't feel the work has been completed up to specification.

Last year when we went through estimates you were asking quite a bit about a subcontractor. And it was almost like, why don't we hold back more so we can pay the subcontractor because the contractor hasn't finished the work. There hasn't been sign-off, and it's the contractor that pays the subcontractor. And your premise of the questioning at that time was, we should hold back more to protect the subcontractors. Now it seems to have changed. And I don't think you're saying that we shouldn't hold back money if the work isn't done because, you know, I would have a hard time with that. But I would agree with you that once the work is done, we need to work very diligently within the ministry to ensure that the final 8 to 10 per cent of that payment is done on time.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Well the issue last year was there was a subcontractor that done a bunch of work for a contractor that then basically skipped town. And the subcontractor was out a whole bunch of money after doing all this work. And he was just wondering why Highways was not watching out for the subcontractors in this regard, people that have done the work but not received their money. This gentleman was quite upset. He was very, very upset and he was out quite a bit of money as well. And he was watching that day, and he was being very careful as to what he wanted to do after the fact. But he wanted to know what this government was doing to make sure that the people who had done work in highways, that they're paid for their work as subcontractors to make sure that there's some relationship and professionalism between the contractors that received the work and payment of the subcontractors.

Nobody's talking about delaying the process any further. He was just saying, how do you protect the interests. A lot of subcontractors at some times will work for a company that does a job and all of a sudden they're gone. They're no longer around, or they may have gone belly up and the subcontractor's out thousands, hundreds of thousands of dollars. That was his issue.

But my argument today, my discussion, and I want to turn it over to my colleague from Cumberland because he's been waiting patiently to ask questions, is that there is a lot of discussion around what ails the Ministry of Highways in terms of some of the issues that were raised. Fifty-seven projects not being completed on time, and the fact that not being able to track whether these contracts are a day late or a month late or a week late. There's no way to really evaluate that and measure that. The fact that there may not have been a lot of discussion around engineering work being delivered by the consultants, as opposed to keeping people in-house.

There's been issues of the industry itself saying that engineering

costs have almost doubled. Now you say, obviously it hasn't. So I guess they were wrong. And there's also discussion about the heavy construction industry themselves telling reporters that Ministry of Highways officials explained the new direction to the industry. And I guess the new direction, is that part of the overall plan for Highways, and what is the new direction?

These are all the questions we have in Highways overall. But I've got another list of another 50 questions in this particular area, but for now I just want to thank the officials for their responses. And I would ask the Chair to recognize my colleague for his particular questions for his area.

**The Chair:** — First of all, I don't know if the minister wanted to respond to that or we just go to Mr. Vermette. I recognize Mr. Vermette.

[20:15]

**Mr. Vermette:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And to the minister and your officials, thank you for being here. I guess a number of highways in the Cumberland constituency have been brought to the ministry's attention in different ways, whether they were petitions, leaders from the community, community members raising concerns. And some of the times, it's about safety, and just the roads and the conditions of some of the northern roads in the Cumberland constituency.

I mean I can look at the whole province and I realize, we hope at the end of the day things are balanced out. And we try to deal with safety issues. And again I just want to express the frustration from some of the community members that approach me, whether it's petitions, whether its leaders with their concerns.

And I know they get a hold of your officials that are out there. Some of the, I guess, immediate workers out there that are doing the work, they talk to them. But also I know that they've shared their concerns with officials within the Highways ministry, and maybe some of those concerns have been raised with yourself. I don't know that for sure. I know I have through petitions in different areas. So I just leave the leaders do the good work that they do to raise the concerns of community members in the North.

And I guess I want to look at Highway 123. It's a highway that, you know, has been petitioned quite a bit — worst highway last year in CAA's [Canadian Automobile Association] . . . Highway 123 was voted the worst highway, and is. This year I know the voting will go on again. And just seeing the condition of that road right now and the messages I've been getting from individuals, it's pretty frustrating to see. But I would like to know, and I guess hopefully we can deal with the safety issue. And I know on the news tonight at 6 o'clock they had a bus showing students. And it's about safety. And I think this community needs and the leaders over there, you know, community members want their residents to travel safely.

So looking at the budget from last year, and maybe you guys can provide . . . And you have the information; your officials do. Just looking at the budget for 2013-14, what was allocated for Highway 123? And that's to Cumberland House and Cumberland House Cree Nation. And I'm just trying to

understand last year's budget for maintenance. And if it's \$1 million, could you break out for me what the cost was for the regular maintenance that they would have been given to do the regular maintenance versus any upgrades or any other additional dollars you've spent in 2013-14?

But also if I could have for 2014-15 what's allocated regular maintenance, and then what do you see your commitment to the community with any additional dollars to do some of the upgrades on that road that needs to be done? And we know that clearly, from last year, the ministry knows about it, the concerns. We raised it. I know the leadership has. Everybody has tried to, community members. So I'll leave it at that and if you could give me, you know, some numbers or provide at some time that information, it would be helpful. Thank you.

**Mr. Govindasamy:** — Thank you for the question, and I'm going to try and respond to the question with respect to Highway 123, if I may. Essentially in 2013 the ministry spent approximately \$347,000 to maintain the gravel portion of Highway 123. Surface maintenance efforts included blading and gravelling. Off-road maintenance activities were also undertaken in 2013 including bush clearing, beaver control, culvert and ditch maintenance.

This is work that has been continuing for a number of years. We've done work dating back to '11, '12, and '13. There were some problems with the road with respect to high water levels, etc. By the way, I have been to Cumberland House on a couple of occasions now, and I've seen the road for myself.

The ministry tendered a project back in October of 2012 in terms of the grading, and clearing of the right-of-way began in the winter of 2013 followed by grading in the summer of 2013. And that cost was about \$2.4 million. And grading work I'm told is currently approximately 60 per cent complete. And the moisture content is currently too high, so that work remains to be finished.

In addition to that, you had requested what the planned work was for 2014-15. So essentially for Highway 123, grading of west of Cumberland House, various locations from mileage 30 to 53 miles. And the approximate cost, the estimated cost of that work is estimated to be slightly over \$1 million for that particular road.

**Mr. Vermette:** — So can you tell me how many kilometres . . . I know there's about 62 kilometres . . . Well it would be 90, but I know that 30, I believe 30 was done previously and there was about 62 to continue to do upgrades on. So you're saying out of that, how many kilometres would that be with the allocation of the \$1 million.

**Mr. Govindasamy:** — So it would go from 30 to 53. That's 23 kilometres.

**Mr. Vermette:** — To be clear, and I want to make sure that I'm not missing the numbers, so this \$1 million is on top of the regular maintenance that you're doing. So it will be \$1 million for this year alone to work on that within the budget? Is that correct?

**Mr. Govindasamy:** — That is correct.

**Mr. Vermette:** — And you said you've travelled that road, and I'm just curious to see if you would give me your comments on that road and what you felt when you travelled because I'm glad you never travelled it yesterday or today.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — I'll take that question. And I also had the opportunity of travelling that road, 123, from Cumberland House. I forget exactly how many kilometres we went, but we were on the road for probably an hour, down for a ways and then turned around and went back. It wasn't through the spring of the season. It was in the fall, but I did travel it. It's not in the best shape, absolutely. It's a provincial highway that needs some work, and that's why you see over \$1 million in capital expenditure this year, not to mention the maintenance. So yes, absolutely there needs to be some work done on that road.

The traffic volumes on that road, I don't know what they are exactly, but we'll get the traffic volumes on the road. And I know it's not just all . . . We don't make all our decisions just on traffic volumes. I mean that's kind of the main road in and out, so other locations may have options to get in and out of their communities.

But what I would say is I've also travelled roads across in many . . . from Stony Rapids south, around Buffalo Narrows, around Cumberland. I've also travelled roads around Torquay and Lake Alma. Highway 18 comes to mind, one that we're putting into a super grid, 361 I believe it is. I've travelled those roads as well. Some of the roads that we have in the province that are low-volume roads are not in the best shape. We are working to put record amounts of money into it, not only in the northern communities but in the southern communities to try and keep up. There are about 5,000 — this not to mention the grid roads that we have that are highways — but there are about 5,000 kilometres of TMS roads that certainly need some work.

So as you can imagine, there is more roads than there is money to go around on any given time. Having said that, we do know the shape of 123. That's why we've put money in over the last few years for capital, and we continue to put in for maintenance as we try and balance it off with other roads in the North as well as roads throughout the South.

**Mr. Vermette:** — And I realize you talk about record spending, and it would be hard to — sorry to say this, Mr. Minister — but it would be hard to sell some of the northern communities that they see it record roadwork in the North. So I just want to share that. I understand you have other priorities. But having said that, that's the frustration from a lot of residents and feeling that, and I'll get through some of those.

And I guess I'll go back to the next you're saying work of 23 kilometres that you'll be continuing the \$1 million above the regular maintenance that you're allocating for 2014-15 budget. Who will oversee and make sure that whatever work is done to this road will meet the standard, the conditions that the community is facing with the moisture, the water? How would you determine and how will you develop those 23 kilometres with a plan that will work to make sure that the monies that are being spent are going to take care of the concerns of that 23 kilometres, and we're not going to later find out, well it didn't, for some reason, it didn't meet the conditions or the material used? I'm just curious to see how you'll determine that, just

your plan.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — I think what I'll do is I want to answer your preface to your question and then I'll turn it over to the officials to talk about the engineering of the road and the surface that we'll be putting on and whether it meets . . . I mean I'm quite positive it, like most communities, want a primary weight, paved road surface. And that's probably not going to happen, but I do need to address . . . You had said, "Yes, record spending, but we know where your priorities are. It's not in the North." You made some comment. "It would be hard to explain in the North that your priorities are here."

And I just really have to put these numbers on the record, and whether you choose to share them in around Cumberland or any other place, that's totally up to you. But over the past seven years, we've spent \$286 million in the North, which is approximately \$60 million more than the NDP [New Democratic Party] did in their last seven years. So \$60 million more. That's an increase from the seven years that we've been in government compared to the last seven years that your party was in government — just in the North, an increase of 30 per cent.

Now there's some inflationary issues that will take away from that, but it is extremely important that we realize that there is a greater expenditure in the North. More to do, absolutely, and we'll be talking about that on road 123. But it's extremely important that we realize there has been an increased expenditure over the seven years by 30 per cent since our party was in government. So I can't take your premise that, we know where your priorities are, and I think you mentioned the South. That doesn't statistically work out with the numbers and the expenditures by the Ministry of Highways over the past seven years of our government. I think it's extremely important to have that on the record.

