



STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY

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Mr. Jeremy Cockrill
The Battlefords

Mr. Ken Francis
Kindersley

Mr. Terry Jenson
Martensville-Warman

Mr. Delbert Kirsch
Batoche

Mr. Doug Steele
Cypress Hills

[The committee met at 13:58.]

The Chair: — All right. Welcome everyone to the Standing Committee on the Economy. I'm Colleen Young, and I will be the Chair of the committee today. Joining us we have committee members Ken Francis, Terry Jenson, Delbert Kirsch, Doug Steele. And sitting in is Todd Goudy for Jeremy Cockrill, and substituting in for Mr. Belanger is Mr. Doyle Vermette.

Because we are still implementing measures to facilitate safety in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, if the minister needs to confer privately during proceedings he may do so in the hallway or the vestibule at the front of the Chamber. And as a reminder, please don't touch the microphones. They are fragile and sensitive, and the Hansard operator up top will turn your microphone on when you're speaking to the committee.

Cleaning supplies are located at the tables by the side doors for members and officials to use if they require them. And if you have any questions about logistics or have documents to table, the committee requests that you contact the Clerk at committees@legassembly.sk.ca. Contact information is provided on the witness table.

**General Revenue Fund
Highways
Vote 16**

Subvote (HI01)

The Chair: — We will now begin our consideration of the estimates and supplementary estimates no. 2 for the Ministry of Highways. Vote 16, Highways, central management and services, subvote (HI01). Minister Bradshaw is here with his officials. Minister, please introduce them and make any opening comments you wish.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Well thank you, Madam Chair, and good afternoon. It's my pleasure to be here today to discuss estimates for the Ministry of Highways. Before we begin I'd like to introduce the officials with me today. I'm joined by my chief of staff, Angela Currie, and Deputy Minister Fred Antunes.

I would also like to recognize the following ministry officials that are attending virtually: Tom Lees, assistant deputy minister, operation and maintenance; Wayne Gienow, acting assistant deputy minister, policy, planning and regulation; Doug Hansen, acting assistant deputy minister, design and construction; Kelly Moskowsky, executive director, corporate services; Doug Wakabayashi, executive director, communications; Zev Lazic, executive director, irrigation project; James Englot, executive director, Public Service Commission; Shannon Lindholm, executive assistant; Larry Young, regional executive director, northern region; Tracey Leibel, regional executive director, central region; Bill Pacholka, regional executive director, southern region; Brent Miller, director, design and construction; Dave Munro, manager, corporate services; and Sam Sasse, ministerial assistant.

The 2021-22 budget for the ministry amounts to \$830 million. This is an increase of 115 million over the previous budget, a year-over-year increase of more than 16 per cent. But before we

get into further detail, I believe the content of this document is just as important as the data.

In 2019 the government introduced its 10-year growth plan. It sets out ambitious goals for all ministries to help guide Saskatchewan to the year 2030. Building on the growth we have seen for more than a decade, it lays out strategies to help Saskatchewan reach a population of 1.4 million people. It committed the Ministry of Highways to building and upgrading 10 000 kilometres of highways. This will support not only population growth but also economic growth.

Then in early 2020 we were hit by the global pandemic. Despite its inherent challenges, Highways continued to safely deliver well-planned, high-quality improvements that build capacity and increase road safety, and we know the projects we deliver in this fiscal year will play a key role in getting Saskatchewan residents back to work. We must ensure we are positioned for renewed economic growth once the pandemic is in our rear-view mirror. Safety and efficiency are the guiding principles for the major projects that we have planned this year.

We will design and tender a twinned section of Highway 3 to roughly 8 kilometres west of Prince Albert. We will plan it this year and complete it next year. We will build multiple sets of passing lanes on highways 2, 3, 12, 14, and 16. These are being funded through the 300 million and additional stimulus flowing through the Ministry of Highways.

There will also be three sets of passing lanes constructed on Highway 7 from Kindersley to the Saskatchewan-Alberta border. More passing lanes and widening will be added to Highway 5 between Saskatoon and Highway 2. And we will also complete the passing lanes on Highway 39 between Estevan and Corinne.

We will make sufficient progress to meet our growth plan goal of improving 10 000 kilometres of highway by 2030. This will mean 1350 kilometres of improvements this year alone. And in doing so we'll be ahead of schedule in meeting that 10-year goal. Residents can expect to see 250 kilometres of repaving, 510 kilometres of pavement sealing, 225 kilometres of medium treatments like micro surfacing, 25 kilometres of gravel rehabilitation, 280 kilometres of thin membrane surface and rural highway upgrades, 60 kilometres of twinning and passing lanes.

And we're also delivering on the needs of Saskatchewan residents. We have heard from our rural neighbours that more support is needed for repairing and upgrading bridges. This is why we will invest 44.5 million to help rehabilitate or replace 14 bridges and many culverts across the province.

And safety, as always, remains a top priority. We are in the third year of a five-year commitment to improve intersection and road safety. Twenty-two million from this budget will do exactly that with the installation of warning lights at the junction of Highway 55 and 240, improved intersection lighting at the intersection of Highway 9 and 18, intersection rumble strips at the junction of Highway 9 and 12, intersection improvements on Highway 364 at Balgonie, intersection improvements at the junction of Highway 11 and the North Grid Road north of Dundurn, a pedestrian crosswalk at Birch Hills, and intersection sight triangle and right-of-way sightline improvements across the

province.

We are ever increasing our budget for mowing right-of-ways by more than \$450,000, which will increase the mowing program by 22 per cent. Many rural highway right-of-ways will receive a second cut this summer. We've maintained an extra 1.6 million in our pavement marking program.

There are also investments to support shortline railways and rural municipal roads. This includes 28 million to support economic growth and safety on rural roads, part of our commitment to upgrade 100 municipal roads and bridges over four years; 6.6 million for construction and maintenance partnerships with urban municipalities; 800,000 in partnership fund for low-volume thin-membrane surface and gravel roads; 1.5 million to support community airport improvements; and 530,000 in new funding for improvements to shortline railways.

Our ministry continues to work closely with the construction and road-building industry to deliver on our important infrastructure needs. Saskatchewan residents are encouraged by our continued dedication to safe and efficient transportation. Since 2008 the Government of Saskatchewan has improved more than 17 100 kilometres of highways through an investment of more than \$10.6 billion — that's nearly two-thirds of our 26 000-kilometre highway network.

I'm very excited about the progress we are making towards our commitments to the people of this province. And with that, my officials and I would be pleased to answer any questions. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister. I'll now open the floor to questions from committee members. And I'll acknowledge Mr. Vermette.

Mr. Vermette: — Thank you, Madam Chair. Again to thank the minister and officials for allowing us to definitely ask some questions on behalf of Saskatchewan residents, and just to question and clarify some of the areas maybe that you've talked about, that you're working on. And you've got a plan, a 10-year plan, and things like that. And hopefully things go in a positive way for you and for the province because obviously safety of roads is number one for all residents. We know that.

I'm going to focus a little bit, especially my questions, more on the North. And my colleague will be in here covering off some of the other areas later on, once he gets in here.

So I'm just going to ask a little bit of updates. There's some areas where we've got some questions. I know our First Nations, our Métis leaders, our northern municipal leaders, residents have raised many concerns for northern roads. And some of those roads, Highways has dealt with and working on some of them. So it's not always negative, negative, but there's a lot of area. And safety needs to be taken care of. And I know I've had conversations with many of our northern leaders, many community members about safety.

And I'll start here and see what you can give me as updates. I know that the community, and they're some of our largest First Nations communities . . . is Pelican Narrows airport. They've asked about it. I wouldn't mind having an update. I know they've

been working hard, the leadership, trying to work with the ministry to get lighting, to get, you know, a bigger airstrip and making sure. If you could give me an update on there.

At the same time I will say, Southend. So many residents out of Southend have to be taken out when it's flying for emergencies, flight, air ambulance. And I know they have requested it and they've been doing it for years. They've had presentations and they have worked on it.

If you can just give me some updates on those two communities for now — it would be nice on those two airports — I would appreciate that. Mr. Minister, to your officials.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Thank you for that question. And yes, and the safety, being a pilot myself, I certainly want to see work done on the airports and to keep them safe and, you know, certainly in the North of which I'm close to. I want to also thank the member for the statement he made the other day on talking about the good work our hard-working people of the Highways department are doing.

But going back to your . . . We're doing, actually we're going to be doing . . . We're spending 29.6 million for operation and maintenance and 30.2 million on capital improvement to some of the roads and also some of the airports. And you specifically mentioned Pelican Narrows. We're doing base strengthening, lighting, and fencing improvements at the Pelican Narrows airport.

And also the other one you asked about was Southend. And I'm not positive on that. And so I guess I would like to turn that over to my deputy minister for that one.

Mr. Antunes: — Surely. The Southend airstrip is actually not owned and operated by the Ministry of Highways. So it's a privately owned airstrip on Crown land currently managed by the Ministry of Environment. They manage the land, but we have not been funding that airstrip for several years. It's a private airstrip mainly used for medical evacuation, and it's a private airstrip operator that operates it. So we haven't really had any involvement with the Southend airport for a little while.

And you know, perhaps that's something we can have further conversations about. It doesn't have a lot of traffic, but that is something we can have some further conversations about I guess with some of the residents up there.

Mr. Vermette: — Well why I ask it is I know that there was a proposal put in and an ask from Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation for Southend. And I've seen the documents, and I just assumed that would have been Highways that they approached. And this is quite some time ago, years ago. And I don't know . . . And I'll check with them too, to make sure.

My understanding is from the council and direction I got from them, they were continuing trying to lobby to get a new airport operated, whether it's by the government, the province, or in a partnership with the band. Like you know, I go back to them and I think about stuff like that. It's always nice to come back and have a conversation about it. So I will make sure on that. I don't know if you recall getting a proposal from them? It's probably three, four years ago. So it would have been to Highways.

But again I know they were lobbying. They were working trying to raise awareness. It was in media and stuff like that. So you know, it's been some time, but I never . . . I know when you hear about that stuff, and here's an opportunity to ask. I know that's it's always been for safety up there. And exactly, they rely on air ambulance coming in there. So I don't know if that's something that's continue or not.

But we can look into that. And you can I guess check in and get back to us. And if that is some information to share with us, with the committee, that would be great. You could table it and say, yes, we did find some information. Whatever you could do would be helpful and appreciated.

I guess the other part I'll go is, you talked about Pelican, and you talked about the lighting and fencing and stuff. Do you know when that will . . . Has it started already? I know they've been working hard. I know that. There've been a lot of push from the chief and council, from the municipal mayor and council. I know that there's been a lot of push for that and I know that they had some training over the years for lighting at night. They were trained to set up.

So I mean, they've tried to do what they can do, and I think working with the Ministry of Highways, they've tried to do that. But you know, obviously this in emergencies with the lighting, you know, the runway . . . So maybe you guys can give me a little bit of update, how much you're planning to spend, and what exactly, and when. When's the timeline till you complete it or, you know, when you're going to move on it? If you have any information, that would be much appreciated.

[14:15]

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Certainly. Thank you. And the deputy minister will have some of those. But yes, the lighting, I know that . . . You see, lighting has to meet transport standards so that's one thing that has to be . . . You know, the days of just landing with, you know, with a vehicle parked on the end of the airstrip, those days are long gone. So the lighting has to be done properly, and I totally agree with you on that.

And as we're speaking on that . . . I'll let the deputy minister in on this, on some of the stuff. But one of the other ones too is in your constituency, and that's the Cumberland airport where we're going to be working on it too. And I'm sure you have been there and noticed that the runway's pretty soft. And I've been on that runway myself so I know that it needs some work. Mind you, it's far better than . . . I'm old enough I can remember landing when it was a grass runway. But anyway, we'll let the deputy minister come in on that.

