



STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY

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Regina University

Mr. Jeremy Cockrill
The Battlefords

Mr. Ken Francis
Kindersley

Mr. Delbert Kirsch
Batoche

Mr. Jim Lemaigre
Athabasca

Mr. Doug Steele
Cypress Hills

[The committee met at 17:14.]

The Chair: — All right, welcome everyone to the Standing Committee on the Economy. I'm Colleen Young and I will be Chairing this evening's meeting. We have other members here with us: Mr. Jeremy Cockrill, Mr. Ken Francis, Mr. Jim Lemaigre — welcome to our new member — Mr. Doug Steele. Mr. Kirsch is unavailable this evening, and we have, chitting in for Aleana Young, Mr. Trent Wotherspoon.

Bill No. 47 — *The Highways and Transportation Amendment Act, 2021*

Clause 1

The Chair: — We will now begin consideration of Bill No. 47, *The Highways and Transportation Amendment Act, 2021*, clause 1, short title. Minister Bradshaw is here with his officials this evening. And I would ask that the officials, each time they speak to the mike, present your names right off the bat so *Hansard* can record them.

And we'll begin with Minister Bradshaw, if you wouldn't mind introducing your officials that are here with you today and begin with your opening remarks.

[17:15]

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Well thank you very much, Madam Chair, and good evening to everybody. I guess it isn't evening, it's still afternoon yet. But joining me here today is my chief of staff, Angela Currie. And Minister of Highways officials Blair Wagar, deputy minister; Ryan Cossitt, assistant deputy minister; and Wayne Gienow, ADM [assistant deputy minister] of design and construction.

I'm pleased to be here today to discuss Bill 47, *The Highways and Transportation Amendment Act*. This bill will modernize the operation and management of Saskatchewan highways. The amendments align with our government's plans to promote economic growth and create jobs, removing regulatory burdens and costs like unnecessary licence fees for auto wreckers, and clear guidelines around new roadside developments to improve both safety and growth opportunities in our province.

This bill will ensure Saskatchewan highways continue to meet the needs of families, travellers, shippers, local governments, and the province as a whole. We want to ensure we maintain the collection of vehicle identification numbers to help prevent the trade of stolen vehicles. We also clarified authority for municipalities to establish official signs and enforce speeding limits on provincial highways.

I would like to list a few of the changes we are proposing. The first provision concerns control of access to provincial highways, which clarifies that municipalities must first get consent from the province before restricting or closing access to a public highway.

The second gives the province the right to clear trees and other obstacles to improve safety at intersections. The authority will be used only if discussions with landowners have reached an impasse.

The third important amendment will ensure we can control development around intersections to ensure public safety.

The fourth key amendment will enable commercial vehicle enforcement through automated technology, such as weigh-in-motion, once it is reliable and readily available.

The final amendment will introduce the authority to create monetary fines for some violations of the Act. Fines can more quickly encourage compliance, while reducing the need for costly and time-consuming court processes.

Chair and committee members, these changes will ensure a modern framework for the safe movement of people, goods, and services. Thank you to the committee for this time and we will now be pleased to take any questions.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister. I'll open the floor to committee members for questions now. I now recognize Mr. Wotherspoon.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks so much, Minister. Thanks to your officials that are here tonight as well and all those that have been involved in this work. Can you just talk a little bit about who's been consulted along the way with respect to this legislation and if there's any outstanding concerns that haven't been addressed, concerns with the legislation that you've brought?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association] and SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] were both consulted. We didn't go to all the various different RMs [rural municipality], but SUMA and SARM were consulted on this aspect.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Do they have any concerns with the legislation in its current form?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — In response to your question, there were really no concerns raised by SUMA or SARM or the trucking association or the auto wreckers.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks for that. What kind of engagement did you have with Indigenous communities or First Nations on this front?

Mr. Wagar: — Blair Wagar. I'm the deputy minister of Highways. As the minister mentioned, the focus of the consultations were the ones that were listed: SARM, SUMA, the trucking association, and the wreckers. In large part it's because of the Act itself and the amendments were pretty focused on kind of those particular areas, so our consultations didn't expand out beyond kind of those focused areas who were directly impacted.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks for that. So the changes wouldn't have impact for Indigenous communities or First Nations in the province?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — No, they wouldn't have impact on that at all.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — The minister identified a technology and

talks about this as sort of modernizing legislation and the ability to enable the technology. Could you just describe a little bit more what that technology is and what sort of timelines, you know, exist on this front?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — I'll give you part of it, and then I'll turn it over to Wayne to come up.

But what it is, it is a mounting that goes across the highway that the trucks would drive over, and newer technology of course as technology goes forward, and it would give a weight of the truck. So at the present time it's not down to perfection yet. They have to be recalibrated quite often.

You know, I think it's something that's going to be happening here in the not-too-distant future as the technology goes through. What it's going to do is it will definitely help, as you well know when trucks have to go through the weigh scales, this is time-consuming and everything else. You can actually put a database there, and you'll be able to watch . . . The traffic officer will be able to watch and see how it's going, and then they can go out and stop the trucks if need be. They can either take them to a regular weigh scale or they can do the, you know, the on-site weighing with their portable scale.

So it's something that I believe the technology is going to . . . As it moves forward, it's going to be coming. I won't be able to put a timeline on it, but it will be something that will definitely help save our assets on the highways, and it's going to save a lot of time for trucks having to pull into the scales all the time too to be checked.

So this is something and Wayne can probably . . . or, Wayne. Sorry, Wayne. You're to my right. Wayne can probably answer more to that than what I've just said.