Now as far as the details of the road and the structure and whether it meets with specification, I'll turn it over to Nithi to talk a little bit more about the actual work we're doing on 123.

**Mr. Govindasamy:** — So when I responded to the question earlier, I had indicated that grade raises, there were three planned grade raises for that particular road. And essentially, I have been told that there will be 8 kilometres of actual grade raises from kilometre 32 to kilometre 36, and then from 43 to 45, and then again from 50 to 52. Those are the three places where those grade raises will occur.

Now grading work, as I had indicated earlier, is 60 per cent complete. It is wet right now so subgrade remains to be finished. My folks are aware of it. And I'm also told that the majority of the culverts will need to be installed. That's something that will be done this summer.

The summer work is expected to start by July 1st and be completed some time late in the summer, in August. Having said that, we do have a process in the ministry where I have my staff, our own internal engineers and engineering consultant, who will oversee the work that is going to be done in that part of road, Highway 123.

**Mr. Vermette:** — So last year, I know there was work being

done on there and you guys, we seen what's going on. And obviously, by the numbers that you allocated, 347,000 was just for regular maintenance. There wasn't any commitment of dollars last year, like, that were to improve the road. Or was it just for the emergency that you guys responded to, the flooding and stuff like that?

[20:30]

**Mr. Govindasamy:** — So I had to go back and check, just make sure that my assessment of the situation and the numbers are being accurately reflected. So I've just been informed that we did spend \$2 million in capital on that road last year. And the amount allocated for capital on that road for '14-15 is \$1 million, and that is over and above the \$347,000 in actual maintenance budget for that road.

**Mr. Vermette:** — So out of that \$2 million above, then you're saying the 347,000 that you've spent on regular maintenance, you're saying three . . . Was it three million or two million? Two million. Was that for to deal with the flood and the response of the condition of the road? Or were there parts of that road that actually your engineers followed through with them? As you said, you use the engineers from Highways. That's 10 kilometres of that road was fixed and, you know, in good shape, or 12 kilometres or 4 kilometres for that dollars? And I realize it was the flooding and you were responding to a crisis over there. And I realize . . . Would some of that money been allocated within the municipality or was it all on the highway that, you know, it doesn't affect the town in the sense of going into it? If I could have an explanation of that.

**Mr. Govindasamy:** — So if I understood the question correctly, you wanted to know what the dollars were used for. Essentially the \$2 million, a little more than \$2 million was used to do grading. The project was for grading of the highway itself, clearing the right-of-way and widening the road. It's my understanding that the money was spent on the road itself, while the Water Security Agency was also doing some work within the community, is what I've been told.

**Mr. Vermette:** — So out of that \$2 million, and I realize you did, you know, constant . . . because of the moisture and everything else. So what section of that 2 million was there where you'd say, 5 kilometres that you guys had upgraded of road with the 2 million? Or was it strictly for emergency to get community members back and forth? I'm just trying to understand. Of that \$2 million, did any of the 62 that was needed to be widened and deal with the moisture problem?

**Mr. Govindasamy:** — So the money was actually spent in terms of, you know, grade raises that actually occurred on those mileages that I just mentioned. Actually the grade raise is on mileage 32 to 36, and then from 43 to 45, and then again from kilometre 50 to 52 because those were the three areas — and I wasn't there last year at this time, I was there in the fall — but those were the three areas that were identified as having been basically having water and flooded out last year. So the grade raise was actually done for those sections of that 123 Highway.

**Mr. Vermette:** — Okay. I'll have a few more questions, but I think, Mr. Chair, one of my colleagues has a few questions they'd like to ask.

**The Chair:** — I recognize Mr. Wotherspoon.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — I just have a couple here tonight. I'm upstairs in the Education estimates, but I wanted to stop down and just touch base on a couple very important files. The Global Transportation Hub, as I'm sure you know, inundated Dewdney Avenue, which cuts through or is a residential neighbourhood, inundated it with heavy-haul truck traffic. And it's been a massive impact on the lives of those that live on Dewdney Avenue but also those that use it to commute or that use it to connect their families to schools.

And it's just a major safety issue that, really it's my greatest concern that, you know, there's going to be tragic circumstances if left unresolved. I've observed the unacceptable traffic on it all up and down it, and I've certainly spoken with many. The bypass is an important long-term solution to this and that's something that, you know, we can talk about, and timelines and resources are important on that front.

But what I'm interested in here tonight is there needs to be, in advance of that bypass, there needs to be a practical solution supported by the ministry and by the government, the provincial government to safely move those trucks off of Dewdney Avenue. And I think there's some practical solutions out there. I guess, where's this at on the government's radar? And what actions can people anticipate?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So yes, I mean, I think the premise of the question is right. The GTH is up and running and is doing well. I think it's only going to increase in traffic as we move forward. We know what the long-term solution is to deal with that traffic and certainly made a bit of an announcement today as far as the route and how, you know, impacting up from, let's say, from the GTH, going north towards No. 11, how important that is, as well as going south.

Towards No. 1, work is being done and design work is being done. But having said that, in short-term solutions, what have we been looking at? We've been working with the city of Regina because we know that it's increased in traffic volumes through the city of Regina, and with the Regina Police Service, because it is a municipal road right through kind of the heart of Regina. Not necessarily a ministry's job, but working with the Regina Police Service to ensure that the traffic is going the speed limit, that it's appropriate weighted traffic, and that the combinations of vehicles that are on that road are permitted for that road.

We know that we're working with the GTH and trucking firms that come in and out of the GTH to make sure that all of those firms know how they can access the GTH and how they can't access the GTH, depending on the configuration of the truck. For example, all double- and triple-trailer trucks leaving the GTH and heading to Saskatoon must, according to permitting, travel south and around the city, as opposed to coming in on Dewdney. So there's a bit of an enforcement piece there too, to make sure that the appropriate vehicles are using Dewdney.

We also know that CP [Canadian Pacific] still has some container work that they do downtown. The vast majority has moved out to the GTH. You know, we're looking at working with them to make sure we get as much of that traffic, instead

of unloading containers in Regina and then trucking them out to the GTH, getting that traffic, rail traffic out to the GTH so we reduce work on Dewdney itself.

So having said that, we know there are issues with that. We're working hard with the trucking companies, the GTH, the city, as well as with our own enforcement officers to ensure that the trucks that are using that roadway are appropriate, they're not overweight, they are obeying the rules of the road. Because certainly safety is a major issue. That is an area of the city that probably didn't see this amount of traffic for a long time and is seeing quite an . . . quite an increase, I won't say improvement.

We also know, you know, some of the residential homes up and down that roadway, as well as education, Luther, and other things up and down that road. So have done some. More to do; work in progress. We see the traffic volumes increasing. We want to be able to address that.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — I appreciate your attention to it. I've raised this for the past better part of a couple years with various ministers and always receive some attention in this sort of discussion that we're having here right now. But I mean, it's just not bearing itself out on the street or, in this case, Dewdney Avenue.

As far as appropriate weight, I can say that I don't know what it's set or how that's measured but, you know, right now with the purported infrastructure damage that's going on, it's certainly a concern. The shaking of homes and foundations, literal shaking, at all hours of the night is not appropriate and not acceptable. But most importantly, it's the safety concerns. And you mentioned speeds. The reality is many aren't adhering to those speeds. I observe it. Even those that are adhering to the speeds, there is still a safety concern. There's massive weight. There's slower stopping times as well as a whole bunch of other issues with it where they're parking trucks all through the residential community, in many cases for many, many hours. And it's a disaster waiting to happen.

I know up in Dieppe on Bowman Avenue, a street that probably has more kids per capita than almost any other street in the city, and the kids out playing — catching balls, all the things they should be doing, playing street hockey — and then great big trucks that are somehow thinking it's appropriate for them to be commuting in through this area. It's not appropriate for them to be on Dewdney, the big heavy-haul trucks that are there. And it's certainly not appropriate for them to litter themselves as a danger throughout the neighbourhood.

And so I guess I'm looking for more here. I did hear from you that it was suggested that they're actually, when they're heading north that they have to go back out to Highway No. 1, up Lewvan, and straight out on 11. If that was actually being done, that would be a good thing. But the practice is, and I observe it all the time, they're coming straight in out of the GTH, turning north on Lewvan to head north. So certainly there's an important enforcement piece if that's the case. But maybe just clarify that that is a bylaw in place.

And then my other question would be, I guess the same is likely true then if they're coming south, because many come in off Highway 11, are coming south and then turning in on Dewdney.

Certainly if they should be going out to Highway No. 1 when they're going one way, it seems to me they should be doing the same the other way. I know it's not the most efficient movement of goods, and that's where a bypass and bridge renos and these sorts of pieces are going to be important. But just to clarify what the actual laws are around the movement of those goods.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So maybe I'll start back at the start of your question and end up where you ended up. On the issue around enforcement, we've been working with the Regina Police Service to ensure that again appropriate weights and speeds are there. We're also using some of our enforcement as well because we know we need to increase enforcement.

As far as what types of vehicles, any doubles and triples are to go around the city on the Ring Road. For example if leaving the GTH, they go south to the new overpass, get on to No. 1, then of course the Ring Road all the way around to No. 11. And vice versa if they're coming in from the north, to go all the way around and then in on by the overpass on No. 1 and Pinkie Road to the GTH. That's what's in place right now.

And if there are trucks that are, you know, doubles and triples, then that's not appropriate, and we need to get them off of there. And also if they're using other roads than Dewdney . . . You're telling me that they're using other roads other than Dewdney, so we need to continue to work with the Regina Police Service. And also, it's not only the police service, but it's also an education piece to the trucking companies themselves to make sure that their drivers know, you know, what is accessible, depending on the combination that they're driving.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Okay, I can't stress enough how important this work is. And I don't know what the doubles and triples . . . certainly I know there's breaches of them utilizing that road. I don't know what characterizes the, I guess, the single — I don't know if that's the proper term or not — but I know there's lots of concerns with those barreling up and down Dewdney as well. And they shake the homes in an inappropriate way, and they certainly cause a safety concern that's beyond acceptable.

And so I certainly look to, you know, your ministry and to the government to be more active on this front. I'm glad there some awareness, but the risks are far too large.

[20:45]

The bypass of course is important. There's some practical pieces of that that could be taken one piece at a time, or at least some modest improvements that would allow, you know, from the trucking standpoint I guess, more efficient movement of goods, which is important but, to be honest, is much less a concern to me than the actual safety concerns that are on Dewdney Avenue right now.