Mr. Antunes: — Sure. Just maybe I'll go back to just one more comment I'll make on Southend. So apparently we have done some work looking at it, you know, maybe a while ago and so yes, we would look forward to seeing, you know, if there's been a proposal. But my understanding is that the airport can't be upgraded at its current location with the size, so I think it's a fairly big project. So that is something that, you know, we can provide some . . . maybe get back in touch with you and find out some information about, you know, what the proposal is and we can maybe go from there.

Now with Pelican Narrows, the airport. So yes, we are planning on doing strengthening this year as well as permanent lighting. The contract, I believe, is going to be tendered in May or June of this year. And we don't divulge the costs of the projects before we tender them, so yes, I'd prefer not to give you an update on the cost. But the work will be completed this year and we hope that it'll be completed this year.

Mr. Vermette: — Trust me. No, I hear you and I appreciate that. No, I understand that. And at a later date if you could give us some . . . when you guys think it'll be completed and what the cost will be, share that with the committee when it's the proper time to do it, would be appreciated.

Mr. Antunes: — Yes, we can send some information over to your office once it's been awarded and then we'll let you know.

Mr. Vermette: — Appreciate that. I guess if there's no further questions on that, I'll go to some of the other areas where I'm going to go. Well, Fred, I know you have a sense of ha ha. So when you talk about Cumberland, and it's important to . . . I have been on there and have flown in there very few times because mainly I drive into the community as well, and I know the Cumberland road has been pretty bad for years and years.

And I know you guys had . . . Highways had committed to doing some upgrades and some work on there. And I've seen that's happened. Maybe you can give me a little, if there are any more to-do sections of it. I know they were doing parts of it. And seeing where we're at with it and maybe, you know, if you can give us an update on that.

But when you're talking about the airport being soft the way it is with the planes, like they can't even . . . they've got to be careful when they're landing. So the last time I flew in there — and actually I've never flown in there again after — is they wouldn't even stop; they just kind of just pushed me out and off they went. Joking, in a way. But you have to be quick to get out of there because they were worried about sitting too long, just their tires. It was pretty warm out that time.

So anyway if you can just give me a little information on the road into Cumberland House that would be great, and then we'll go to the next question. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Yes, the Cumberland airport, like I said, I know it's soft. I've been in and out of there quite a few times. Now they didn't try and push me out on the go because I was actually the one driving the airplane. But that being said, yes there's been . . . And I'll turn it over to the deputy, talking about the highway. But I can talk a little bit about the highway because I know that there were some real problems there for a while. And what it was, was they were having water that was coming right up against the highway. And they got that water redirected so it was away, because there were times that, you know, trucks were getting stuck right in the middle of the road.

And truthfully the road actually has been improved a lot. It's actually in pretty good shape now compared to what it used to be. There have been some great improvements on there. A lot of it had to do . . . In those wet years especially, had the water laying right up against the road. And it was causing a lot of problems and, you know, just making the base all wet so there wasn't really

any base there to speak of. But since then, you know, we haven't had as much rain and they've gotten the water redirected away from the road. And I can let the deputy minister fill in on the rest of that.

Mr. Antunes: — Yes, I think the minister hit the highlights there. I think we spent, since 2009 we've spent about \$14 million to make improvements along Highway 123. Most recently, I think, back in 2018-19, we spent another three and a half million dollars. We did some grading. Plus we fixed, as the minister said, a lot of the culverts that were clogged and overgrown. So we cleared out some of the drainage, and since then the roads have been in much better shape.

So we don't have any current plans to do any additional improvements right now. But we'll continue to monitor it. But it's in much better shape over the last couple of years as the minister indicated.

Mr. Vermette: — No, and I've been on there, you know, and it has. I know there was improvements, and I know that the moisture was causing a lot. Because I'll be honest with you, when the bad times were there, I would share videos and remind the ministry, don't forget about this, and those holes and vehicles stuck right down. So we've done that to wake up the ministry and make sure the community, for safety, was taken care of.

And of course, the leadership — chief-in-council, the mayor and council — and they're at the end of the road, but you know, they want to be taking care of safety for their community members. And I give them credit. And again at the end of the day, you know, that's the right thing to do for Saskatchewan citizens to make sure they have safe roads to go on. And when there's issues, we've got to, you know, make sure we do our part as opposition. But also anyone who represents your communities, you want to advocate for them and make sure they're getting heard and getting some of the needs covered.

So having said that, you're right now just continuing to monitor it, so there's not no new dollars. Which is good to, like I guess, to know. And I guess if something happens, we'll definitely let you guys know if it changes.

And as I talk about being neighbours, Cumberland and Carrot River riding, we are neighbours. So it's nice to have the minister right there saying, hey take a drive for . . . a 20-minute drive and you'll go see what's going on. So it's kind of nice that way, and we can do that.

So, Fred, with that I'll just . . . Minister, I'll just say with that, can you give me a little bit of an update on Wollaston Lake road? That's been something that for years and years the leadership . . . I myself have served petitions in this House, question after question, time, you know, raising awareness about the safety and the ice roads. And I know that Highways has taken care of the ice roads up there for years, to do the maintenance and shuts them down. And the community has felt the impact when those ice roads are closed and getting goods and services into the community, you know, whatever supplies that they need to get by, propane, whatever it is.

You know, there's times that they're just trying to . . . When it's freeze-up time, when it's, you know, thawing time, they have so

many challenges that that community has to deal with. And loss of life. They've lost people on the ice road, and you know, in 2010 a teacher. That's always been something that I've always worked on and have worked with the previous minister, to be honest with you, and I give credit that he worked on that to try to push that along with others, but within the ministry.

And I think the leadership, I give credit to our northern First Nations leaders up north, you know, the Dene chiefs and the council. And they've done a lot, their staff, to bring awareness and advocate. PAGC [Prince Albert Grand Council] has done a great job advocating. Many have said it was time for, you know, safety for that community to have an all-season, all-weather road. If you can give me an update on that.

I know there's been announcements and since I've been here in 2008 we've had it announced and then reannounced and then reannounced, and then there's movement and a little bit of work. So if you can give me an update on that, I think I'd appreciate that to know for the record where we're at with that.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Well certainly, and I think you'll be happy to know that Highways has formed a partnership with the band up there to construct a 102-kilometre winter road connection to that community to Highway 905. And this completion of the winter road, which is scheduled for May of '21, it's going to involve clearing trees and other obstructions and grading targeted areas. And the remaining 88 kilometres is going to be done over a two-year period.

So they actually are looking at . . . They want to get this road all the way through as far as a winter road and then once that winter road's there, of course, it's going to eliminate the need for the ice road. So this is something that actually is going to be happening and you probably heard the announcements on it. So this is going to be a great thing for the people up there, up at Wollaston and Hatchet Lake and whatnot. And it's going to definitely improve it. And I know what ice roads are like — I've been on them myself — so I know precisely where you're coming from.

Mr. Vermette: — So just to be clear, you said the completion date of the road . . . I guess to try to understand when we think about an all-season road, will it be used 365 days out of the year? I'd like to have an understanding of what we're talking about as far as access to that road, so if you could give me a little bit more information it'd be much helpful to understand.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Well my understanding is it's going to be a winter road, at least for the time being here. It will be a winter road. And I don't know if you want to add some more onto that?

Mr. Antunes: — Yes, so I think the intent . . . They've been working on it now for, I think they started last year, then again this winter. And so the plan is, as the minister said, is to turn it into a winter road. So it'll only be available during the winter. They're going in, and I think they had to blast out some rock areas, clear the right-of-way. You know, they'll have to pad muskeg every year to get it operational, but the intent would be that by next fall, we're thinking that it will be in place and that we won't need to have an ice road. So that's the intent.

There's still a couple of bridges that need to be built, like one

major bridge that needs to be built and some, I think a couple of larger culverts. That's not included as part of this phase, but they'll figure out a way to cross those during the winter. So that's kind of what the current plan of the project is, is basically it's a partnership between the province and Indigenous Services Canada to get the road built, and Highways will continue to operate it after that and we'll contract the community to operate it.

Mr. Vermette: — Can you try to give me an idea — and I'm not trying to be smart in any way — when you say, then, for the period of winter it will be a winter road, so they'll use it from a certain time. Will it be one of these roads where, my gosh, you're wondering what exactly you're travelling on? Or is it going to be pretty smooth and they can travel at a type of speed? Like I'm just trying to understand when we say that so people understand, and I'm curious. That's what I am asking.

Mr. Antunes: — Yes. I guess when you look at a winter road, basically what they do is they come in and they pat it with snow and they pack it down with snow over the different areas. So it is not travelled at high speeds, it is slow speeds, and you will have to be careful when you're on it. So it's not a, you know, high-class road by any sense of the meaning. But what it does is it gets people off the ice. And, as you indicated, then you don't have to worry about a car falling through the ice.

And once they get it up and running a couple of seasons, I think they'll get better at it and it'll be open probably longer than what you're going to see is currently open with the ice road. That's the expectation. So you'll have better access, more part of the year. Still in the winter only, but it should provide better access.

Mr. Vermette: — Okay. No, I appreciate that and I know I'll have a chance to talk to them as well and get an update — eventually, obviously, as we're dealing with the challenges of COVID. So it's been pretty tough to meet with people. And I have that . . . I know sometimes the technology, you know, whether it's Zoom or whatever, you get a chance to meet with them, but it's not always done in a way northern people like to do it. And we do it through coffee visits, the hugs, the handshakes and all that. So we'll eventually get there and we can deal with some of the challenges.

The other area, I'll say I don't really like these signs I see up every now and then, because I like seeing signs . . . Ministry of Highways likes putting up signs when you're travelling to an area and it says how much money they're spending and how many kilometres they're fixing. And I usually like seeing . . . You guys have put some recently up in La Ronge. And I don't know if it's a joint partnership.

I think it's \$2.6 million and you're doing 6.5 kilometres of something up there. There's signs up there. And what I'm really not happy with is, I was hoping it would say like bigger numbers and more kilometres. So if you can give me a little bit of an update on it, I'd appreciate it, what area you guys are doing the 6.5 kilometres and spending that type of money, just to understand what you guys are doing. If you could share that with me, that would be helpful.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Just while we're looking this up just to get that straight, I also wanted to say I'm very happy that . . . and

again, it's kind of on our sister constituencies, but Highway 55 which the tender is out and they're going to start working on it this year.

[14:30]

So you know, from 6 miles north of Carrot River to going down just to the bush line. And the part was already done by Red Earth and Shoal Lake so it's definitely going to help out Red Earth and Shoal Lake, you know, when they're coming over to do business and also to the hospital in Nipawin and whatnot. So this is something that I'm very happy that the Ministry of Highways is doing. This is going to be a great project for everybody and it's going to be good for our logging contractors up there too. So I just thought I'd throw that in because we're right tight together on that.

We're just looking that up. Well we could just go out and . . . so we can find out about this.

Mr. Antunes: — Sorry about that. You got me a little bit confused when it's like, it's on Highway 2, but what are we doing up there?

So actually the work that we put up the sign for in La Ronge is actually for work that we're doing up on Highway 905, quite a bit further north. We're doing some gravel resurfacing there. It's a partnership we're doing with Cameco. And the reason we put the sign up in La Ronge is because it's really the only way in on that highway. So rather than have our sign crews travel 450 kilometres up north to install the sign, we just put the sign in La Ronge. So that's where the work is for. It's for work that we're doing up on Highway 905, quite a bit further north of La Ronge.