But there is a practical solution in addressing the Pinkie Road upgrade on the small portion from Dewdney Avenue to 9th Avenue North, which includes a small bridge at the Goulet golf course that, to be honest I'm frightened to jog across almost, that needs replacement. So that portion right there, I know that's an important piece to the city as well. Where's your

ministry at in acting as . . . I know the bypass is a big project, but I think this is a practical piece and a smaller piece that could be parsed out and acted upon immediately.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — I think, you know, there's been talk of Pinkie Road, but that bridge is a major factor. It's not anywhere close to being able to deal with any traffic, especially the traffic that we'd want to put on it.

So how much would a person think they'd need to invest into putting a bridge to get traffic over it for perhaps two years before the final solution? Now you know, you'd have to measure that. Would you be wise to put in and to get across there with a primary-weight bridge that's wide enough for coming and going? And I don't know. I'd have to get a ballpark on a price for that bridge. Hypothetically let's say it's \$20 million, when the project hopefully will be from the GTH because we're moving further north all the time with more to do. But if it was two or three years down the road, would that be a wise expenditure then, when the solution is really the road that we announced today, and now we're assembling land and trying to get that moving as quickly as we possibly can?

So we'd have to look at that, but there is that factor of investing into a bridge that you know within a couple of years may not be used for the same volume of traffic or weight of traffic as what is intended today.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — As I say, the current scenario is simply unacceptable and unsustainable though and I can't impress upon you as minister enough, and I appreciate your recognition of it here tonight. But the people up and down Dewdney, those that are using it as families, can't wait another two months or three months. You know, we go back quite some time now raising these issues at the committee, and it seems that things continually get punted down the line. And the bridge itself and how Pinkie Road and that bridge factor into the movement of traffic into the bypass into the future would best be known by your ministry and your plans, but certainly it's going to be important nonetheless in the movement of traffic in west Regina.

So it's a practical piece, and I know it's an important one to many that I'd appreciate the consideration of. But in lieu of that, we need some immediate actions by your ministry and the government that will alleviate the unacceptable conditions on Dewdney. I guess just looking to . . . As minister right now, you've identified that you're aware of the risks there. The risks are huge. Will you undertake some actions to see what sort of temporary solutions can be brought to get those trucks off Dewdney Avenue?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Well I think I've already described it, and more needs to be done. But it really starts with enforcement and education, making sure the people that are using those roadways know what roadways they can use and what they can't. And if they're using roadways that are inappropriate for the vehicle that they're driving, that there's enforcement there. So that's what we need to do to begin with. That's the short term.

Regardless of what solution some people may think, and whether it's Pinkie Road, you're saying it needs to be done

within two months. I'm sorry, it won't be done within two months. The overpass one, the main link between the GTH and No. 11 won't be done in two months and neither would be, if we ever decided, a bridge, which is in the city limits not Highways limits. So we couldn't . . . If we said we wanted to build a bridge there, it's up to the city to say whether they're going to do that or not. Having said that, none of this, none of this is short-term. The short-term and the immediate is enforcement and education and trying to reduce the number of vehicles that are on it, you know, with working with CP and whatever else.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — But just back to those timelines and whether it's, you know . . . Getting a bridge built out in two months is obviously not realistic, but the point is a solution has to be had in the interim, and people can't wait two months for that one. So as far as enforcement and communication and education, that's stuff's not working right now. We're not working to the effect that it's needed to be working. So there needs to be some ramped-up efforts on that front. There needs to be reconsiderations on all fronts to interim solutions that could be put in place to effectively move that traffic, but it shouldn't be on Dewdney Avenue. And I'd certainly push, you know, government to look to take the matter seriously and to bring some solutions forward. And I'd be pleased to work together on anything if there's some measures that are being considered. I don't think I had a question on that, but if . . .

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Well I just have to, and not take offence to the comment, but you're saying obviously what we've been doing, the fact that we've got more enforcement and we're working with the companies is not working. Well you don't know that for sure because if we hadn't increased enforcement and if we hadn't done the education, there could be twice as many vehicles on that road. So you can't say what we have been doing isn't working. Do we need to improve that work? Absolutely. And I think the city would agree. They've been working on that front. We've been working on that front. So I don't think you can coin it to say that whatever you're doing is not working. I would not throw it out like that. I would say that education, enforcement in the short-term is what we need to do. We need to continue to do more of it.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — And I think I characterized what's being done right now isn't working to the level that it needs to be. And right now it just doesn't cut it. It's dangerous and it needs to be, needs to be addressed. And I know you can't place a value on a life or lives, but this is the serious terms or consequences that we're dealing with if we don't have some resolution here. And you know, let's all work towards a solution.

Another area that lives are being placed at risk on a daily basis in and around Regina is out at Emerald Park and White City as they connect to Highway No. 1. And of course the bypass is, you know, an important piece there and proper connections to Highway 1. But again on this one, I hear from so many families that are coming in for work or that are coming in for sports or that are going out at night for different activities, it's a real threat out there right now.

I would look to the ministry . . . Of course bypasses are the long-term plan here. We're going to be looking for commitment



to resources and the timely fulfillment of those bypasses, but right now in the here and now we need to look at some interim and more urgent solutions. So I look to the . . . You know, I hear everything from things with . . . you know, might need to control speed at a different level, maybe have to slow down speed. I hear a lot of solutions coming from the communities and business community of Emerald Park and White City. I guess I look to the minister to see what actions he's considering or what he's willing to consider.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So that area I'm very familiar with. I drive it, maybe not every day, but depending on the time of year, every day. I know that area quite well, and I access businesses on both sides of the highway, maybe the Dairy Queen more often on the way out and PowerSports quite often on the way back in. So I understand that area quite well. And my constituency butts right up against Emerald Park, White City. 48 is the dividing line or right close there, so quite familiar with it.

We've done a number of things. Is it enough? It's never enough. I mean again the solution is proper overpasses. It's grade separation. What we've worked on is exit ramps and turning lanes onto highways to try and separate the traffic. And we've done that at the junction of 46 by Balgonie, the junction of 48 by White City, Emerald Park. You know where Redhead Equipment is. There has been some work done there in conjunction with Redhead Equipment, Gary himself.

And we've put in overhead lighting. We've put in radar speed indicators to try and inform traffic the speed that they're going as they're going through these intersections, flashing amber lights. We've taken a lot of steps over the last couple of years to try and increase the safety at those intersections. Having said that, and of course last week another tragedy, which nobody wants to see. So really the solution is overall grade separation.

I don't know how far to get into this. I don't think maybe I want to get into this too far, but I think it's very important to know that we've put in an application to PPP Canada [Public-Private Partnership Canada]. And we can have a whole long debate, especially with the interesting makeup on this side, on their thoughts on that. But we won't get into that right now unless others want to get into it. But we have put an application in to PPP Canada.

Having said that, the announcement today was the fact that this needs to be done. Normally we make an announcement, and then down the road we start acquiring land. I've said to the ministry, we need to get this going as quickly as possible. Yes, we are waiting for the final decision of PPP Canada, but there's work we can do on our own without that final approval. And that's what the ministry has been doing, engineering work, you know, to make sure that when the funding is there, we are up and ready to get these grade separations, overpasses in place.

We also have sent out letters as of about March 14th, over the last two weeks, letters to land owners — 130 land owners; 200 parcels of land — that we have to start negotiating with to try and purchase their land so we can make this a reality. These are not easy processes to go through. We have to balance the fact that I want to get this done as quickly as possible but also protecting our taxpayers' money. We can't just go and offer

whatever a person wants. There's that balance. So negotiations sometimes take a little longer than we want. I mean I wish everybody would just agree or we could quite easily find an agreeable price. That isn't always the case. So we are going through that process, started it now to make sure that when there's announcements made and when there's money, that we can start some of these projects as soon as possible is very, very important.

I have also been lobbied hard. I mean I know many of the people in those communities. I have friends who've lost, you know, kids at those intersections. So I've been lobbied very, very hard. It's difficult. And you know, I'll just ask you to put yourself in my position. And so you've got the people lobbying from one side, and I hear it, absolutely.

And so we'll go back to the ministry and we'll have the best experts in traffic safety that study traffic safety across Western Canada. And I'll say, what about traffic lights? I think we need traffic lights. And they'll go through all the rationale as to why a traffic light wouldn't work in that situation. Very, very compelling, absolutely. And there are standards of when you would put that in. And I'll have to agree with the engineers because it makes sense to me, and they're the experts. I could go against it, and we could've put a traffic light in there and have a fatality a week later. And what grounds would I have to stand on when engineers would say that should have never been done, but because of political pressure, it was done?

So you have to balance that when you are sitting in this seat and taking advice from people that have worked in this their whole life and want to see traffic safety and people drive our streets and highways as safe as you and I, but they understand it perhaps a little bit better because of experiential evidence across Western Canada or even across North America. And then you have to say to the community, I'm sorry; yes, maybe we can look at speed reductions. But that has an issue too. It's usually not the speed, but it's a variation of speed. So you've got a speed reduction down to 80 kilometres per hour going through a zone there, and you've got a person turning onto the highway where you expect everybody to go 80, and there's a semi going through at 120. It's the separation of speed. So I have to balance, you know, the lobby, absolutely which I hear, with the expertise, which I also truly respect, before we make those decisions.

The overall, long-term solution obviously is what we announced today. In the short term, we continue to put in the measures that we can — deceleration ramps, acceleration ramps, proper overhead lighting, proper signage, proper flashing amber lights, speed boards that notify. We're taking all the steps to ensure these are as safe as possible.

Ultimately, ultimately it comes down to how we drive those intersections and the decisions that we make as drivers. That's the ultimate. And you know, not to certainly place blame, but that is ultimately the most important part. But we on the design front do as much as we possibly can, and we have a long-term goal to have a final solution there.

[21:00]

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — I certainly appreciate the role of the civil

servants and the engineers and traffic flow experts in their contribution to resolving this matter and many others. And I recognize the pressure you'd be facing from a host of different perspectives and certainly identify that the bypass is the long-term solution that needs timely fulfillment. That's important. I do hear many questions as to whether or not it shouldn't have been extended out further, and I'm sure there's a host of considerations that you could share there.

You know, as it relates to Dewdney Avenue, urgent actions are needed. The current actions that are in place to mitigate the risks simply aren't sufficient and so there needs to be more there.

As it relates to White City and Emerald Park, I think you have a lot of rational families that care greatly about getting from point A to point B safely as well. There might be great value in engaging that community in an exercise in bringing forward the capacity you have within the ministry as well to have a rational dialogue about the challenges that are there, some possible solutions that might be in place. I know there's a huge willingness from that community and a desire to see some interim actions that would bring about safety. I would suspect that if something they were recommending was able to be held up by way of evidence or experience as something that doesn't bring about safety, that would probably be an important part of the full public discussion. But I do think there's some urgent actions that are needed there in advance of the long-term project which is the bypass.

So certainly I'd urge your consideration on those fronts and action on these files in an urgent way. And certainly I'd value that, would certainly be there to support or work constructively to find solutions. But I appreciate your words to this here tonight, and I am supposed to be upstairs in the Education estimates here right now with that committee, so at this point here tonight I'll have to conclude my participation.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — We're just going to be here for a little bit longer then since you're wanted up there. But what I would say is that, you know, again I hear those concerns. And not that it's about ribbon cutting; it certainly isn't. But since I've been the minister, which is less than two years, we've opened up acceleration, deceleration ramps on 46 by Balgonie; acceleration, deceleration ramps on 48 by White City, Emerald Park. So I think that alone — which are \$1 million projects and they're small, but they're \$1 million projects — that alone would say that we hear and we see the concern. We're taking steps. It isn't going to prevent every collision unfortunately.

Just like, you know, it's interesting from this perspective is you have, you know, a regular highway, a two-lane highway that has large volume and they want four-lane. And you have four-lane highways and they want overpasses. You know, it's just a natural progression. You know, I would say that the highway that I drove every day practically in my life was the most dangerous highway as three guys were killed out there, three or four, two weeks ago. Young. I knew one of them, a young guy from the city. You know, we should four-lane that.

You can't four-lane every road and you can't overpass every intersection. We're working on it. Absolutely more work to do. But ultimately you wish there was no accidents, no injuries, and

no fatalities. But again you can't do it all by design.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Vermette.

**Mr. Vermette:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to go back onto Highway 123 and the \$1 million. You talked about the 23 kilometres. And I realize you're saying for the \$1 million you're obviously putting out tender or whatever. You have a contractor going to do the work. Obviously Highways itself is going to tender that out, I assume, what I've heard previous.

So having said that, what happens if the cost goes higher than \$1 million for 23 kilometres? Then you guys will just cover that? Or if he gets, the contractor gets 18 kilometres and the \$1 million is spent, and that's it? Could you just explain that, how you came at the 23 and that's what you've allocated, 1 million, and you plan to get to? If you could just explain that.

**Mr. Govindasamy:** — So I'll go back to, you know, again clarify the work that I spoke to regarding the planned grade raises, and I will specify that the grade raise is actually for 8 kilometres, certain sections of that road. So that's where the grade raises are going to be done.

The numbers that I quoted with respect to the tender, these numbers are now part of the contract. So these are contracted costs. These contractors are actually doing the work, and the additional \$1 million that'll be spent in '14-15 is part of that contract that needs to get done. So if there is, you know, any kind of a notion that this might be higher than what was the accepted contracted cost, I'm comfortable that it will be covered. The work will get done, is what I am saying, on this particular contract.

**Mr. Vermette:** — Okay, thank you. Now, and I know there's 92 kilometres of gravel and I realize there's some pavement up to the dam. I realize maybe 30 kilometres had some upgrades previous that Highways did earlier. So now you're dealing with about 62 kilometres.

So having said that, do you see a . . . Is there a plan that you have from Highways, like your engineers and you're looking at, is it a three-year plan to get it done, a four-year plan? Do you have any idea at all what you're saying? You know, we're going to make sure this time we get the road done. We may not get it all done in one season. It might take two years, three years. Any talk about that? Any plan from Highways, your engineers and stuff, and just your planning as you go forward? I'd just like to know that for the community so they can know that, you know, it's going to take some time but at least we're moving in a positive direction for them.

**Mr. Govindasamy:** — So I'll come back to responding to the question with respect to timing of the work that's already begun. As I said earlier, 60 per cent of the work is complete. And because of the weather conditions obviously, you know, the subgrade remains to be finished. The plan as far as the contract itself is concerned on that portion of the grading that they're going to do is to complete it by the end of the summer season now.

Besides the annual operating costs and operating and maintenance budgets that we will continue to use to take care of

Highway 123, there are no plans at this point in time, in the short term, with respect to any major upgrades to the entire 123, those sections that you had mentioned.

**Mr. Vermette:** — And is that the . . . I guess is it a budget item that you're discussing that the plan is not to go further with it to upgrade the whole 92 kilometres or 60-some kilometres that's left, 62? Is it engineers saying it doesn't need it? Is it budget? Like what would stop you from making sure that the community has a safe road to travel on right through the 92 kilometres rather than saying you're looking at just 23 kilometres? Can you explain that to me?

Because just on the assumption that the road's pretty bad right through, and as you are moving forward, so maybe the engineer's saying it doesn't need it. But I know the community sure feels that whole road needs a complete upgrade. The leadership has been supporting that, the petitions. Every time I go there, and I'm sure, you know, the minister and the officials have been hearing that from that community. And it is, at the end of the day, it's their only way in and out of that community. Right now if an emergency happened, they would not be able to take an ambulance into there. And from my understanding, I've been told by the leaders they would have to call in a helicopter to fly out because the ambulance wouldn't make it in there.

Now if that's still the case or not, we'll see. I'll check on it tomorrow. But these are the types of situations we're dealing with for that community. It has one way in, and that is the only way for community members to get out in an emergency or everything else, so, you know, we'll see where it goes. And that's why I'm asking this, if there was a plan to complete the full 92 kilometres to make sure they have a safe road for their students to travel on, like we've seen the bus sitting, stuck in the mud, you know, on the news. So, I mean, at the end of the day, you know, that's a concern about students and safety.

So I guess I'll let you answer that, and we'll see what your answers are and we'll go from there. Thank you.

**Mr. Govindasamy:** — I think I'll begin by, you know, basically talking about the fact that my ministry and my officials in the ministry essentially have responsibility for taking care of 26 000 kilometres of roadways in the province. We have enormous requirements out there as the province is growing. It's a growing province. The pressure to close this infrastructure deficit in the province more quickly than what we would like is growing.

We do have to balance the kind of priorities that I have seen for myself in the North when I travel there with respect to overall priorities across the province. It would be really desirable to kind of get everything done to the kind of standards that most people would like, but that is clearly not possible. What I have suggested is that with the work that's underway on 123 right now and with the planned grade raises when the work is complete, the road will be in better shape than what it may be in right now along with the kind of maintenance work that we will continue to provide on that road.

I believe that the, you know, overall when I step back and take a look at overall sort of expenditures that my ministry makes on maintenance and new capital projects across the province, I

have to say that the total dollar numbers that they actually put for roads and prioritizing all the sort of requests that we get from the North, approximately \$40 million, this next year will be \$37 million, which is essentially almost 6 per cent of my budget. So from the perspective of spending monies to be able to, you know, maintain roads and upgrade roads throughout the province, I wish we could do it all. But we do need to balance the sort of requirements from all across the province. And clearly we have put some level of attention, and in my experience and in my estimation, the right kind of attention on 123, and the work is getting done.

**Mr. Vermette:** — Well I guess at the end of the day it'll be up to the community and the leaders to decide how safe they feel if they're travelling on 123. You talk about 6 per cent and you look at half the Cumberland constituency and the Athabasca. It covers half the province in land mass. So you're saying 6 per cent. We have a lot of roads. People are expecting better. They're demanding that and, you know, from the Ministry of Highways.

You can talk about all the challenges, but for those community members, for their children and the teachers, the leaders, whether it's 123, whether it's Highway 135 through Pelican, you know, that had an announcement of pavement, there's different areas that have . . . whether it's Wollaston Lake road. The current administration and the current Sask Party government in 2008 made an announcement that the all-weather road to Wollaston would be done.

[21:15]

I've seen the press releases, all the balloons, the fanfare. Everything was great and then the other priorities came in and took over their road. So that's a sad day for them. And I mean the leadership's in here.

So we see the North, whether it's the paving 135 through Pelican Narrows, Wollaston Lake. We see the money that was allocated to Cumberland. You had other priorities when you had record spending. You talk about record spending. And so you wonder why the leaders, community members in northern Saskatchewan truly aren't feeling like they're getting the priority of the ministry.

And I guess we can back and forth all the day. I'll leave it to the leaders, the community members to see what roads they have to travel on every day for safety for their students going to school when they're trying to go. It'll be their, I guess, decision on whether they feel Highways is doing justice to their roads for their safety, whether the ministry and whether this current administration is doing it. So at this point I'm going to leave 123 for now. I know we'll talk to the community members. I'm going to be going in there.

The other area I want to talk about, Highway 135 through Pelican Narrows. There was a commitment made to them to pave the 7 kilometres through the community for certain reasons. And we were told different times, and I know leadership has brought it forward and asked. And there's been different questions when I asked at committee. And I think some of the answers were, there was provisions you were working with the federal government, or band resolution you

needed to go through there. Can you give me an update why that road has not been paved? It was a commitment to pave it, why the 7 kilometres through 135 Pelican have not been paved. And we've heard different things, that you're waiting for talks and everything else. So that's been a few years again and nothing being done. So if you could tell me what your plan is with 135 for the paving of the 7 kilometres through the community.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you for the question. I'll start with your second part of your . . . I guess your second part was the question; your first part was kind of a preamble. I'll start with the question and then I'll go back to your comments at the start.

First of all, the Pelican Narrows piece, and you would know it's band council land. We can't do work on land that we don't have authorization or authority to. So the holdup is not here. The holdup is with the band council and the federal government giving us the authority to do that, as would be the case with any road going through, I think for the most part, any reserve land that we would not have the authority to do that. So I know the band council has passed a resolution, but we haven't had any agreement I guess with the federal government to move forward so that we can do that work. So that's the issue around Pelican Narrows and that 7 kilometres.

It's important to know that that is a gravel highway all the way along. What Pelican Narrows wants is the 7 kilometres that runs through its authority I guess to be paved, even though it's a grid road the length of that roadway. It's not like it's pavement, then gravel, then pavement. It's a gravel highway and they want that section paved, which again is not necessarily our authority because we don't have jurisdiction to that land.

The preamble, though, I can't let go. I touched on it earlier and it was further to 123 and just some of your preamble around that. I really think it's important that we set the record straight. I can't let that go without setting the record straight. And he shakes his head. But you know, whether it's Pelican Narrows or whether it's Cumberland House, these roads were not built in seven years. I remember hearing the mayor of Cumberland House talk for years and years and years lobbying the NDP to just give them a bridge so they could get out of their community. And it was finally built, but it was years and years and years of lobbying to get a bridge to access that community.