Mr. Vermette: — Oh, you shouldn't have told me that because now people back home will want to take that sign. They like taking those signs down if it's not for their area. So you guys might be putting a sign up again. I've noticed that sometimes that happens. And I say, no, no, trust me. It's not . . . Doyle doesn't do that kind of stuff. But anyway, a joking matter.

No, I wanted to know because the people were asking me. And I was wondering, well what section of 6.5 kilometres are they . . . I was thinking Sucker River. And that brings me back to where I've been asked to talk about the road north of La Ronge to Sucker River. The First Nations community there is about 28 kilometres from La Ronge north, going north. It's very old pavement, chewed up, bad. I know sometimes people get very frustrated with it.

We want our tourists to come up there, and unfortunately . . . you want to have good highways for the tourists to come up and enjoy the beautiful North, and that road is not really . . . It needs some serious looking at it.

And I know we petitioned. I know band council has raised questions to it, and many have raised, you know, concerns back and forth over the years. And any work that can be done to correct some of that road . . . and I think about it even from, we'll say from, let's say LT's . . . So Waskesiu junction where you go to Waskesiu, it's a very nice road. But you get beyond that and you start to see a lot of wear and tear.

And I know they've done some bridge replacements and some culverts and different things on that road because they were bad. But that highway's starting to get pretty worn down with, you know, the amount of trucks on it and stuff like that. So you're telling . . . I notice it, you know, your vehicles. It's like everywhere else, so I guess I'll leave it with you with that. If you can give me a little update on Sucker River, and then I have another question once we're done with that, on Sucker River going into the community.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Okay, well that particular chunk, it's actually not on the current plan. But you know, we're aware that there's some problems there, and you know, we're continuing to look at it. And you know, we can maybe get it on the priority list here later on, but at the present time it's not on our current plan.

Mr. Vermette: — You know, I think if you could have your officials have a look at it, you know, maybe it warrants having a look at it, seeing what you can do to improve it. Like I mean, it's for safety and stuff like that. Like I mean, sometimes I know even myself, I like making comments that unfortunately sometimes we lose some of the vehicles in some of the potholes and they're gone, and then they pop up and you see them and they're on their way.

But on a more serious note, for safety it would be nice to look at some of that, conditions. And if you guys can look at it, I know the leadership over there would appreciate it for the residents. And you know, we have quite a few residents along there, whether it's English Bay, Sucker River, La Ronge Indian Band First Nation. And you have different communities along there, Stanley Mission. So if you could look at that, that would be great.

I know on this . . . and maybe I'll just mention it to you. I was going to reach out to you. I know La Ronge Indian Band has requested a number of times, for safety, when it comes off the highway, you know, to have turning lanes for the big trucks or for vehicles off the main run because it's not much of a . . . You know, so when I think about that Sucker River, I know, has put in an application within the La Ronge Indian Band.

And I don't know if you guys have got that or if you're looking at your budgets and saying well, you know what, we might be able to do it this year and meet with them. I know they've applied or put in a request. And the band council asked me, could you please just see. I said, well you know what? We're doing Highways estimates. I could ask them and see if they'll look at it.

So it's actually at Sucker River. It's 27 kilometres north of La Ronge. And they've got a new store, and you know, they're trying to promote business so people coming in off the highway, you know, 102. It's about 27 kilometres to Sucker River right from La Ronge going on the northern road. So if you would have a . . . They want a turning lane where you can have a turning lane for safety because they want the big trucks to pull in. They want, you know, people to come in, stop in, and treat them, you know, as hospitality to say here, we have a store; we have service to provide you if you want. So it helps them as entrepreneurs but it also helps their community, and it lets people know that, hey, you're welcome here in our community. And they want to work.

So if we can look at that, I think that would be much appreciated

from the councillor who's working on that, trying to get that going. So I don't know if you have money or if you have seen the request, but I just was asked to mention it. And seeing we're in committee, I thought it would be a good time to ask you about it.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — It's something that, you know, we can certainly take a look at. As you well know, we're really into safety, so we're trying to fix up a lot of the safety issues within the province. And, Fred, do you want to add anything to that?

Mr. Antunes: — Yes, I'm not specifically aware of this specific project yet, but what I will do is have my northern region team — they look after turning lanes and those types of things — I'll have them reach out to the community and make sure we have the information we need, and we can do a safety assessment and then get it into the prioritization process. So I'll have them reach out to the community.

Mr. Vermette: — Okay, what I'll do is maybe just send over the band councillor's name and number to your office, and then if you guys want to reach out to him, by all means please do. Anything we can do for safety, like you say, it's a positive. I think that would be good to welcome tourists and our northern and southern cousins coming together to visit and see the beauty in the North. We want to promote that and it helps the business, entrepreneurs, and stuff like that. So that's good.

The other area I was going to ask you on, I guess, gravel road goes into . . . and I know they've been doing some work on it, so maybe you can give me an update with the monies that you're allocating. It's gravel and an upgrade and an update on Highway No. 915 into Stanley Mission. You usually travel, like, the 40 kilometres north, and then you go in for about 40 kilometres into Stanley Mission. Beautiful community.

[14:45]

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — We're going to have to talk about this.

Mr. Antunes: — Sorry about that. So with the Stanley Mission road, so yes, there are some issues there that are . . . It's quite expensive to fix because you're in the shield blasting rock, things like that. So we aren't doing any work like that right now. We are considering that in the future. It's on our radar. We're looking at it in our prioritization process so we're considering, you know, further upgrades.

But what I can tell you is over the last two years, last year and this year, we are doing some base stabilization. So we've been meeting with the band, talking about where we want to do the work. So last year we did 10 kilometres of base stabilization. This year we're going to do another 20 kilometres. And what we're doing is basically putting in about 3 inches of base over top. It'll cover some of the protruding rocks and improve the surface, and there'll be about 6 kilometres left to do after this year. And we are looking at it for the more significant geometric improvements.

Mr. Vermette: — No, and again I know I travel that road quite a bit. And yes, it definitely needed some tender love and care, and you know, probably timely, especially with the tourists and the amount of . . . You know, it's a big community now and they

do a lot of travelling back and forth for medical, for supplies, and everything else that they do. Again, so I mean, yes, any time you can improve our road conditions for safety. And like I said, you're looking at, maybe later down the road, doing some, you know, whether it's blasting or whatever you have to do. I understand what you're saying.

So now if you guys can keep that on your radar, I know the leadership does all it can, local leadership, to advocate for the community and get what they can. And I know there's contracts with them to do some maintenance and stuff. So I know that they're always trying to do what they can.

Having said that, another area, if I could, you could see it comes out from Montreal Lake. It's the Molanosa road. We call it the Molanosa road. For, you know, yourselves it would be 969. If you could give me a little bit of information on that, if there's any plans to, you know, just do the regular maintenance. You know, if you could give me a little bit of information on that, that would be helpful.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — I guess, you know, if you can give us the information on it. We don't have it on the plan here right now so, you know, you could certainly talk about it, let us know about it.

Mr. Vermette: — Thank you. Well actually when you leave the community of Montreal Lake you come off the Highway No. 2 and then you get about 5, 6 kilometres into Montreal Lake. Then you go through Timber Bay and then it goes across, right. It's about 117 kilometres total length. You get into the junction, Creighton junction. You meet up with the Creighton junction in the end if you go right through.

And we have a lot of people who traditionally live there. It's their trapline, it's where they live, it's their residence and they have, Molanosa has a graveyard where they bury their loved ones, people from the area. And that road, they sometimes hope that it's maintained properly so that, you know, they can travel back and forth, you know, bury their loved ones, but also get to their home where they live along that highway. And I realize there's been a lot of harvesting of wood out of there and they have done work on it. And the road's been pretty beat up sometimes too. And we're hoping that that road can be maintained properly as best it can to provide service for the people that are there.

But I do also want to, you know . . . I know sometimes, you know, you've got a tough job and, you know, that's the way it is. But I want to say for the Ministry of Highways, we've called into P.A. [Prince Albert] because that's who looks after and takes care of the maintenance whether it's a contract you have — I think it's a contract, or you know, that does it — or Highways if it's the full length. We call in there because sometimes I'll get a call from some of the family who are burying a loved one in wintertime and the roads whether it's, you know, condition needs to go over. And I just want to pass that on to your people if you could in P.A., that when we've asked and we've phoned and reached out to them, whether we've contacted La Ronge first and then they give us the number or we go, we've contacted, my office has contacted Highways out of P.A. and they have taken care of that.

So if you would pass that on to those . . . You know, when people

are grieving the loss of a loved one and they have to bury them, they want to get there for a funeral. And they've done that whether it's winter. There's been a few times where somewhere there's been, you know, the road needs to be taken care of. And just pass that on that they have done that, so sometimes it's important that people feel like, you know, when they have a concern it gets responded to, so I want to pass that on.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Thanks. Certainly thank you for that. It's a testament to how hard our workers work out there. And I certainly can attest to it as we have in the wintertime, you know, we've got some bad winter conditions at times. And, yes, truthfully it's an amazing job that they do.

Mr. Antunes: — So on 969 I can tell you, so we don't have any current plans to do any major work on there. Routine maintenance is currently what we have planned. I think we are going to be putting in a delineation light at the intersection of 106, or at the intersection of Highway 969 . . . and is it Highway 106 or 102? So we're going to be doing an intersection light there, but no major plans.

And if I could, I also want to go back to the La Ronge . . . because I want to make sure I get on the record. So I gave you some information that was incorrect. Our team went back and looked at it. So the sign that's up there is, actually was put up by mistake. It is not for the job up on the gravel road improvements up on Highway 905. Apparently it's for a project we're looking at doing under an agreement with the federal government in a couple of years, and it's been put up way in advance. So we're going to be taking the sign down. It was put up by mistake. So I apologize for providing the wrong information.

Mr. Vermette: — Well no, and I appreciate that, for clarifying that. So those that are out there listening to this, don't cut that sign down yet. They're going to remove it themselves.

But on a serious note, any time we can bring up issues from northern Saskatchewan when it comes to safety about roads, it's very important. And I know that sometimes some of the . . . and maybe Highways can help us. Our trappers, some of them live a traditional lifestyle, and they still try to pass that on to their grandchildren, the next generation. And some of these have been generation after generation in the trap area, and you know, they see these harvesters coming in and harvesting just massive volumes of wood and don't feel like they're ever being consulted, and First Nations and Métis, and it's frustrating.

And I say this in a way that obviously the roads are built and they come in and harvest out and they, you know, they're harvesting out. And sometimes, you know, these companies want to come in and it's fine. And there's other areas to bring this up in as concern, but they do, do a lot of wear and tear, these big trucks, on the roads. And we understand that and we know that. They understand that there. And they're willing to work with industry in a positive way to make sure their traditional areas are protected, whether they trap, whether they have a certain medicines that they have — berries, mushrooms, like the list goes on — and stuff like that.

And Highways actually can play a role. If you can, you know, stop some of those trucks from harvesting the way they are, you know, as the volume, would be help maybe. You can give

Environment a help and say to them, we're not going to let those trucks take all this wood out there. They're causing too much damage on these highways. So maybe they'll slow down on the volume, and everyone'll be very happy over there.

I say that to you. In a way I know it's not in your control, but just so you know that I see the way it is and I see the pounding that some of these . . . You know, it's heavy loads coming out of there, whether it's gravel or the main highways. Obviously it has to have an effect on it. I've seen some of the potholes and I mean I don't know if that's causing it, but you know, when I say that, I just wanted to make sure for those, you know, trappers out there that . . . And they do, they do care about it. And the roads that they want to travel on, sometimes those semis, man, they just tear up. They're heavy, like, they're . . . the amount of volume they're hauling is heavy. So with that, I just wanted to put that in there.

Now you had mentioned about grass-cutting, and this is something that's interesting. I've had people . . . whether it's SaskPower or along the highways or it's Highways that are responsible for taking care of the grass-cutting or trees and all the different things that go on. Do you guys contract that out to . . . and is it Saskatchewan companies that . . . Do you know? Or is it just whoever applies can apply? I'm just curious to see.

Mr. Antunes: — Yes, and the mowing programs that we do, we've had two different programs. One's mowing, and then one we do some brush-clearing, and most of that work is contracted. We do some brush-clearing, a little bit of it, but most of it's contracted. The mowing is all done through public tenders, so it depends on who bids on the work and who gets it, and the brush-clearing, in most cases, there will be tenders or invitational tenders. So it really just depends on who bids on the work and who gets the work.

[15:00]

When you're up in more remote communities, it's probably harder. It's probably more local residents that are probably involved in it because they're there, I would suspect. But for the most part, it's all tendered out.

Mr. Vermette: — Could you, for the committee, could you submit, once you know the tender, who they are . . . companies are, where they're from, if they're out-of-province or in-province? Would you be able to provide that information for the committee at some point, later date?

Mr. Antunes: — Yes, we certainly could. There . . . I think a lot of the tenders are actually out right now. So we don't have the final results yet. But yes, once we have the results of the tendering, we can provide information on that.

Mr. Vermette: — Thank you. I'd appreciate that. It's just helpful because I know some people have raised it to me and saying, you know, making sure, you know, that we want to try to make sure our Saskatchewan residents have access, and hopefully they're successful and there's opportunities for them to provide. As we know, tough times with COVID, everything else, people are struggling to make ends meet, so if we can encourage . . . and hopefully that happens. And again it's nice if sometimes it's some of our First Nations, our Métis entrepreneurs that have access and the chance so that I can encourage, you know, that

type of a working relationship.

So I know my colleague's here, and I was supposed to go on for an hour, but I'm going to take a little more of his time because I know he's patient and he's forgiving. But you know, on more of a note, just want to say to the minister, committee members, and your staff, your senior staff, thank you for giving me an opportunity to ask some questions and committing to providing those information documents at a later date so that we can have them as a committee. I think that information would be helpful for me.

And you know, at this point, I don't have a lot more questions, again as I said. Thank you for giving me an opportunity and trying to answer the questions that I had that people have raised to me. So with that I just, Madam Chair, say thank you very much and I'll turn it over to my colleague here to take over. He's not a nice guy like I am so enjoy your next two hours.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Certainly thank you for the questions and they're thoughtful questions. And like I said, I'm neighbouring you up there too so I certainly know a lot about the North. But you know, I think we've got a good budget for up there this year and we'll try and get as much work done as possible. So certainly thank you for the questions.

Mr. Vermette: — And like I said, if I see that the work's not being done, I've got your cell number now — I'll call you.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Vermette. And I'll open it to other committee members. And I'll recognize Mr. Wotherspoon who is now in for Mr. Belanger.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Well thanks so much, Madam Chair. And Mr. Minister, great to join you and your deputy minister and officials that are connecting to this work here today. And thank you to them and so many others that connect to the important work of Highways day in, day out. Thanks for the time we have here this afternoon.

I'll start with a few more sort of general questions that I think are being asked to most of the ministers and most of the ministries by our various critics, and then we'll get into, you know, some areas more specific to Highways, although these are specific to Highways. With respect to FTEs [full-time equivalent], what's happening in Highways this year?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Well you know, this is truthfully, this is a very good budget for Highways this year. We're investing \$830 million into the Saskatchewan highways in '21, which as you well know is a very large budget, and 520 million of that is for the capital investments. And these are great numbers that, you know, part of it is coming on the stimulus end, and the other thing is, you know, we're looking at all the safety aspects that we can do with highways.

As you well know, a good example is the Broncos crash site, which is actually in my constituency. And out of the 13 recommendations, we've pretty well covered them all. The last one, this was with SaskPower just moving the power line there, but the rest of them have all been covered.

But we're also, you know, we're working all across the province

between the different things that we're doing — you know, the twinning north of Prince Albert for about 8 kilometres, and then all the passing lanes that we're putting in. There's passing lanes on highways 2, 3, 12, 14, and 16; and three sets of passing lanes on Highway 7 on the Kindersley to the Saskatchewan-Alberta border; two sets of passing lanes and widening on Highway 5 Saskatoon to Highway 2; and completing the remaining passing lanes on Highway 39 on Corinne into Estevan.

So there's quite a few things, and I can certainly go through here and talk about quite a few of the other things that we're doing if you so want. I can keep on going here for quite a while because we're doing a lot of work this year. And you know, we're doing 250 kilometres of repaving and 510 kilometres of pavement sealing, 225 kilometres of medium treatments like micro surfacing, 25 kilometres of gravel rehabilitation, and 280 kilometres of thin-membrane surface and rural highway upgrades, including 100 kilometres delivered through stimulus funding.

Sixty kilometres of twinning and passing lanes, and of course 44.5 million to rehabilitate and replace 14 bridges and multiple culverts across the province. There are many things, and actually Doyle was just talking about the mowing end of it. You know, that's going to be nice. That's something we've certainly heard about, increasing our mowing budget.

And I can talk about some of the safety aspects in here too which, you know, we got the flashing warning lights going at the junction of Highway 55 and 240, intersection illumination at the junction of Highway 9 and Highway 18, intersection rumble strips at the junction of Highway 9 and Highway 22, intersection improvements on Highway 364 at Balgonie, intersection improvements at the junction of Highway 11 and North Grid Road north of Dundurn, pedestrian crosswalk . . .

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Minister? Minister?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Yes?

Mr. Wotherspoon: — These are all really good updates and we can go through them, and I've read quite a few of them through the budget. But my question, and I probably was . . . it's hard sometimes to hear, I know, in the masks as well. But my question was, what's happening with FTEs, full-time equivalents, inside the ministry this year?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — There are no full-time equivalent changes.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — No changes. Wonderful. With respect to any of the COVID dollars or expenditure, how does that intersect with your ministry or has it at all?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Well we have, you know, as you probably know, like we've got another \$300 million on the stimulus end of it due to, you know, the COVID end of it to stimulate our economy and to keep our people out there working, to keep the contractors working, the highway crews going. Especially on the contracting end of it, we want to see our contractors get busy.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So this budget here has 300 additional

million, 300 million additional dollars that are dedicated exclusively as sort of the response to COVID and to secure, you know, get the important projects done, but to secure economic fortunes as well?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Yes, the 300 million is extra stimulus spending that we're going to be doing within Highways to, like I said, to keep our contractors working. The contractors actually seem to be very happy with the, you know, with the tendering that's going on and it's certainly keeping them busy. So you know, like I said, we're happy about that. Plus it's improving the safety and improving the highways within the province.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Where would I find the \$300 million profiled within the budget, the additional dollars?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — I just kind of missed that question a little bit. I was just talking to the deputy minister there. And like, that whole 300 isn't going to be spent this year. We're doing part of it this year. It's over, I believe, it's two years, a two-year plan.

Mr. Antunes: — 3.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Sorry, three-year plan.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay so three years, 300 million. So is this year's allocation \$100 million out of that then?

Mr. Antunes: — Yes, so for this year, there's a \$134.5 million increase for stimulus over last year. I think last year we had 56 million, I think is a rough number, if I remember correctly, close to that, in that \$50 million range. So this year there's an additional \$134.5 million on the capital side for stimulus. In addition to that, there is also an additional \$14 million that's being used for rural roads for the RIRG [rural integrated roads for growth] program. There's \$14 million that's part of that 300 million that's going towards . . . There's some money going to rural roads, so some of that is part of our transfers to third-party capital. There's about \$14 million there and there's another \$650,000 for airports, for community airport program.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks for that information. And so when we're talking about the \$300 million stimulus over the next number of years, this year the budget contains 134 million of those dollars. What's the schedule then for deployment in the next two years with respect to this pool of dollars?

Mr. Antunes: — Yes. So if we talk about the total \$300 million there was, I think, 256 is for highways, \$44 million for municipalities, and then there's about \$1.5 million for the community airport program. So that's over the three-year period.

So last year we had 650,000 in for airports, \$14 million . . . Actually then we increased it at the end of the year so that went up, I think, to \$14 million in the budget and I think we added 11 at the end. This year there's going to be another 14 in that for rural roads. The \$650,000 for the airports, and then there's going to be about \$180 million in total on, kind of, construction this year. And then the rest will be spent next year . . . [inaudible].

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Sure. So of those dollars that we're discussing, what will be the distribution for next year? And then is it the year following that as well, or is the three years . . . We're

in the middle. We're in year number two. So the next year, what do we have left to deploy on that front?

Mr. Antunes: — Well yes, I have . . . Just give me a minute to figure out the number for that.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay.

Mr. Antunes: — So next year there'll be about \$69 million left in capital and about \$7.5 million for the rural integrated roads for growth program for municipal roads.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you very much for that information. With respect to sort of, I guess, privatization in a broad sense, do you have anything that's being privatized this year within the ministry or any plans that you're acting upon on that front?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — No, we have no plans.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — What's the state of play with respect to lawsuits and litigation that would be ongoing for the ministry?

[15:15]

Mr. Antunes: — A specific area or just in general?

Mr. Wotherspoon: — In a general sense, I guess. You know, what are you dealing with right now and what's the value of the damages that are being sought? So how many lawsuits, a bit of the nature of them, and the values of the damages being sought.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — We'll have to go talk about this just a little bit.

The Chair: — I just wanted to acknowledge for the record that committee member Jeremy Cockrill has now joined us.

Mr. Antunes: — Yes, we have around 30 claims that we're dealing with.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Do you have a total on the value of the damages that are sought?

Mr. Antunes: — Yes, so the damages are around \$79 million. That's the amount sought. Some are not specified.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Right. And how does that compare over the last number of years? What's the trend looking like on this? Both the 30 claims and then the value of 79 million?

Mr. Antunes: — I don't have that information here with me today. I'd have to look into that and find out. Yes, I'd have to look into that and find out. You know, there have been a number of additional claims that've been added. Some are related to the Humboldt Broncos bus crash. I can't remember if those happened last year or this year. So we can get that information for you and just let you know kind of what the change is.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Sure. Yes, thank you very much. If you're able to supply that information when you're able to, that's appreciated.

With respect to the tragic site of the Broncos bus tragedy, it was identified that the recommendations . . . The minister spoke briefly to this and it was a feeling that the recommendations had been fulfilled with the exception of the recommendation around SaskPower. I guess I just would seek clarity from the minister to make sure that that's the case and what exactly is outstanding and what the timeline is on that front.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Yes. All of the recommendations have been done so far at the Broncos crash site. You know, we've done everything there. There were 13 recommendations, and you know, 12 of them have been done. And you know, there's the rumble strips and the lighting and the signage, and we just did the sightlines actually this spring, were done. And the last one is SaskPower, and they're going to be moving as soon as they . . . SaskPower is doing the drawings on moving on the power line. As soon as that is done then all 13 recommendations will have been covered.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Well thank you. It's certainly really important that that work is completed. I thank all those that have been involved in making sure that those recommendations have been acted on. And thanks for the update as well.

Shifting attention just a little bit to the Saskatoon bypass, I'm wondering specific to this project, what lessons were learned from the Provincial Auditor's report into the assemblage of land for the GTH [Global Transportation Hub] and the Regina bypass, that the ministry will now be incorporating into this project?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — You know, it's in the very early stages, the Saskatoon freeway project, and you know, we're undergoing extensive public consultation. And we've actively engaged with the Swale Watchers in the consultation, as you probably have seen in the news. That's been on there. And you know, we'll have to work around that end of it. And the Ministry of Highways are going to be dealing with several regulators at, you know, protecting the wildlife habitat.