This road is not the best road we have in the province. Absolutely not. That's why we're putting money into it. Three million dollars over the last year and a half to two years. Two million last year, a million this year. More money going into maintenance on a yearly basis. But what's most important, if you look at the spend within northern Saskatchewan, a \$60 million increase compared seven years to seven years. A \$60 million increase or a 30 per cent increase over the years under the former government. That will not fix all the needs in the North. We know that. But I will say that we are addressing them as quickly as we possibly can.

It would show a greater . . . I can guarantee that there are a lot of areas in southern Saskatchewan that would say, I wish you would have increased the spending on our roads where there's oil activity, huge oil activity, by 30 per cent. Because I can

guarantee you we haven't. There is areas where there's been lots of activity. Some of the roads are taking a kicking. We're trying to fix them as much as possible. But I won't take the preamble of the member opposite to say that, you don't care and nothing's being done, because nothing could be further from the truth.

**Mr. Vermette:** — Well you have your opinion, I have mine, and the community and leaders will have their opinion on that. So we'll leave it at that. Now I want to go back to some of the roads that I was talking about in the North. I mentioned 102 runs about 200 kilometres north of La Ronge to Southend. So you'll take 102, you get to Southend, then you have about 22 kilometres, turns off and you go into the community of Southend. So there's . . . Off of the main road 102, there's about 22 kilometres. The road that goes into the community of Southend, I travel it quite a bit. Honestly, I mean I would like to see a report on that from your engineers. Or if you could provide the committee with a report, or there's other way that I could get that report on there, on the condition of that road. If there are reports on that road, I would like to have those if you would provide those to the committee. I'd like a copy of that if possible, on the 22 kilometres going into Southend.

I mean the road is terrible. I mean it's just unbelievable how bad that road is and what those community members have to travel on for safety and everything else. You know, sometimes the ambulance has to respond in there because they can't go in at certain times of the year with the air ambulance. The airport doesn't meet . . . I guess the airstrip does not meet I guess the provisions that an air ambulance needs to go land there and pick up patients. So there's all those issues.

So if you could give something like that . . . And I mean even that . . . Have a look at that road because, I'll be honest with you, it's terrible and it needs some work and it needs some attention. I mean I realize they're doing regular maintenance and they do what they can, but there is no gravel. I mean I've travelled on it and the rocks that are coming out of it are just, it's just unbelievable. Like I don't know, you know, tires, everything else . . . But I just talk about 102, it's got that. And I'll come back to 102.

But that 22 kilometres, if you can deal with that and then I'll go on.

**Mr. Govindasamy:** — I will respond to the question that was raised regarding 102. I'll make an observation that maintenance of that road is now actually being undertaken on contract to the ministry by the community itself. But it is a road that is built on the Canadian Shield and obviously not in the kind of condition that one would like to see it because of the nature and the geography of that place. I haven't driven it myself, but the condition of the road itself is something that's there and it's being taken care of by the community on contract.

And you know, I just want to make another observation about all of these roads that we are talking about. It is not that we are not aware of the roads, whether it's north, south, east, or west. We do have a planned approach to address in terms of maintenance, etc., across the province, and we're doing our best to basically balance the needs of communities across the province. And that's about all I will say on 102.

**Mr. Belanger:** — So I want to be clear. You're talking into Southend; it's not Highways. You're contracting a contractor to do that? Or are you or am I . . . So how about to Stanley Mission?

**Mr. Govindasamy:** — So the ministry has a contract with the community to maintain that road.

**Mr. Vermette:** — Okay. Thank you for that then. Okay, I'm going to go back to 102 and we've got about, out of La Ronge, we've got about 28 kilometres of pavement that's paved. When you leave La Ronge you go for Highway 2 and then it goes to 102. It goes to the community of Wadin Bay, Sucker River. There's other areas where we have people who, along that road, have their road into whatever, it's Link Lake or there's different communities and people have houses along that 28 kilometres of pavement.

Has maintenance slowed down on, over the winter with removing snow from those roads? There used to be, and we've had complaints about it's not the same. They're not getting the same quality of maintenance or I guess snow removal on their roads, whether to meet the highway. There's been some concerns raised in my office from different community members over there saying there's been a change. They don't know why. Why the change in the way they were doing the snow removal for those, when they come to the stop sign and get on to the main highway? Is there any reason why that's changed? It's been a budget thing or staffing? Some people are asking and I'm curious.

[21:30]

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — On the section of highway that you're talking about and identifying changes to the maintenance, and as far we know there's been no change in the maintenance that has been done this year or any other year. So I'd be very interested, you know, if they have kind of some evidence as to what has changed because we haven't changed our process at all. We haven't changed. You know, the budget is the budget for maintenance.

But I would say that this is sometimes not uncommon to hear anecdotal . . . and I've heard it around the province at times, anecdotal, some stories that would say, you know, you've changed the way you maintain this or you've changed certain things. And we look into it and there really is no basis. Maybe it's their perception. Maybe it's a time that they were at certain intersections before we got there and cleaned them further. I'm not sure, but as far as anything tangible from what we do, budget or manpower or asking the crews . . .

I had the opportunity to spend some time with the crews in La Ronge, and a great bunch of young guys that are committed to their work, absolutely. A real young guy that was the shop manager there, sections guy, yes, and certainly from our perspective and I would believe they would reiterate it, there has been no directive from the ministry to change maintenance at all.

**Mr. Vermette:** — Okay, thank you. Then I'll direct those individuals that come forward, we'll make sure that we get hold of your ministry to let them know that they can forward the

pictures, the videos, whatever they have so you can see what their concern is, and if there is a change I'll do that. So thank you for that.

I guess I want to go . . . I've had some people saying about putting up signs. The pavement's pretty chopped up pretty bad along there. I mean we're hoping at some point your engineers, again, will look at it as a priority that a lot of people come out during the summer. Tourists, we have a lot of tourists come up in that area and they go into Wadin Bay, you know, Nemeiben, right through the area. And the pavement, it is just . . . It needs some upgrades and if you guys could . . . And I know the guys do their best to do the maintenance. They try, I know, limited resource that they have but they try. I understand that because we've raised that and it's not about the workers and no one's implying that.

It needs more attention, so if maybe your officials could have a look at that and maybe it's time to do some work. With the big trucks on there, the ruts that are in there are unbelievable. Sometimes you get thrown out. Even in the wintertime I've seen people getting, and I know some that have . . . They've said they just, for whatever . . . a teacher going back and forth, thrown out of the ruts in the wintertime and rolled her vehicle. So I mean it's stuff like that, just last year.

So it's different things like that you're hearing concerns about, and maybe it's time to look at it. So that's why I'm raising it. It's been raised with me so I want to make sure your officials are aware of it, yourself as the minister. Maybe there's something you guys can do to look at dealing with that.

The other area I want to go and the last thing I'll say is, then I'm going to turn it over to my colleague here, the road to Stanley Mission. It's about 40 kilometres, and I realize there the community does have the contract with grading the road. Who supplies the gravel and who determines what needs to be done on a road? Like is it . . . Obviously they don't have engineers, I don't believe. So who determines the gravel? Who determines what needs to be done to that road? Is it done in partnership with Highways? Can you explain to me that process? I'd like to understand it.

**Mr. Govindasamy:** — So in terms of the 40 kilometres that you referenced and the manner in which this work is done, the work is obviously supervised by my staff, Jason being one of them, the SO [safety officer], and the district operations manager along with the staff supervisor. We provide the gravel and the work is actually done by those who are contract . . . those we have contracted out. So there's close supervision of the work if that was the question that you had asked.

**Mr. Vermette:** — Okay. And that's what I wanted, who determines that. And I know they'll do some written questions to get some of that information I want, rather than go through, to take up time in here. I want some, so I'll . . . Well anyway we'll forward those on.

I guess I want to kind of finish up, and I know my colleague's going to go more into . . . and he's gifted on how he presents the different arguments. And I won't get into the argument and how much we're record spending and all the areas we're going. I'm going to turn it over. As a critic, he'll handle that quite

well. And you know, I'm going to be here to watch him and observe and learn.

But having said that, you talked about the pavement. And it's really concerning to me that it's an issue of the 7 kilometres. It's the federal government. It was maybe the band didn't do the band resolution, the BCR [band council resolution]. So the money's there, and I'm glad to hear that. So I can't wait to get back home and tell them, oh, your money's waiting there. You've just got to get the government to agree. And then the band resolution, and we're going to get the payment finally. Because people have been doing an electronic petition, and they want to petition again. And some of the community members over there and some of the leaders said that, so I'm pretty excited to go back. So I just want to say thank you for that, clarifying that, that it's not that Highways is not ready to go. There was other areas why you couldn't get the job done. Thank you.

**The Chair:** — I recognize Mr. Belanger.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Well, thank you very much. I think I owe my colleague a steak here, and I'll certainly deliver sometime next year. But anyway, I want to point out that what's important I guess from our perspective, and I want to focus on the North a bit because we've obviously got more opportunity and time for some of the southern issues. But you often make reference to my experience being in the minister of Highways portfolio, and so I want to take you up on a bit of the history as to where and what happened in Highways, and why northern Saskatchewan's important overall to the province.

You know, we're familiar with the Asia-Pacific Corridor work and the reason why we have a resource-based economy. We know we've got to get our goods to market. We understand that. We also understand that the agricultural sector is hurting right now. Many people are losing as much as 50 per cent of their value of their crop because of this transportation crisis that people are facing. We know the effects and impacts it has on the economy. And we know rural Saskatchewan's hurting as a result of the unpreparedness of, in my estimation, not only the federal government, but the railway companies and the provincial government as well.

We're aware of the fact that the roads to resources program that put a lot of money into the Lloydminster area had a lot of commitment in dollars over a number of years, to a point where the oil patch, the oil industry was praising Lorne Calvert for doing a great job in bringing the royalties in line, spurring investment and development, and providing much needed infrastructure to move our oil.

We're also aware of the fact that, you know, when I was the minister of Highways that there was a lot of money spent on the Trans-Canada Highway to make sure it was brought up to safety standards and to make sure that the patch of Saskatchewan that people travel on as they traverse the Trans-Canada Highway from one end of the country to the other, that at the very least they felt that Saskatchewan was doing their part to make sure it was safe.

We spent a lot of money in those areas. And the twinning between Saskatoon and P.A. [Prince Albert], the twinning

between Saskatoon and North Battleford, the Circle Drive overpass, and the work being done to the Circle Drive project in Saskatoon — all that took three or four or five years to plan and to prepare and to implement and, you know, to negotiate.