We also have to . . . you know, with phase 2, public consultations has been completed and it's going to be reviewed before completing any of the next steps. You know, there's been a lot of people who have visited the information. I think 9,000 have gone to the freeway website to look at this. But it's in the very early planning stages, and you know, construction's a number of years away.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So just specific to the auditor's report that came down with respect to the Regina bypass, the assemblage of land there, as well as with the GTH and many of the problems that originated with some of that early work and process and choices that were made, what lessons have been learned from those projects, from that report? And how are those recommendations and that learning being incorporated into this project?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Obviously this was before my time as minister, so you know, I'm not that familiar with it. So what I'll do is I'll let my deputy minister answer that end of it.

Mr. Antunes: — Yes, so I think there's a couple of main changes. I think the key lessons learned are two. So one is doing the functional planning way ahead of construction. So the

ministry's past practice was to say, okay, we're going to do a general location study which says, okay, I've got a corridor that's 500 metres wide, and the road could be anywhere within that 500 metres. And then that study is done and kind of shelved, and typically you don't go back and do more engineering to figure out exactly what the land footprint is until about five years before construction starts. And that's kind of been the ministry's practice for a number of years.

When we started the Saskatoon freeway it was the first time that we actually said, we now know what the general location is; let's do the functional planning right now, so that we can take it to that next step and determine exactly what land we need. So basically at the time the functional planning study is done, we'll have defined right-of-way drawings. We'll know exactly what land we need.

So then what we can do is we can start to assemble the land over time, which is one of the auditor's recommendations is that, you know, trying to not rush into buying land. Try to buy it well in advance. And then you can do it when you have . . . A couple of advantages: one, you've got a willing buyer, willing seller relationship, so if somebody wants to exit their land, we know what the land we need is. They're willing to sell. If we can find the money then we can go ahead and buy it. The other thing it does is it allows you to buy it before you have a whole bunch of development going on, so that maybe you can get better prices.

So you know, those are kind of the two main, I think, things or findings that we're making direct changes out of the auditor's report in terms of how we assemble land. And it really starts with the planning, so you know where it's going to go, what land I exactly need, and then being able to assemble the land in an orderly fashion.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Are there challenges on this front or problems when a project basically is sited and largely mapped many years in advance but long before the ministry acts to procure that land?

Mr. Antunes: — I wouldn't say that there's challenges. I think there's huge advantages because what we find is when you have a corridor that's 500 metres wide, the landowners are going, I don't really have any certainty; I don't know if I can develop. We won't let them develop in that 500-metre-wide footprint, so there's a lot of uncertainty. So once we narrow it down and say, well no, this is where the right-of-way is going to go; this is where the interchanges are; this is how you're going to get on, how you're going to get off, where the service roads are going to be, then people can start planning for the future.

So it actually creates more certainty for people, and so I don't think it'll create challenges. I think we're going to find that people will be appreciative of the fact that they know what's going on, and they can start planning for it. And then we can make like, as I said, planned investments over the next number of years before it's built.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — What's the current projected cost of this project?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — This project is a long ways out yet. So we don't, you know, we don't know. This project is quite a long

ways out. And we're, you know, looking at . . . You couldn't even . . . I don't think you could put a number on it at the present time because it's, like I said, it's just so far out. It's just strictly in the planning stages for right now. So we don't know for sure what the costing would be. And of course, you know, as time goes on the prices of aggregate and asphalt can go up. It can go down. Probably up. There's so many things involved that it would be impossible to throw a price on it at the present time.

[15:30]

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I appreciate that. There must be an ability to . . . There must be a bit of an operating ballpark, a bit of a range that you're looking at for the capital needs on this front.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Yes, we don't know what we're building, so we just, we don't have that yet.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks. It sort of gets to my next question, which is what the timeline is on this front. So do you have a sense of when you'd be looking to commence this project, to begin this project? Do you have an idea of when you'd want to conclude this project? Do you have further, I guess, do you have timelines around the kind of process to develop out the plans further to certain stages or to evaluate the project?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — We'll just go consult on this for a minute.

Mr. Antunes: — Yes, so we're currently in phase 2 of that functional planning study, and phase 2 will be done this year. There's one more phase, which we expect will be completed next year. And then after that, as the minister said, there's no plans for construction. I think that, you know, we've been telling everybody it's, you know, 10 to 15 years away but there's no set timeline, no set date.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I appreciate that. Ten to 15 years off, the studies, you've got the functional studies that you've taken on. What's the cost that's been undertaken for those studies?

Mr. Antunes: — Yes. So, so far it's been \$3.9 million, and we expect that the total cost will be about \$5.3 million.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks so much. Now some have questioned or discussed the question of the need in Saskatoon on this front, if it already has new north and south commuter bridges that allow traffic to largely bypass the residential streets already, I guess. So some are questioning the need for this. It would be a significant project. Could you speak I guess to those questions that folks have?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Well the whole thing is like . . . Yes. Like I mean, we're having people, we have had public consultation on it. And you know, like I said, it's years away from doing anything. So you know, we want to make sure that we do it right and that's why we have the public consultation on it. That's why we have, you know, there's the environmental aspect that's going to end up coming up. There's quite a few things there that will have to be looked at.

But really we're only just in the planning stage and, like I said, it's still a long ways off. So you know, you're always going to

have some people that don't want it, some people that do. And it's something that we're looking at. And that's how come we have the public consultation on it, to make sure that we're going to be doing the right things there.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Fair enough. We're \$5 million in with the studies that have been undertaken. It's not insignificant. Certainly that's a fraction of the costs that the project will actually cost. You must have a sense of sort of the need. You know, certainly there's questions out there as to, you know, the need with the new north and south commuter bridges that will be in place.

Mr. Antunes: — Yes, so I guess the south . . . The Saskatoon freeway is not . . . So it's going to start at Highway 11 and go around I guess to the east and then come back around the north and then end up on I think Highway 7. So there's not a southwest quadrant to the freeway. So that, you know, that south commuter part that's already there, that will still be in place in the future. As we're developing the Saskatoon freeway study, we are doing it in consultation and co-operation with the city of Saskatoon. The city of Saskatoon has a traffic-demand model, so we're working with the city of Saskatoon on their traffic-demand model, incorporating it into ours.

And we're basing the future projections for the freeway . . . are based on a population in the Saskatoon area, greater Saskatoon area, because it's not just Saskatoon. It's that greater Saskatoon area of . . . I think it's around 830,000 people in about 2063. So we're trying to project, you know, that far out, what are going to be the traffic patterns taking into account the fact that we already have this north commuter parkway, and we have this road that's going to be going around the perimeter of Saskatoon. And what we've seen with some of the work that we've been doing with the traffic demands that are generated when you have that many people is that in some cases that this is going to be a 10-lane freeway, especially up on the north side of the city. So there is going to be significant demand from traffic, like traffic demand for this even with the commuter bridge that's there right now. That's what the engineering has shown us so far.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Right. Okay, so just on that engineering then, what sort of projections are you looking at as far as the number of vehicles per day for utilization?

Mr. Antunes: — I don't have that detail with me but we can certainly provide that in terms of the traffic volumes. I'm pretty sure that in the public consultations we did there was some information that showed volumes at the different intersections and things like that. But we can definitely provide that information.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. Well, I appreciate that. And yes, so if you're able to supply that, that's really helpful. And I guess just to the minister: I know this stuff seems like it's a long ways off and you're doing this preliminary work and I'm asking questions about how to incorporate the auditor's work and stuff but, you know, we can't go through another experience . . . the public shouldn't go through another experience like we did with the Regina bypass where, you know . . . Anyways I won't get too far into . . . I do have some questions about that project, but that's why these sorts of questions I think do matter at this time as well.

Thank you for committing to get the information back on vehicles. If you can also break that out with any of the other additional information, breaking it out around heavy trucks, you know, what component we're looking at there within that, that would be helpful as well.

Mr. Antunes: — Yes, we'll see what we have for information available right now, and then we'll see if we can provide it in the way that helps, that is easy to interpret.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks so much. And as far as the financing of this project, I guess, is the government contemplating this as another P3 [public-private partnership] project, or are you looking at traditional procurement on this front?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — This project is so far away that no, nothing has been looked at like that at the present time.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So across government there hasn't been any . . . it hasn't been considered how to finance this project? And there hasn't been P3 considerations to this project?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Well obviously there hasn't been any cost put to it. So you know, like I said, it's so early in the planning stage on it that no, nothing has been done like that.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And what's the state of play with respect to any environmental assessment or impacts on this front with respect to the project? I know we've heard a few concerns on this front.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Well there's, you know, and of course . . . and it's been well publicized that the Swale Watchers have been there. So you know, there's quite a few things that would have to be done, you know, when it finally comes to fruition when it's going to get done.

[15:45]

We've got quite a few regulators we have to deal with. We'd have to deal with Fisheries and Oceans and Transport Canada, Impact Assessment Agency of Canada. There are many things. You know, obviously we have the Wanuskewin over there. So there are quite a few things that we would have to do on that. Like you'd have to look at, you know, the geographic makeup of the river valley. On the environmental end there's quite a few things that have to be done, and rightfully so. And so these are things that all would have to be done.

But that's like I said, it's years away. You know, things can change. So there isn't that . . . You know, you don't want to be doing them right at the present time, to get all the assessments done on the regulations because it's just so far away yet that it would almost be pretty well impossible to do.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So what will be required? Has there been any environmental assessments conducted to date? And will there be any more in this current tranche of work involved in the studies that have been referenced?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — There's a lot of baseline work being done on the environmental end but, you know, it's too far away

to do any assessment on it at the present time.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And is it the position of the government that this is the kind of project that triggers duty to consult with First Nations and Métis people?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Yes, actually it is. There's a duty to consult, you know, with the unoccupied Crown land in the South Saskatchewan River Valley. And letters have been sent to three First Nations: Beardy's and Okemasis, One Arrow, and Whitecap Dakota. And three letters to the Métis locals: Local 11, Local 126, and Local 165. And you know, there's going to be some other First Nations to be consulted. But you know, so yes, there will be some duty to consult on the project if it were to go forward.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Sorry. I appreciate the recognition of that duty and I guess the action that there has been an undertaking and an expression to various First Nations already as well as Métis locals. What's that process look like, as far as timelines and process moving forward?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Yes, you know, we haven't received any formal responses back from them at the present time but, you know, it's going to be a while here. It would have to be something that was done closer to when you were actually going to be doing the construction. So like I said, there's been no issues brought up by them at the present time, the ones that were sent the letter.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Now is there any plans beyond sending the letters at this point? Is there any plans to meet with leadership of the impacted or respective First Nations and Métis locals?

Mr. Antunes: — Yes, I think we've been trying really hard to make sure that we have . . . that we don't just do duty to consult, that we're also consulting on the project itself. The Saskatoon Tribal Council is part of the steering committee that we have for the project. We have been meeting with a number of First Nations that have land in the area to talk about their development plans, things like that. And then we've also, you know, had just general outreach to any First Nations in the area that's interested in the project.

And I guess the other thing that's important to know is that we have been working very closely with Wanuskewin in making sure that, as we develop the freeway footprint, that we're taking into account their future plans for the UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization] heritage designation site at Wanuskewin Heritage Park. And they've been involved intimately in the project.

And we have a number of technical working groups. There's an environment and technical working group and we have invited the different First Nations groups to attend that. And you know, we actually make it a more . . . we don't make it inclusive. If people want to be part of the technical working group, we welcome them to join and participate.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks for the responses. Certainly the duty to consult is critical. More than that, the involvement and partnership is really important. I appreciate hearing the understanding as well of the importance of Wanuskewin and UNESCO heritage designation, and making sure that it has the

space and latitude that it needs there.

We'll shift gears just a little bit to maybe the minister's favourite project, the Regina bypass. And I'd like to just . . . I guess first off, what was the payment to the P3 consortium this year?

Mr. Antunes: — For the year 2020, like the year we're going into or . . .

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Let's look at both, I guess. Let's look at what it was in the previous year and then in the current fiscal related to this budget.

The Chair: — Mr. Wotherspoon, the Regina bypass from the previous year is not in these estimates and not in this budget. So we're dealing with these estimates and this budget, so if it's something that's in this budget, you can ask the question.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I guess, the reason is it's a contract and it's an ongoing contract, so just making sure. Certainly it's appropriate and standard to ask questions around schedule of payments. And I'd be interested in knowing of course what it was last year, this current fiscal, and then what the schedule of payments are in the years ahead.

Mr. Antunes: — So for this year, I don't have the total but I can give you the numbers. So there's 13.015 million scheduled for operating and maintenance payments. The debt charges are \$25.6 million, and the rehabilitation costs are \$1.704 million. Those are the payments that are in our budget. This does not include a principal payment that is made as part of the . . . There's a principal component that's not part of our budget, and for this year that principal component is \$18.52 million.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And that payment, does that come from SaskBuilds or where does that flow from?

Mr. Antunes: — So my understanding is . . . And I'm not an accountant on this. So my understanding is that the payment comes out of obviously the Government of Saskatchewan, but it shows up as a reduction in a capital obligation on public accounts is where it shows up on the principal payment. That's my understanding.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — The total payments this year are about 60 million. Is that correct?

Mr. Antunes: — So it's 39.7 million for the items that I first listed off, and then when you include the principal, yes it's about \$57 million.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And what was the payments last year?

Mr. Antunes: — Last year there was 12.4 million in O & M [operating and maintenance] payments. The debt charge last year was \$26.167 million. The principal component was 17.955, and the rehabilitation payments were 23.95 million, is the information that I have here.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And what certainty do we have on this front as far as moving forward? Do you know the costs at this point for the out years, the years ahead of us, at this point for this project?

Mr. Antunes: — Total cost for capital payment on interest and principal is fixed, so it's \$44.122 million. So that's the same for the duration of the entire contract. The only thing that changes is the difference between interest and principal, because it's like a mortgage. As you pay off the principal, then the interest gets . . . the principal gets higher as you pay it off.

The operation and maintenance budgets, the only changes are those that are indexed for inflation. And that's a contractual obligation, so those are defined. And then the rehabilitation costs. At the time of bid the Regina Bypass Partners would have bid what their rehabilitation schedule was, so those costs were already known as well.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — No, that's helpful then. So just the O & M budget then. Where are we at this year, sorry, and what's the inflation that we're building in that allows for . . .

Mr. Antunes: — I think it's tied to the, you know, the standard inflation index of Canada, whatever it is. So it's tied to that. So I don't know what the exact number is but it's basically tied to some index.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And then the rehab schedule. Are you able to provide the rehab schedule? The cost schedule?

Mr. Antunes: — So the rehab schedule really varies by year, and it really depends on when the Regina Bypass partners planned on doing their major rehabilitations. So you know, it can be, some years it's \$800,000, other years it's 12 million, 13 million. So it really depends on kind of what they had predicted on when they would need to do major resurfacing or major bridge repairs and that type of stuff. So it's fairly variable, but like I say, it's defined in the contract.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Could you provide to committee members, maybe you have documents that you can supply to us today, but if you don't, could you undertake to get those documents? Anything around the fixed costs on this front and the schedules that we're speaking of here today.

Mr. Antunes: — Yes, we can look to see what type of information we can provide.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you very much. Were there any costs with the consortium this year that were not planned for and not part of the contract?

Mr. Antunes: — For this year coming up or last year's?

Mr. Wotherspoon: — The current fiscal. And fair question, and sure, the year that just closed. The year prior as well.

Mr. Antunes: — So the information I have here is that last year there was capital variations of, I think \$23,000. This year I'm not aware if there's any. I don't know if there's going to be any variations or any changes.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And just to make things simple for our folks at home and this critic right here, capital variations, can you just . . . what does that. . .

Mr. Antunes: — It's where we've asked the Regina bypass

partners to do something that wasn't originally planned in the contract or something that's new. A scope change, something that, you know, we hadn't anticipated.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Got you. And what was the capital variation last year? What was the project or the scope change?

Mr. Antunes: — I'll have to get that for you. I'm not sure what that was for.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks for being able to get that back or undertaking to get that back to us as committee members. What were the numbers for last year in terms of trucks per day on the bypass, heavy-haul trucks? While you're looking for it, if you're able to also share what they were the year prior.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Yes, well basically what I've got here is since the Regina bypass opened, it sees an average of 4,000 to 20,000 vehicles a day, 5,000 of which are transport trucks. So I guess that kind of . . . Is that what you were looking for?

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So I think that's . . . Is that a general sort of, is that an average or is that a sort of a general number? Do you know what the actual counts would be?

[16:00]

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Yes, that would be . . . Yes, that's since it has opened, that's what it's seen, an average of 4,000 to 20,000, which is quite variable, and 5,000 of those are transport trucks.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Right. But do you have a breakdown for the past couple of years? You must, because they're keeping a range.

Mr. Antunes: — Well we don't. So what we do is we do an average annual daily traffic. So it's since the bypass opened, so what we have is numbers for the one year since it was opened. So kind of, you know, after, you know, I think it opened in October 2019, so we have the one-year average to 2020 and then we'll get the average for the future year. So we don't have any previous numbers for the entire bypass. But so yes, we have the ADT [average daily traffic] and it's actually, you know, it varies by section depending on what it is. But you know, maybe the easiest thing is for us to just, you know, provide you a copy of this document if you'd like. It just shows what the traffic volumes are.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — That would be awesome. Thank you. Thank you very much. What were the annual targets, and where are we at in meeting those targets?

Mr. Antunes: — Yes, so the document kind of shows that too, so I think it depends on the section. At some sections you see that the traffic volumes that we were expecting are much higher, are higher than what we had anticipated. So if I look at the bypass between Victoria Avenue and Highway 33, the traffic volumes are 7,330. We had predicted around 6,350. We were expecting 1,250 trucks. We're actually at 1,340.

And keep in mind that half of the year was through a pandemic, so there's a bit of a . . . That wasn't planned for when we did the original projections, right? So it really varies by the section. In

some cases, as I said, the traffic volumes are higher than we had estimated and in some cases they're lower than we had estimated. But it is based on a traffic demand model, and then now you're getting into the real world and seeing what actually happens.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Sure. No, I appreciate that, and thanks for the information as well. Which sections haven't met targets?

Mr. Antunes: — The area where we haven't seen the traffic volume as high as we had anticipated was really on the bypass between . . . the west part of the bypass between Highway 1 and kind of up to, I guess, it looks like it's up to kind of Rotary Avenue and 9th Avenue North. So up to 9th Avenue North, that's the section where it's been lower than we had predicted.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And what was . . .

Mr. Antunes: — So on Highway 1 between Pilot Butte and the bypass, so it's lower there as well.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And can you just share what was targeted on that front or modelled on that front and then what the reality's been?

Mr. Antunes: — Yes, so the one between Pilot Butte and the bypass, we had estimated that we would have about 29,200 vehicles a day, 3,000 trucks, and we're seeing about 22,600 with 2,230 trucks. And then on Highway 1 on the west side, between the bypass and kind of 9th Avenue North, we were expecting between 9 and 11,000 vehicles a day. We're up around 53 and 52 . . . 5,000 to 5,200. And the trucks are off a little bit too. So we had expected 1,700 trucks, we're at 900 or . . . 900 trucks, we're at 600.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And thank you for that information as well. For the section from 9th to Highway 11?

Mr. Antunes: — There we had estimated that we would be at about 2,000 vehicles a day. We're at 2,800. Thought we'd have 750 trucks, we're at 400.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And just where there's those gaps, that chunk for example from Highway 1 to 9th Avenue North, what do you attribute the, I guess, the gap there from the modelling through to the reality?

Mr. Antunes: — I think you have to go back and look at the assumptions and the model and what it predicted for, you know, development in the area, right? So that's where you'd have to go back and look at, because it's pretty hard to . . . you know, once you see the actual traffic volumes, you know, they are what they are. So you know, you have to go back to the traffic model and say, okay, what would I need to calibrate to kind of reflect these traffic volumes? So it could be some of the assumptions that were made, whether that was . . . yes, it could be just some of the assumptions that were made, or it could have been an error in the model too. That's also always possible.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks for the information. Have any further deficiencies been found on this project in the last year? Anything that's been identified that will impact us in this fiscal?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Yes, the answer there to the question,

the deficiency period is over. So from now on, anything that is out there is on the proponent.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So any deficiencies now that are identified, the proponent has to take care of, pay for? There's not a fiscal impact to the . . .

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — It's all on the proponent from now on.

Mr. Antunes: — And just to clarify, that was always the case. Even when there were deficiencies during the construction, those were their problem too. Like we did not . . . That was part of the contract. They needed to deal with those. So going forward, any problems that they identify, it's their responsibility.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So is it just a change in reporting? This isn't something then tracked and monitored by the ministry? Or is that the change?

Mr. Antunes: — Yes, so the ministry does do audits of their . . . They have to provide regular reports till we see what's going on. If they identify issues, they need to self-report them. And if we identify issues, then we'll identify them and they need to fix them. So it is monitor-audited throughout the whole entire operations period.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So you conduct some sort of audit or inspections as a ministry throughout this period. Would it be to the same extent of infrastructure that's wholly the province of Saskatchewan's?

Mr. Antunes: — Can you repeat the second part of the question?

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Would that be the same schedule or approach to inspections or audits for infrastructure like this through a P3 as it would be if it was just simply a highway that was sort of wholly owned by the province of Saskatchewan?

Mr. Antunes: — There's higher scrutiny on this because of the contractual regime that we have. There's higher scrutiny and higher inspection and audit on this than there would be on other roads around the province because we maintain those and it's, you know, we do that work. So this is a little bit different because we have a contractual relationship.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks again for the information. Has the proponent been penalized in any way? And if so, what's the value of the penalization?

Mr. Antunes: — Yes, I don't have that information here. It's laid out in the contract in terms of what the, you know, how the penalty regime works in terms of the . . . they're called nonconformances. So there's a mechanism in the contract to identify, you know, how they identify what those are and then how they rectify them. So I can provide information. I can find out right now whether they have anything in this current year right now that we're looking at, whether there's anything in that they've been penalized for.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — That would be appreciated, you know, if you're able to report what the, you know, what's planned for this year on that front or what's anticipated or what's being acted upon, I guess, and what sort of penalties were incurred in the

previous fiscal.

Mr. Antunes: — Well I guess they got . . . Somebody just told me that there have been no penalties incurred during the operation period yet.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And where are we at with lawsuits on the . . . related to the assemblage of land in this project?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — There's eight left to do thus far. So 15 of the 23 claims have been resolved up to this time. So there's eight left to go. And so we'll make sure that we continue working on that.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — There's eight left. And what's the value on those?