Now it seems like all these projects were born three or four years ago. But the fact of the matter is that whether it's the twinning between P.A. and Saskatoon, whether it's the twinning between Saskatoon and North Battleford, whether it's the roads to resources around the Lloydminster area, whether it's the incredible amount of money spent on the Trans-Canada Highway, all these issues we were aware of. And what we've done as a government was we also committed to northern Saskatchewan which is an integral part of our economy.

And that's why I keep yapping about the Prince Albert bridge. It makes it a point in our economy that we need to have the proper resources and the proper infrastructure in the province to get our resources, which include uranium from the North, which include forestry from the North, which includes gold from the North, which includes tourism opportunity flowing back and forth, and travel back and forth from the North.

So our government's estimation was, we should put some money into the North. Put some money into the North because the North is just as important in the economic plan for the province overall as all the points raised today on all the issues, whether it's the GTH, or whether it's other work being done on other communities in the region.

All the North wanted was their fair share. They wanted to be recognized that they had the opportunity, and they wanted to be recognized that they should be included in this economic plan. We don't have to justify nor clarify 6 per cent of any highways budget as being a proper investment. The North just wants to see some action on highway construction.

Now from my argument, my argument is that when this government assumed power, they cancelled what we call the northern economic infrastructure strategy, N-E-I-S. And there is four pillars to that NEIS. Much the same pillars were put in place for all the other work that I explained that was done. But what happened, Mr. Chairman, is this government cancelled the money. They cancelled the roadwork in Wollaston Lake. They cancelled the roadwork in Pelican Narrows. They cancelled the commitment in Cumberland House. They cancelled the commitment to the English River First Nations and to Highway 155 and other roads in northern Saskatchewan.

Now the only road I see getting any kind of money, and I want to argue with you, Mr. Minister, on two points. First point is, is that any new construction, new road construction in the North has been between two mines and that's it. It's been between two mines. There's no other new construction anywhere that I see in Athabasca, nor do I see it in Cumberland.

And the second point I would raise is that how would you define north? I've seen an estimation of some of the work that you're undertaking this year and I think it was some work around Melfort, and Melfort was deemed northern. So my argument is, which definition of northern does the Department of Highways use to qualify their investment for northern projects, whether it be bridges or highways?

[21:45]

Now what the northern people are saying, whether it's from Cumberland House or whether it is from Patuanak or whether or it's from Pelican Narrows or whether it is from Turnor Lake or Canoe Lake — I understood you met with the chief of Canoe Lake and that you promised to visit Canoe Lake — they're just simply saying, give us something, anything. And so far they have not seen any bit of work done to any highway in northern Saskatchewan.

Now what I told the people when we have some discussion, I say one thing . . . If they don't want to fix our roads, then leave our resources alone. We'll fix our own road using our own resource base. In fact I would even suggest that the mining sector, the mining companies — whether it's gold production or uranium in particular — they're probably pretty upset with this government primarily because they're hauling their product out of northern Saskatchewan on very dangerous roads, very dangerous roads.

And I brought up to the minister last fall an issue around Beauval, the community of Beauval of how they're hauling to Key Lake, the Key Lake mine site very dangerous chemicals such as hydrochloric acid which I think they use in the process of milling at the Key Lake mine. I could be corrected on that. And then of course, they haul yellowcake out.

So the community presented a petition; the mayor spoke about this to a number of organizations and people. But to date there's been no action, no action whatsoever. So I guess my point being in all the discussion we're having here today is every government, every government governs for all of Saskatchewan, and every region should be important for the economic build-out of our province. So why is it now that northern Saskatchewan is being completely ignored and about the only mines, the only company, only activity we see for improving the highways is between two mines and that's designed to extract resources?

So my argument is, the elders in Pelican Narrows asked for 6 lousy kilometres of highway through the community to be paved. Why? Because it was a heavy-volume highway that was creating a lot of danger to their kids, creating a lot of dust, and was generally in very poor shape. And this highway, provincial highway, ran through town. It ran through the First Nations land.

And I'm sure somewhere along the road that they were given permission to do whatever they can to improve the highway. I don't buy the argument from the minister, oh we never got a BCR from Pelican Narrows. I don't buy that at all. I think you may have got BCRs out of your yingyang, and now you're blaming the federal government that they're not putting their money in. So as much as you try and sugar-coat the process, I don't think you had any desire nor commitment to do anything in northern Saskatchewan, and that's a real shame. That's a real shame. And it's a real shame not only because you're challenging the economics of the province by thwarting any kind of activity in the North, but it's also putting a lot of families at risk, and it's hampering community development.

So I guess my statement and my question . . . And we're going

to do this for the next . . . Well I've only got 40 more minutes left, but we're going to have fun on the whole notion of northern Saskatchewan, is the simple question is, why won't you commit any highway projects for northern Saskatchewan, Mr. Minister? Why is northern Saskatchewan not important to you and to your government?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — You've covered a lot of topics, not with much substance, but you've covered a lot of different topics. And I don't really even quite know where to start. But I'm going to first of all start on one topic that you talked about, the NEIS, or it had four pillars. And you talk, it was a great strategy, the northern strategy put forward when you were in government, the NDP, when you were in government. You might have even been the minister. And you talk about great fanfare of the four pillars that you had constructed. Except you didn't put any money in. You didn't put any money in. That's the problem.

You sit there . . . The member sits there — sorry, Mr. Chair — the member sits there and says they just want to see something done. I know why they want to see something done, because they had 16 years of NDP that did nothing for northern Saskatchewan. In fact they did very little for the rest of Saskatchewan, and that's why you see the distribution in the House.

And you know, of all members, this member should realize it. He was there as a Liberal at one point, and then he ran as an NDP. He saw when they won a slim majority in 1999 and a slim majority in 2003. And for the life of him, I still think he thought he was in government from 2007 to 2011, and I don't think he's realized it since. He sits and talks, the member sits and talks like everything was wonderful under the NDP. Except the people in the province didn't quite see it the same way.

You've hung onto the two northern seats and, you know, the voters are always right. They made the right decisions there. You're still the member. But if you looked at the track record of what you did, what the member did in government, and what this government has done, Mr. Speaker, on highways alone there is no comparison.

I've talked about the increase in spending by 30 per cent from the former days. And well the member shakes his hand on it like that's not true. Absolutely it's true. I'll compare your seven years, their seven years in government with the seven years of the Sask Party. And there's no comparison in spending. It has increased by 30 per cent. He said, well just show me a highway that's been fixed. I don't know if the member was not awake, but we just finished talking about 123 where we put \$2 million in last year and \$1 million. And is it enough? No, there's more to be going into it. But the member just said, you're not putting any money into capital. We just finished talking about it, Mr. Member.

You know, it's really interesting the member opposite — I feel like I'm in the House — the member opposite talks about not spending enough in the North. He's talked about it a couple of different times. You know, if you look at the spending by our government, it's increased by 30 per cent in the North, which is the northern authority administrative district. It's the same as what it's comparing apples to apples. It's the same district that

the NDP looked at. It's the same comparison. Their expenditure to our expenditure. So, you know, he questioned what are we doing. As far as when we say an example of expenditure, it's the same northern administrative district as what was under the NDP.

But let's compare, for example, that area which is about 3.2 per cent of all of our population in the province. It works out to about 3.2 per cent of the population . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Pardon me?

Three point two per cent of the population. It has about 6 per cent of Highways budget into that area of 3.2. There are many areas of the province that would say, compared to our population base, I wish we had twice that expenditure on highways.

He talked about the resources. The resources are extremely important . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Absolutely. And that's why we have a great working relationship with the mining companies up there, with a number of the companies that are working in the North. But it produces 1.2 per cent of the GDP [gross domestic product]; 1.2 per cent of the GDP, 6 per cent of the budget's expenditure on 3.2 per cent of the population. For him to sit there and say, why don't you do something? We are. Absolutely we are. That's why the budgetary expenditure is twice percentage of budget as it is reflective of the population in northern Saskatchewan.

But I think the telling fact is, you know, two and a half years ago we went through an election where the people of the province decided what type of government they wanted to see. And they voted 49 Saskatchewan Party members in, to nine NDP. And that is through an election campaign where the two members that are sitting to my right supported a leader, Dwain Lingenfelter, that went around the province spending and spending and spending.

And I've got a few of the spends. The interesting part, which is really quite interesting, where he was promising to spend money across the province: \$250 million to twin Highway 6 and 39; \$240 million to twin No. 10; \$50 million for an interchange east of Regina. Fifty million dollars wouldn't have come close to an interchange east of Regina to solve the problems. That's where he spent the money.

Guess what his expenditure was in northern Saskatchewan after spending well over \$500 million on highways. Guess what it was in northern Saskatchewan. Not a cent. He never mentioned northern Saskatchewan once on highways spending through the last election, when he was spending to buy votes from corner to corner to corner. Except talk about forgetting northern Saskatchewan, the NDP and especially their leader in the last campaign absolutely ignored northern Saskatchewan.

That wasn't our policy. That wasn't our platform. We said we'd spend \$2 billion over the next four years across the province, and that's what we're doing — \$40 million dollars this year in northern Saskatchewan. The member opposite says, do something. We are doing something. We're working on many of the roads — maintenance, the connector road between mines, 914. Those are all commitments of this government that we will be moving on. Far cry, far outstrips anything that the former

government did after 16 years.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Well I would totally disagree with you on a number of fronts. First of all I would say this, is we're arguing tonight from the economic perspective that the North should be an important part of what the Department of Highways should be looking at.

As I said at the outset, the only road that you're doing is the road between two mines. Now I know that the mining sector have been getting extreme grief from a lot of people asking the mining sector to push the government to fix some of these roads. I know a lot of northern leaders are telling the major players in northern Saskatchewan — I'm talking about the mining companies in particular and a few forestry companies as well, but mostly mining in the last number of years — they're saying, can you guys push the government to get some of these roads fixed? That's what the mining sector is saying. I know that's what they're saying to the government. Now they're not going to share their letters with us, but I'm sure the mining companies have written to the minister or have spoken to a number of cabinet ministers.

When the mining companies cannot do what they normally should do, and that is to develop northern resources, create jobs for northerners, when they're being pressured to get the government to put some money into highways, then you know it justifies what we're arguing on the opposition side, that you haven't done anything for highways. In my opinion, you haven't done a darn thing for northern roads.