[16:15]

Mr. Antunes: — I think we'll have to get back to you on what the actual number is. Some are not related to . . . So it's hard to kind of put a . . . Like, I don't have that number with me, so I'll have to get back to you with what the value is of those claims.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Well thanks so much, and thanks for undertaking to get that information back to us as well. Just looking at some of the other aspects of the budget before us here, I see that the bridges budget is down about \$5 million here this year. I'm just looking if we can get some information on the prioritization of this year's funding. You know, certainly I know SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] has been and rural municipalities have been really identifying significant need for RM [rural municipality] bridge repairs. And I'm wondering as well how those requests connect to this pool of dollars.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — In the 2021, this year, we've committed 44.7 million to provincial stimulus funding and 10.5 million in federal funding through Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program to rebuild 100 roads in the next three years and 100 bridges in the next four years. So this is good news for our rural municipalities because there are a lot of older bridges out there that do need to be worked on, and it's something that this government is committed to helping out on and using some of the federal money at the same time.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I want to make sure I understand then where those dollars are profiled. Is there funding for bridges beyond the budget line that I read in subvote (HI08) which shows a reduction in \$5 million on the budget line there for bridges?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Are you talking about the highways . . . Was that the replacing of highways on 14 bridges, or are you talking about the RM end of it also?

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So yes, my question is . . . connects to both of them. So I'm looking directly at the allocations in the budget, page 77 of the budget, where it breaks down highways, airports, bridges. On the bridges component, the funding is down from last year. Last year it was 17 million; this year it's at 5 million . . . or at 12 million. So it's down 5 million. My mistake. And so if you could speak to that reduction. And then also my question, and I could ask them just separately, but my

question was, certainly the, you know, rural municipalities, SARM themselves have really identified the need for rural bridges to be rebuilt and replaced. So I'm wondering how this pool of funds intersects or connects to their needs.

Mr. Antunes: — So the \$5 million reduction is . . . You know, usually when we look at our overall programs we have, like, a long-term idea of where we want the funding for the different elements to be. So it's really tied to the projects that we're doing. So the \$5 million reduction is just a reflection of the nature of the projects that we're doing. It's kind of the main reason for that difference.

The money that we have allocated for doing the rural municipal bridge projects is actually part of the . . . It's in a different subvote. It's part of that RIRG program. It's part of the \$28 million that we provide to the municipalities. So it's kind of reported as third-party capital.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Well thanks for that information. And so maybe speak first of all then to the types of bridges that we're looking at here. These would be on provincial highways, the ones related to the subvote that's allocated for 12 million this year.

Mr. Antunes: — Yes, so that would include bridge replacements as well as major bridge rehabs. I know two major bridge rehabs that we're doing is Highway 1 just near Swift Current, so we're replacing both of those structures over the railway track. One's being completely replaced and one we're replacing the superstructure.

And then we're doing a major rehabilitation on Highway 11 north of Lumsden on the northbound lanes, the two bridges there. So that's another major project.

And then there's a variety of other projects that we outlined in the spring tender schedule that says, you know, replacements . . . or the fall tender plan. That would be minor bridges or bridges replaced with culverts around the province.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Appreciate the information there. So when RMs are looking for . . . where they're looking to access funding, that's coming from the rural integrated roads for growth program. And that's the \$28 million budget. Is that correct?

Mr. Antunes: — That's correct.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So then how are those dollars deployed to municipalities?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — That is done through SARM.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Through which, sorry?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — That's done through SARM.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So these dollars, do you know . . . So the 28 million goes, and then SARM directs those dollars to the RMs. Is there a funding model as far as how that's distributed, or do they do the prioritization of which projects or RMs receive those dollars?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Yes, there's a program management

board, and what it's done is they prioritize what needs to be done there. So that's the way that it works.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Is that 28 million then, is that all for . . . I think it's for bridges and roads, grid road infrastructure. Is there some distribution to all RMs based on some formula, and then is there some other capital project base for, you know, specific projects — bridge A, B, or C?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Yes, about 800 million of the rural integrated roads for growth program annual budget is considered fixed. It's required for SARM to administrate . . . administration, operation, and maintenance grants for the Clearing the Path network, bridge inspections, and rural traffic count program.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Sorry, how much of the budget is fixed?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Eight million.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Eight million. So then the \$20 million is . . . And is 8 million distributed, then, through some sort of formula to all RMs? And then the other 20 million is where there'd be some process and some discretion involved in allocating dollars to project A, B, or C in RM A, B, or C?

Mr. Antunes: — Yes. The significant portion of that money is allocated to the — of that \$8 million — is allocated to what we call the Clearing the Path corridor program. So this is where a number of rural roads have been designated as allowing primary haul, and as a result of that there's increased maintenance costs so they get a certain amount of money per kilometre. So it's depending on how much truck traffic they have.

So if you have more than 36 trucks a day, you get \$1,200 a kilometre for each kilometre of road that's on that Clearing the Path corridor. If it's between 1 and 35 trucks, then you get \$1,000 per kilometre for the year. And then the program management board basically evaluates which ones should be Clearing the Path or not. So that's how the funding is allocated. It's funding by approved Clearing the Path roads and then a certain amount of money goes to the maintenance based on how many kilometres they have that's Clearing the Path.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I appreciate that information. The urban connectors program, it's certainly a valued program and one that our municipalities speak regularly about the importance of, and it seems that the demand exceeds, you know, the dollars in a significant way on this front. That program has been cut here this year. I guess I'm just wondering why that program was cut this year.

Mr. Antunes: — So what that program . . . We've redesigned it. And what we've done is we've looked at the roads that were going through the towns. There's 18 towns that were in what we call the town urban highway connector program. And we did a review and listened to the concerns that the towns had.

And so what we decided to do in consultation with them is we used to pay the towns a certain amount of money to maintain those roads through their towns, and what they were telling us is the problem was that they weren't ever getting upgraded in a timely manner. So what the ministry decided to do was take over, assign them as a provincial priority 1, take over operation of

those, so now whenever we go to do a rehab project in the area, we will just pay for the rehab and do it.

And then what we did is we also then, since it's a priority 1 road, meaning that we have 100 per cent provincial interest in it, we took the \$700,000 from the urban highway connector program, moved it to our surface preservation budget, and it's still paying for those improvements. And in some cases we'll contract the towns to do that work.

So there really isn't a change in the program. It's just been how we deliver it has moved. The money's moved from giving it directly to them to, it's in our surface preservation budget. But we're still probably contracting them to do the work.

[16:30]

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks as well for the clarity on that program. Moving along to the budget line, the strategic partnership program, certainly there is an increase, noticeable increase in that program this year. Could you just speak to that program, its aims, and how those dollars are being distributed?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Yes, the budget was increased by 3.2 million and includes the following allocations: 0.8 million for jurisdictional transfer to improve and maintain low-volume roads in accordance with local needs, and 2.4 million to Transwest in each of the '20-21 and '21-22.

And that money is part of a federal government program to support the airlines in the North during the pandemic. As we all know, you know, they're getting way less customers so this will help them. And that's to ensure that the northern communities are still going to receive air service and that will be, that 2.4 million will be refunded by the federal government.

The 4.59 million is 1.39 million is for the alternate truck route and over-dimension agreements; 0.8 million for jurisdictional transfers; and 2.4 million, again, for the second year of the federal funding for the northern air services.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. Thanks for that information. I don't know that I clarified as we entered into the discussion . . . We've talked a bit about some of the federal dollars that are utilized within the budget here. Could you detail the total amount of federal dollars in this ministry, in this budget for this year?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Yes. This money for Transwest, like, it's a flow-through. It's provincial. The provincial is paying it but the federal is actually giving us some money to flow it through on them for the next two years to facilitate Transwest Air to be able to still operate in the North.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Right. So, no, appreciate that. My question's in the broader sense. If you're looking at the entire budget, the Highways budget of \$553 million, how many of those dollars are federal dollars that have been supplied?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Well further to your question, actually, well \$830 million actually, that is our budget with the provincial . . . that's what we get out of the provincial government. So as far as anything coming from the federal end of it, that would be something to be asked of the Minister of Finance. This money,

this \$830 million we're putting into highways, this is provincial money.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — But a lot of the dollars, or a portion of the dollars are flowing from federal initiatives, some of them that have been long-standing, some that are new in response to COVID. You must have a bit of a breakdown as to those federal dollars and initiatives.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Well that actually would go to the Minister of Finance. What our 830 million, that's as far as Highways is concerned, that is provincial. Any money that comes in from the federal government would go into general revenue and then it's distributed, as you well know, through treasury board and everything else.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Right, but if there's federal dollars arriving to the provincial government and being deployed through your ministry . . . There's been multiple mentions to federal dollars by yourself today, Mr. Minister. So I'm just wondering, there must be an ability to be able to account for those dollars within your budget allocation.

Mr. Antunes: — So yes, there are a number of cost-share agreements. So I think we'd have to go back to the Ministry of Finance and kind of ask how they present this information or how they do it. But you know, there are a number of agreements that we've announced in the past that are related to joint-funding arrangements. So for example, there's the Highway 39 and Highway 6 improvements that was announced a number of years ago. That was \$106 million in total and the federal government agreed to put in \$53 million. So that was over, you know, a four- or five-year period. So that's one example.

There's some work that was being done on the Disaster Mitigation Adaptation Fund and again that was, I think it was a \$23 million project and the federal government's paying for half of that. So you know, there's those types of programs. There's not a lot of them, but we can go back to the Ministry of Finance.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks so much. If there's a way to detail that or to profile that, understanding that some of these projects are, you know, multi-year projects, some are long-standing commitments and agreements, and then some I would anticipate would be new dollars dedicated through the pandemic that we're facing. So anyways, that's helpful if you're able to endeavour to get that information back to us.

Just a question with respect to tolls on roads or bridges. Is that completely off the table under your government, Minister?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — No, we don't have any plans for putting any tolls on.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — That's good, Minister, and you keep that position. Looking at the shortline rail budget line that's in the budget, this is a new budget line, is that correct, Minister? Certainly shortline rails are so critical, so important to this province and certainly I'm pleased to see support here. I just would like to hear, just sort of how this program came together and how these dollars meet the need. I suspect the need is probably far greater than the budget allocation even.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Yes, this is very important, and if anybody should know, because I have two shortlines in my constituency. So absolutely this is a good program. The reason that it comes out of the Highways budget is it takes some of the trucks off of the roads. So you know, it saves wear and tear on the roads. And the shortlines have been doing a very good job here in Saskatchewan. So this is a program that I'm really appreciative of the government doing.

We have Torch River Rail and Thunder Rail just in my constituency. And they can certainly use the money. And this will help them keep up their maintenance on their rail and continue to move our products back out to the main lines so the products can be picked up efficiently by the CN and CP [Canadian Pacific Railway]. And this is welcome news to them. I know I called the president of Thunder Rail right after it came out and he was very happy with this money coming out. So it is something that is very important for rural Saskatchewan and it's, like I said, something that the shortlines certainly, certainly appreciate.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Now are there other dollars allocated towards shortline rail in the province? I guess going back a few years, they received dollars from the Saskatchewan Grain Car Corporation, I believe matching dollars from the Saskatchewan Grain Car Corporation. And that would have come to an end when the Grain Car Corporation was sold off. Are there any other dollars made available to shortline rail in this budget?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — No, there isn't any other money for the shortlines.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — What was the amount from the Saskatchewan Grain Car Corporation that used to flow on a matching basis to the shortline rails? My recollection, and it could be wrong, was that it was a million annually.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — I do not know. I couldn't tell you.