And you don't have any semblance of a plan, much less any commitment. And by semblance of a plan, I think the elders of Pelican Narrows would have been happy if you would have said, well it may take us a couple of years to complete 6 kilometres, 7 kilometres to your community. I think perhaps the English River First Nations or Patuanak would have been happy if you'd done even 20 kilometres of TMS in the last seven years that you spoke about record revenues and record spending in highways and record this, record that. And yet they don't see any kind of commitment from you towards their northern highways. Now you talk about evidence. Show me the evidence of what work you've done in northern Saskatchewan. You point to a map . . . And there's a map here available. You point to a map and say, this is where we put money on to improve that particular road.

Now me and my colleague from Cumberland, we present, every day, petitions. I present petitions on Highway 918 which I believe is the English River First Nations. I present highway petitions on 908 which is the access road to the community of Ile-a-la-Crosse. I put petitions in previously on the Beauval highway, on the Canoe Lake highway, and I also put petitions on Highway 155. I think Mr. Vermette's put petitions in the Pelican Narrows area. He's put petitions in the Cumberland House, for Stanley Mission. We've put petitions every single day that we're able to do so on highways in northern Saskatchewan. It's the number one issue. It's the number one issue. And you told me at one of our committee hearings that you're acutely aware of some of the conditions of some of these roads. And yet year after year after year you have done nothing to address any one of those single roads. You have done nothing. That I can point out. And again, there's a map right



here. If you've got to draw me a picture, draw me a picture.

[22:00]

But when mining companies are giving you a hard time, saying, why don't you do something with those northern roads, they very well know that nothing is being done. And I would assume that the mining companies are remaining neutral. They won't get involved in any politics but when they start complaining about highway infrastructure demands in the North and that they're pressuring the government to do something, they sense the frustration of people out there.

And since you are acutely aware of the dangerous roads that many northern people are travelling, since you're acutely aware of the stranglehold of the potential of the economy that poor roads create for northern residents, when you're aware of the fact that many of these community highways are the only single roads into these communities, when you're aware of the conditions that exist every winter for some of the ice roads in the far North. Wollaston Lake's another good example, where your government announced with great fanfare they're going to do Wollaston Lake. And what happens? You guys pull the plug. The member from Cypress Hills was the minister at the time. He announced it. And then there was another minister, I believe, I'm not sure who it was, but then you came along and the net effect is that road was cancelled.

So again no matter how many arguments you throw our way, the bottom line is you have not done a single highway in northern Saskatchewan. And I even challenge your \$40 million price tag that you put down as spending in northern Saskatchewan. And the reason I challenge that is because when I travel home on some of those roads, you start hitting northern Saskatchewan in a winter storm and there's very few resources to allow the highways crews to do their jobs out there.

Our highways crews are controlled out of Meadow Lake and the budget is always an ongoing issue. And you don't think we see 50, 60, vehicles all slowly following one set of tire tracks in the dead of winter because nobody's out there because they don't have the resources to maintain those northern roads. And as dangerous as they are, they're still not being maintained. And then what do we meet? We meet trucks hauling out forestry products. We meet trucks hauling out yellowcake. And the northern people are supposed to be happy with this government? Well they're not happy, Mr. Minister. They're quite angry.

When you threaten the safety of many of their families, when you don't maintain the roads during critical times, critical times, especially during the winter, and when you see roads that are being used by trucks hauling out the resources, you can wonder why people get so angry in the North.

So my point being is that as much as you want to rewrite the history of Saskatchewan, as much as you want to politicize the process, the question I have for you in the committee of estimates for Highways is, you show me one road that you've committed to in northern Saskatchewan, even if you were to give me an example of 2 or 3 kilometres of road that you put pavement on in any of the northern communities.

And my colleague from Cumberland showed me a bunch of pictures of the Cumberland road, and these are Saskatchewan families and children travelling on those roads — busloads, van loads, and vehicles. And all they're asking for is parity. If you want the northern resources hauled out, at the very least have the decency to give us safe highways. That's all the northern people ask. Every single mayor and chief will tell you, that's what they want.

But seven years and all the record revenues that you speak about, and you often speak about record spending in highways, and you made reference to Lingenfelter. Well you've been talking about record revenue spending or record spending in highways. Why hasn't the North seen any of it? Why hasn't the North seen any of it? That's my question to the minister.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Well you know, I've answered the question two or three times, and I can answer it again. They have. I mean 30 per cent increase over the former government. We can compare the seven years to seven years — I know he doesn't want to hear that — but there has been an increase in spending year over year on highways across the whole province but especially in northern Saskatchewan compared to the NDP days.

And he talks about the roads that we haven't fixed. I mean I've got a list here of 30 projects, capital projects that will be done in 2013 and '14 — 30 projects, capital projects in northern Saskatchewan alone. You know, whether it's resurfacing east of Big Sandy Lake to east of Ballantyne River, that's being done for over \$3 million. There is the Cumberland access, which we've already talked about, which is over \$1 million. And then there's a whole combination that add up to well over \$8 million . . . to about \$7 million.

And these are capital projects. These are capital projects, not maintenance: a number of bridges that if these bridges aren't fixed, it doesn't matter what the road is like if you can't get across the bridge; a number of culverts that are being fixed. And I can send over the list. He doesn't think that we're fixing any roads in northern Saskatchewan. Thirty capital projects that are sitting right here in front of me that will be funded to the tune of actually more like ten and a half million dollars of capital projects. And then there's the maintenance budget on a yearly basis as well.

So there is work being done, absolutely. Could there be more? Sure there could be more. But I find it absolutely amazing that we could spend three and a half hours here on estimates of highway spending, three and a half hours of highway spending, and there was about 15 minutes on anything to do with south of the northern administrative district. Now I know the members opposite want to become government again someday, but I'll tell you what. You're not going to do it when you spend three and a half hours asking questions and only about 15 minutes of it is on the rest of the province where 96.8 per cent of the population live.

And it wasn't even the Highways critic that asked a question on any other roadwork or any other roadway in Saskatchewan. The only questions that he has asked and his colleague, the member from Cumberland, has asked in the three and a half hours of estimates have been on northern roads. And I can understand

they're playing to their audience. They're playing to northern Saskatchewan and I get that. I completely understand that.

What I think it tells the rest of the province is obviously that party doesn't really care about the rest of the province. They haven't asked one question on the shape of Highway 18 in the southern part of the province. They haven't asked one question on any other highway in the rest of the province that carries 97 per cent of the volume of traffic.

And I understand they're playing to their audience, which would have been very, very difficult come the election campaign, and there wasn't a word mentioned about spending money on highways during the last election campaign, and now he comes in here and he criticizes because we're not doing enough in northern Saskatchewan. And he throws out the, you're doing nothing, which is wrong.

I mean I don't think \$40 million is nothing in northern Saskatchewan. I don't think of an increase of 30 per cent year over year, compared to the seven years of the NDP, compared to our past seven years, is nothing. He can coin it that way. I wouldn't coin it that way. In fact I think a lot of the communities would say, yes, we see spending. We would like more spending. But they at least have the courtesy and integrity to mention the fact that we have.

I spent time in Stony Rapids and Buffalo Narrows and La Ronge and Cumberland House last fall. And they would all say they would like more work done, but they're appreciative of the work that has been done. They would like more work done, but they can see some of the improvements that have been made year over year over the past seven years. They will say that, yes, we can see that more money is being spent than the previous administration, but it's still not enough. I heard that when I was there. They would say that there was more money spent currently now than under the previous administration, but it's not enough.

And I could agree with that because I rode on roads. And I didn't drive but I was in the back of a very comfortable 15-passenger van that bounced over those roads. I had a pretty good idea what the feeling was like bouncing over those roads. And what I did say to myself when I was bouncing over those roads, these are not great. Absolutely we need to fix them. But I would also say to the people in that area, I can take you to areas within my constituency in southern Saskatchewan that the ride would be virtually the same. This isn't a North-South thing. This is roadways that have low volumes of traffic, a huge network of roadways throughout the whole province that haven't had the TLC [tender loving care] that they need, whether it's Highway 35 going north of Francis, it's not a very comfortable ride. Whether it's Highway 18 going across the southern part, east to west of the province, not a very comfortable ride. It isn't contingent on North-South. Not at all. There would be people in the Southeast and the Southwest that would say they're not getting their fair share of all the oil revenue.

It's interesting, though. What I really came away from there from — and I would say this is pretty generic across the province, but it's what I have realized — I remember when I was the minister of Health, everybody would say, well if you

just did this, the health care system would be fixed. But what I get now in Highways, if you could just fix this one highway, then the rest of the highways are good. Because it's the one highway they use until they get onto a secondary or primary highway, and that one highway is not very good. And if I could fix that highway, the rest of the highways are good. The reason the rest of the highways are good, they've got to a secondary or primary highway and they're good.

And that's what I'm hearing from northern Saskatchewan. If you would just fix our road till we get to the secondary or primary highway, the highways are good. But the one in my area is not very good. That isn't generic to northern Saskatchewan. That's generic to areas where the population is low, where the traffic volumes are low comparative to other roads within the province.

So this is not a North-South thing, although if you want to just make it a North-South thing, I think I would quite easily stand behind the record of our government as opposed to the record of the previous government. And I don't know how the member opposite rationalized being in that government for 16 years and seeing the expenditure in northern Saskatchewan. He was supposed to be the voice for northern Saskatchewan, and I would submit if he had half as much to say when they were in government about northern Saskatchewan as he has now that he's in opposition, maybe the roads in northern Saskatchewan would be in a little bit better shape.

Maybe if the member had some weight to carry in a former government, in a cabinet, and voiced the concerns of northern Saskatchewan to his cabinet colleagues and lobbied for the North as strongly as he's doing now, the roads in the North would have been in better shape. It would have been hard-pressed for us to increase the spending by 30 per cent in northern Saskatchewan because that spending would have been up under the previous government.

But I would submit that that strong lobby wasn't heard. I don't think that strong lobby was heard, and that's why we didn't see the spending increase in northern Saskatchewan as much as probably what it should have. I can tell you that we have strong voices across the whole province, including members from around Prince Albert, from Saskatchewan Rivers, from Lloydminster, from Shellbrook, Rosthern, strong voices that relay those concerns on a regular basis, and that's why we've seen spending increase. Absolutely that's why we've seen spending increase by 30 per cent over the previous government for the same time period.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Well thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I just want to point out in terms of your commitments. I guess when you talk about strong voices that's probably one of the most compelling reasons why you haven't got nobody in cabinet north of Saskatoon. So obviously I guess practising what you preach may not be important overall in terms of trying to follow through with commitments, but we don't see any commitments in northern Saskatchewan.