Mr. Antunes: — I don't know that it actually ever came from the . . . I'm not aware that it came from the Grain Car Corporation. That's news to me. So I'm not aware of that. I do believe that in the past we had a program similar to this. I think there was \$900,000 that was distributed, but I think it was based on a cost-share formula at that time. We are not requiring them to cost share though. We're just going to provide the funding to them.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. So the previous program, maybe it connected to the Grain Car Corporation. And it was my understanding that the Grain Car Corporation was able to supply a million dollars, roughly a million. I guess that's close to the 900,000 that had been described. And I recall when it was sold off, something of course we shared our . . . still share our concern on. But I know the shortline rail folks had concern on that loss of needed capital on that front.

Maybe speaking more directly to rail, certainly you know, as we look at the demands on our roads and as we look to the hopes that we'd like to fulfill when it looks to things like value-add processing in this province, certainly rail is important and making sure we have a performing rail system. What's the minister looking at as far as efforts to make sure our rail system's performing better in Saskatchewan? And what efforts is he

undertaking to make presentation and push for change federally with respect to the CTA [Canadian Transportation Agency]?

[16:45]

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — You know, I've had discussions with the Vancouver port authority and have talked to the other ministers. And actually our Premier has sent a letter, along with myself, asking that we have more directors. The Vancouver port authority, where a lot of our product goes through, there are 11 directors on there and Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Alberta only have one director.

And I have talked to them and explained my displeasure with that, due to the fact that 85 per cent of the product that goes out through Vancouver comes from British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, and I feel that we should have more of a say on the Vancouver port authority. So that actually is being reviewed at the present time.

I've also talked to and sent a letter to the federal transportation minister that's stating the same thing, that we should have . . . And what we're saying, what I am saying is that we should have two directors on the board: two from Saskatchewan, two from Alberta, and two from Manitoba, because of the fact that we are the major shippers that are going out there. Like, you take with our potash and with, you know . . . And we've got oil going out there too with our potash, oil. But of course our agriculture products is huge going through the Port of Vancouver. And putting that amount of product and money through there, we definitely should have a better say on the Port of Vancouver and how it is being operated.

So that's one of my big concerns in that, and I'm hoping that the federal government and the Port of Vancouver will listen. We actually have appointed a person on there this year who has been accepted, but I want to see more. I want to see two for each: for Saskatchewan on there, and two for Manitoba and two for Alberta. So we'll, I guess, kind of see where that goes.

Mr. Antunes: — I just want to clarify one point at one comment I made earlier. I was incorrect when I said that there's no cost-sharing required in this new program. We'll provide grants for up to 50 per cent of the eligible track material costs and construction costs. So it is still a 50/50 cost-share program with this new program.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I see.

Mr. Antunes: — Yes. So I just wanted to clarify that, because I had said that we were just basically a grant, but it is a 50/50 cost-share arrangement.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I appreciate that. I remember one time too in this House I had said that the member for Carrot River has never caught a fish and I've — that I was aware of — and it's actually been brought to my attention that he's caught a couple small ones. So I wanted to . . . I haven't had the chance to get onto the record here, but I do understand he really struggles in that area though.

I appreciate the minister's update around the Port of Vancouver, and it's important. I've heard this through the agricultural

community as well, the need for these important changes.

I would urge the minister to look as well at representing Saskatchewan's interests, producers' interests, exporters' interests around rail reform and making sure our rail system's performing. The CTA, you know, so representing us federally there. Things like joint running rights, working with industry to look to make sure that this system is working for us. You know, interswitching and its role, and enforcement on that front.

But we're running short on time, but that's not . . . That's an area we could spend two hours talking about, and I really think making sure we have a rail system performing is critical to us today in Saskatchewan, critical to the future of Saskatchewan for us to get our products to market and make sure that our producers and exporters are treated in a fair way on that front.

I'm interested in just sort of the decision-making process or the modelling around that you utilized to make decisions around which projects move forward and which don't. And so I would look at Highway 3, which is being twinned, or has been committed by your government to be twinned right now, and I'm sure that's a very important project.

But then I think of a project as well like Highway 6 and 39 through Weyburn and into Estevan and the serious, you know, safety risks that exist still on that highway. Certainly there's been passing lane upgrades and some improvements brought about on it, but I'd be interested in the statistics around serious collisions or accidents and fatalities on those arteries comparatively — the Highway 3 comparative to Highway 6 and 39, if you're able to provide some information on that front.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Well there's a couple of things I'll bring out there and then I'll let the deputy minister in. You know, you talked about rail, and that's a very good point. And one thing that our government has talked about doing, and that's supporting the port of Churchill. You know, we need more outlet for our product.

And I've been an advocate, I've been a member of the Hudson Bay Route Association for a long time, and I would like to see a lot of our product — especially out of northeastern Saskatchewan but could also do all of Saskatchewan — but to move out through the port of Churchill. I'm a strong advocate for it, and hopefully we can get more product moving out through the port of Churchill. It just gives us another outlet rather than having to rely on Thunder Bay and Vancouver all the time, and I think that would be good.

As far as going back on to the various different, you know, looking at the various different highways, what projects can be done, Highways are continually looking. And they like to put things on to a five-year plan. Sometimes they have to move them around a little bit depending on what is going on, but they are monitoring the highways at all times, and as you realize, things do change. You know, you may get more activity in one area where they have to all of sudden change around and do that. But with that I'll let the deputy minister answer that.

Mr. Antunes: — So I think when you get near urban centres, you know, that's kind of where you start looking at going from passing lanes and other improvements to twinning. So if you look

at Highway 6 and 39 and compare that to Highway 3, so we are doing passing lanes west of Highway 3 all the way over to Shellbrook. So I look at Highway 6 and 39 where we're doing passing lanes there as well. But in addition to the passing lanes on 6 and 39, we are going to be doing a short section of twinning south of Regina because a passing lane wasn't the suitable treatment there.

We're also looking at twinning between, kind of in the Corinne area, there's a number of intersections in there, traffic operations issues. So in order to improve safety as part of that project, we're going to be doing a short section of twinning in there that will cover off kind of between those two intersections of Highway 6 and 39.

And then in addition to that, we're also going to be looking at a piece of twinning west of Estevan. Originally we were going to do a passing lane just outside Estevan, but in consultation with the community and looking at the traffic patterns and looking at the development in the area, it was determined that the best solution there would be a short section of twinning.

If you look at Highway 5, same type of thing. So we are doing passing lanes once you get away from the city and the traffic volumes drop off, but we are looking at doing a section of twinning immediately east of Saskatoon getting out to, I think, Highway 316.

So those types of things come into the decision. What's the best traffic operation, given the traffic volumes and the traffic operations, the development, the access points — we kind of look at all those things and say, okay what's the right solution here? So there are sections of twinning going to be happening on 6 and 39 just like we're doing a piece of twinning on Highway 3.

And we're also looking at a piece of twinning on Highway 2 north of P.A. in the future because, again, the passing lanes in that area just north of P.A. wouldn't be effective. So that's something that we're looking at for future years. Nothing's planned yet, but that's kind of how we look at these things.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks for that information. So how many kilometres of twinning is going on on those respective highways — Highway 3, Highways 6 and 39?

Mr. Antunes: — So on 6 and 39, we're looking at about 19 kilometres in total with the three sections. And on Highway 3, I think it's about . . . we're going to about eight and a half kilometres west. Some of it's already twinned, so that's about 7 kilometres-ish.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — How do you report out the sort of collisions? And how are you tracking and reporting the safety conditions of various roads? I know there's many factors that contribute to that. So you know, serious accidents and fatalities, is that documented and reported out?

Mr. Antunes: — All the accidents are recorded at a database that SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance] has. And so we get that data. And then usually what we do is we look at numbers, but then you also look at putting that with a rate. Because numbers are one part, but then you look at, well how many vehicles are on there? So we typically report accidents and

accidents per million vehicle-kilometres, is typically what you do.

And then you can further break that down into not the number of . . . Number of fatalities is unfortunately, you know, it's a count. The fatal accident rates, you look at one accident and say, it was a fatal accident and then divide that again by the number of vehicles, and that becomes the fatal accident rate. Or you can have a serious accident rate. We try to normalize it to kind of look at the exposure based on the traffic volumes. That's standard engineering practice in how you do it.

There's some new work being done that I'm not as familiar with. But there's some new work being done in terms of how you categorize safety where it looks more like an exposure level or a risk level where it doesn't tie to rates and numbers. That's something we're just starting to get into.

But that's traditionally how engineers look at accident rates is they look at, you know, accidents per million vehicle-kilometres or fatal accidents per million vehicle-kilometres, things like that.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So is that supplied publicly? Is there some reporting out publicly around the safety of the various highways?

Mr. Antunes: — Yes, I understand that SGI has some reports that are online.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And then you'd have some . . . You're doing these rankings as a ministry and that factors into the priority around which projects you're taking on and what sort of plans you take on.

I see that my time is getting near. With respect to the contracts that were let last year, what was the value of the contracts that went out of province?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Yes, well last year the value of the contracts: in province it was 91.27 per cent for 412,586,428; and out of province was 8.73 per cent and the contracts added up to being 6,885,325.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So it was over 400 million for the 91 per cent. And so the 8 per cent, what's the total value? It must be higher than 6 million.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — No, 8.73 per cent, and it was 6,885,325. The value of the contracts in province, of provincial contractors, was 91.27 per cent of the contracts were Saskatchewan in province. And that was 412,586,428.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I'm not sure that the . . . Maybe I'm missing something on the math there. Just if we're talking about 400 million in . . .

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — The total contracts, the total of all the contracts last year was four hundred and nineteen thousand, four hundred and seventy-one, seven hundred and fifty-three.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I'm just not sure that the percentages line up with the value there. 10 per cent of 400-and-some is, you know, \$40 million.

[17:00]

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Okay, so yes. Okay. The percentages are based on the number of contracts. There was 115 contracts that were provincial, and 11 contracts were out of province.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Yes, appreciate it. The numbers didn't line up as far as percentages and values presenting it the other way. One final question, Madam Chair? It's a very short, straightforward one. In years past we've received the information on how much has been spent on external consultants. Could you let me know what the budget for external consultants are this year, and what it was last year?

Mr. Antunes: — I don't know we have a budget number. I guess what we do is we have projects and then there's, you know, some projects have a certain percentage consulting commission. So the projects drive the budget. But what I can tell you is that last year the total consulting expenditures were about \$38.5 million.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you for that information. And when you're able to provide a number for this year, it would be great to . . . Or do you have . . .

Mr. Antunes: — So that was for '20-21. So the next number I would give you would be for, like, next year at this time, for the year we're in now.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Great.

Mr. Antunes: — Yes.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. Well listen, I know we're at the end of the time. I just want to briefly say, thank you so much to the minister for his time here today and we'll follow up with some further questions with him. Thank you very much to Deputy Minister Antunes for his time and offering clarity on many questions, and to all the other officials and folks that are involved in the important work with respect to highways in the province.

The Chair: — So having reached our agreed-upon time for the consideration of business today, we will adjourn our consideration of the estimates and supplementary estimates no. 2 for the Ministry of Highways. Minister, if you would like to add some closing remarks yourself.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Yes. Well I want to thank all the committee members for being here today. I want to thank the member from Rosemont for all the questions that he asked. And I want to thank you, Madam Chair. And I also want to thank Hansard for all the work that they do, and you know, we've been keeping them working pretty hard here for the last while. So I really want to thank them. And like I said, I also want to thank, you know, the deputy minister for all the work that he has done with us and of course my chief of staff who has been fantastic.

And by the way, I will have to throw onto the record that the member from Rosemont, like I mean, he thinks he can fish? He should come up sometime and watch us people from Carrot River Valley. Anyway, with that, thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister. And I would ask a member

to move a motion to adjourn the committee at this point in time. Mr. Steele so moves. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. This committee now stands adjourned until Saturday, April the 24th, 2021 at 11 a.m.

[The committee adjourned at 17:04.]