And again I reiterate, it's not a North-South situation, absolutely not. The premise that we govern is what I think Calvert summed it up very nicely at one meeting when we were talking about the No. 1 Highway, and also speaking about the

road through Chamberlain, when the discussion was going around the investment made into the southernmost part of our province in terms of commitment to roadwork. And at the time Premier Calvert said, we govern for all of Saskatchewan. Every sector is important to us, and every road that has the opportunity to provide safe travel, safety for our people, and economic opportunity must be incorporated in our overall plan. That was his directive. And we talked about the Chamberlain roadwork that came through, that obviously that much more work needed to be done, and he wanted it done fast.

[22:15]

So when I speak about the twinning of Saskatoon-P.A., Eldon Lautermilch announced the twinning project. When I speak about the twinning of Saskatoon north between North Battleford and of course on, it is all part of an overall plan that talked about a resource economy. When we've done work in any part, in every part of Saskatchewan, it was all about governing for all. And that's my fundamental point on northern Saskatchewan.

Your government ripped out \$65.5 million of investment into northern communities, ripped it right out. Now we're happy you didn't rip it out of all the sectors in all the regions of the province because that would have created some major problems for you politically, but more so it would have been a great problem for us economically over the long haul.

But the only place you chose to rip out money was in northern Saskatchewan. That's my point. It's not a North-South thing. Most of the work and the framework and the groundwork for how you develop your transportation system was laid out and planned for years by some very good bureaucrats and very good technocrats and some good leadership on a political level between municipal leaders, provincial leaders, and federal leaders. The money was committed, especially for the Asia-Pacific corridor work. And the problem that we had was when all the dollars were committed and there was announcements made, what you don't seem to realize is that it took seven, six, five years to get all these things in place — a lot of planning, a lot of investment, and a lot of co-operation.

Now at the end of the day you mentioned 97 per cent of people live in the South. You start ripping up highway commitments to 97 per cent of the population, then you're into a lot of trouble. You couldn't do it because there is too much political support in some of the regions that had dollars. But you chose to go to the North and rip out \$65.5 million. For what? For what purpose?

Now we, as I mentioned, we had to understand or we have to understand in this room that there are many, many families that travel these northern roads — many families. And their fundamental argument is this: a lot of taxpayers in the North, a lot of resources in the North. You know the need. You've been arguing for the need. Why aren't our issues and why are we not important to this government? The only place that you ripped out \$65.5 million, which is a huge chunk of some of the work we are trying to do, was in northern Saskatchewan. And if you look at the whole region of Prince Albert as well in terms of their second bridge, we all supported the city because it is important for our economy. That was not delivered. We look at the impacts of forestry in the Meadow Lake area; the grain

transportation issue. All these issues, all these points I'm raising tonight, needless to say is that there hasn't been a lot of action in that particular sector.

Now I hear there's some roads being done around the Meadow Lake area, and I'm pleased for that because obviously attracting tourism is pretty darn important. So my argument and my point today is, again I'll ask, why aren't you doing anything for northern Saskatchewan to improve highway systems overall?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Well you know, I saw a glimmer of hope there for a second. He did mention Chamberlain. He mentioned the community in southern Saskatchewan after an hour and a half. I thought maybe we were going to get maybe a little bit more talk on the rest of the province other than just northern Saskatchewan. He was there for a couple of seconds, and then he moved on and he went to northern Saskatchewan. And I think I've answered the question, you know, certainly to my satisfaction on the spending that we're doing in northern Saskatchewan — the 30 new capital projects, the maintenance dollars that were going in to the North, the total expenditure over the last seven years of our government — and I think we've answered that. I also would admit that there is more work to be done.

I found it interesting when the member opposite said that we don't have a cabinet minister north of Saskatoon. Obviously he doesn't know his geography very well, whether it's in Lloydminster, whether it's Canora-Pelly, or other areas that have been represented through cabinet ministers and will be again as we move forward. I'm quite confident of that because of the level of MLA that happens to be sitting on our side could probably all be in cabinet. For sure, strong representation both in cabinet and definitely within caucus. So just so that he knows, Saskatoon would be south of Lloydminster so we do have representation north of Saskatoon. Maybe he was just trying to ballpark it, but obviously he needs a bit of a geography lesson as far as where the constituencies lie.

I will be very interested in the time that we have left, Mr. Chair, because we do have, you know, we've talked about the North a lot. I do want to identify a couple of the major projects that are going on in southern Saskatchewan and the need — and the member from Regina Rosemont I think was talking about the need — around White City and Emerald Park, the bigger investment that we're making to go around Regina, and that is a huge investment. I talked about it through the media today. The member opposite would know and he knows very, very well that we've applied to PPP Canada.

Now I want to give the member opposite a chance to clarify his statements on the record, on the public record. He may say that he was misquoted up in the media, but I would really like to give the member opposite an opportunity in the time we have left to clarify his statements regarding whether it's a perimeter road to get around Saskatoon or the east and west Regina bypass. East and west Regina bypass, we are applying to PPP Canada. He said his comments in the context of a couple of new bridges in Saskatoon and perhaps one in Prince Albert. And he made his comments on the fact that the city of Saskatoon, with our support and commitment moving forward, has applied to PPP Canada for funding for those bridges.

There's two things here that are very important that we need to have clarity from the member opposite. Number one, the city of Saskatoon is bundling, and they could even maybe even talk to Prince Albert and bundle three bridges together as a P3 [public-private partnership]. There's two questions. Number one, if that was the case, would he support the bundling concept? Because we've heard from members opposite that they do not agree with the bundling concept when it comes to schools. Does he agree with the bundling concept put forward by the city of Saskatoon? And if he does, then does he, secondly, agree then that applying for PPP Canada money would be a wise decision? And if the PPP Canada accepts the proposal, albeit whether it's bridges in Saskatoon or a ring road around Regina, would he support that?

He was very clear during the media scrum that a person would be crazy, we'd be crazy to leave money on the table. In other words, if the federal government had money . . . Let's hypothetically say in a project to get around Regina, roughly \$1.2 billion, if the federal government said, if you do it as a P3 we've got \$100 million we'll give you. But because of ideology you say, well we can't support that because it's a P3, so we can't accept that \$100 million. I would say that would be leaving money on the table.

If we accept the premise that we'll go forward with a P3, then we're going to take that \$100 million off the table, supplement it with the money that we're putting in as the provincial government. We'll get the infrastructure built sooner, Mr. Chair, get the infrastructure built sooner in a combination between private-public partnership, P3. Municipalities are on board, provincial government is on board, private sector is on board. We can get this done because we're accessing federal dollars just like we accessed federal dollars, not through a P3, but through probably either Building Canada or some other fund to develop the four-laning between Saskatoon and Prince Albert.

The member opposite, rightfully so, says Eldon Lautermilch announced it. Eldon Lautermilch announced a lot of things without any funding. We funded the road between Saskatoon and Prince Albert. We lobbied hard with the federal government. We got federal government dollars to make that project a reality. It just finished this past summer. So over the seven years that we've been in government, we followed through on that commitment absolutely because we accessed federal money. We didn't leave it on the table. Just like if we're building a ring road around Regina and the federal government is offering up money, let's say \$100 million on the table, would ideology get in the way? Would he say no?

**Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. First of all I want to point out to the member or to the minister that a while ago you spoke about how the Saskatchewan people spoke and there's 49 on our side and there's nine on the NDP side, so I think they sent a pretty good message, is what your comments were.

Then you spoke about the record revenues the province was enjoying, in fact that there was some great revenues coming to the province. And then you spoke about record spending on highways — you do that on a pretty continual basis — and yet on many fronts we see very little action from this particular

minister and from the department in terms of dealing with some of the issues, whether it's North, East, West, or South.

Now I would point out that when you look at the whole notion of trying to engage the federal government on any front . . . And I can tell you that Eldon Lautermilch done a heck of a lot for northern highways and highways throughout the province. You know, we have a number of those press releases that spoke of some of the earlier work. People don't realize that Eldon done a lot of good work, as did Sonntag and some of the others.

Now as to your question, our leader has been quite straightforward in a sense of saying that it's unfortunate that the federal government puts this box around the spending of some of the tax dollars. We think the tax dollars and highway spending should be coming into the province of Saskatchewan free and clear. There shouldn't be any encumbrances on that money. It is taxpayers' money.

And how much do they collect on the GST [goods and services tax] and the taxes on some of the gas that they sell, federal taxes on gasoline sold in Saskatchewan? Is it \$250 million? Is that a ballpark figure? And it's unfortunate . . . I would even assume that it's probably beyond \$250 million. It's unfortunate that the only way that we get any of that money back, despite all the taxes that they collect, the federal government collects from gas tax in the province of Saskatchewan, that we get a pittance back. And that pittance that we get back from the federal government has all these rules attached to it. And one of the rules is that it's got to be under a P3 scenario. So at the outset it's unfortunate, it is very unfortunate that the federal government puts all these encumbrances on gas taxes that they collect from Saskatchewan based on their philosophy of looking after their big corporate friends, not talking about the economy of Saskatchewan nor support for the province overall.

The second thing is that what we have been calling for as an opposition has been pretty straightforward in the sense of, let's have a transparency and accountability framework attached to any P3. Can we at least have that? And the current government shot us down on the whole argument of accountability and transparency on the P3 model. We couldn't even have the discussion because the province simply wanted to have P3s and that's it — no further discussion from anybody. This is our mantra. This is our philosophy. We asked that to be open and transparent.

[22:30]

Now obviously you look at some of the boxes and the encumbrances that the federal government put their P3 partnership under Building Canada as their way of controlling how they want to spend their money despite our argument that there is taxes being paid, a significant amount of taxes being paid by the provincial people in Saskatchewan towards the federal government tax system from gas, gasoline. Why couldn't they give us that money without any conditions? My first question back to you.

Second question is, 49 of your Sask Party MLAs against nine NDP MLAs, I think you're able to figure that out on your own . . . [inaudible] . . . seeking advice from the opposition on a continual basis. The third point is, why is it that the federal

government isn't listening to your lobby to have the tax dollars come in unencumbered and free to use as you please, because they're bound by their philosophy? And the third thing I think the municipal governments and the . . .

**The Chair:** — Order. I think we've reached the hour of adjournment. So I'm going to have to thank the minister and his officials and the committee members for joining us this evening. And the committee stands adjourned to the call of the Chair. Thank you. Mr. Minister.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — If I could just take one minute and answer. No, I won't do that. But I do want to thank the officials very much. I'm circled with a great, great team at the Ministry of Highways, and I want to thank them for all the work that they do to have me ready for this evening. Thank you.

**The Chair:** — This meeting stands adjourned. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 22:31.]