Mr. Gienow: — Sure. Thanks, Minister. Wayne Gienow, ADM of design and construction. So the technology that we're talking about really is right now the weigh-in-motion technology, and we've been working with it in different formats over the last 20 years within Highways.

So we have several sites across the province using different types of the technology. Within the Regina bypass we have a couple of these weigh-in-motion actually installed. You'll notice them where there's a piece of concrete, you know, up near Highway 11 on the north end there. And what we have there is we have the concrete because you have to have it very smooth in order to get to very good accuracy.

And right now, other jurisdictions aren't using the weigh-in-motion technology to actually issue tickets because they can be very accurate but, as the minister talked about, the calibration, you have to calibrate them fairly often and then they come out of calibration. So we're not quite there with technology yet. We're not exactly sure how long it will take. You know, it could be five years; it could be 10 years. It's just something that we have to make sure that we monitor and we look forward to. So we want to make sure that when we are looking at changes to the Act that this is something we looked at.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks for that. So when the minister references that this will enable commercial vehicle enforcement

through automated technology, this is the extent of the technology that we're talking about. Is that correct? Or are there other technologies that would also be captured in this legislation?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Yeah, this is just focused on the weight of the . . . the overweight on the vehicle or the weights of the vehicle. Plus, you know, with that data too it also shows, you know, what we have for average weights going down that road. So you know, this is something that's going to, eventually, it's going to help our engineers design the roads to what we actually need. So I think that this is something that in the future is going to be a very good thing.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — The Act changes powers or provisions around a municipality and how they would go about, potentially, closing of a highway. I guess, what are the changes on this front? And are there concerns on this front? Has there been problems on this front? Or are there certain concerns that you consider and, you know, that this legislation is responding to?

Mr. Wagar: — So I'll start and then hand it over to Wayne just to get into maybe some examples to your question. For us, this piece of legislation, it really starts to ensure that we have reliability. And as I said, we've had this authority in the past so this isn't necessarily new authority. It's just that some of the experiences . . . And I'll get Wayne to maybe provide a couple examples of what's driving some of this. And it's just to bring absolute clarity to the way in which we want to keep those roads open — reliable access, consistent access for all road users.

And the difference between what might be driving a municipality or the relationship between municipalities sometimes comes into play. And so what we need to do as a province, often, is we'll get pulled into conversations between municipalities where they're looking for us to resolve maybe a conflict or a disagreement on how a particular corridor gets utilized, or doesn't get utilized, or how it gets utilized. So at a high level, that's kind of what's driving the change.

Again we've had this authority in the past, but this just takes it and defines some of that a lot clearer to help us resolve some of those disputes that might occur between municipalities. So Wayne, if you could maybe speak to a couple specific examples.

Mr. Gienow: — Thanks. I can speak to three examples we've had, like real-life examples over the last year and a half where we did need some clarification. And we looked at this, and in each of the examples it was working with one of our municipalities.

So in one example, it was a resort village that really looked to block access to a boat launch that was on our right-of-way. So they blocked access. It caused an issue for obviously other people that wanted to use that. It caused issues with the RM. So given that it was actually on our right-of-way, we had to step in and work with the municipalities to sort through that issue.

We had another example shortly afterwards where another neighbouring community, there was a disagreement between one of the urban communities and the RM at the same time. And they were actually looking to blockade or actually put a gate across the RM roadway so they could limit who could actually access that.

And then the third example is we had one of our other rural municipalities which was looking at the potential of putting up a toll booth so that they could charge either their non-residents or everyone a toll to go through there.

So just some real-life examples that we actually have where we did need that clarification. Because as I've said, we did have that ability before, but we wanted some clarification.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. No, I appreciate those examples as well. With respect to tolls, I noticed that tolls were referenced in the legislation and there needs to be . . . I think it describes that there needs to be consent on a toll being implemented. Now are there tolls in place in Saskatchewan right now?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — No. No, there's no tolls in place in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So this enables sort of a process as to where a toll could be added. Is there consideration to authorize or allow or have tolls installed somewhere in the province? Are there folks pushing for a toll?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Yeah, that would have to be a provincial policy. And we don't have that. It's not in this, so we don't have that policy in place. And don't . . . [inaudible].

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Right. So now I think there was something about tolls in this legislation, wasn't there? That a municipality or someone would have to have consent of the province in this legislation. Is that correct?

[17:30]

Mr. Wagar: — That's correct. I think the ministry has always had that kind of authority whether a toll would get put on a public road. That's something that the ministry would have authority over in terms of that being applied. This just again takes that further in terms of clarifying the process in which that might happen. As the minister said, at this point there's no policy in place that we would have where we're looking at tolling any roads.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So there's no contemplation or consideration or discussion to look at a toll on any road within Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — No.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks for that. There were some changes around expropriation and processes there. Can you speak to what those changes are and why that's required?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Well that actually comes in . . . Like, most of the time — virtually all the time — we never have a problem going in and cleaning out where the intersection, where the sight lines are obstructed going on to the highway. And you know, 99 per cent of the time you're not going to have a problem.

But this kind of came about after, you know, after the Humboldt bus crash and — which was in my constituency — where you could have a problem with a landowner on where you have to clean out, where you have to clean the sight lines out. Like I said,

99 per cent of the time you're never going to have a problem. But if we did have a landowner that was dead set against it, and it's still what we considered a safety hazard, what this does is it gives us the ability to go in there and remove those obstacles so we can get those sightlines cleaned up.

Mr. Wagar: — So just to build on the minister a little bit, and maybe one clarifying point, there is a reference to expropriation. So this bill and the changes doesn't contemplate any changes to expropriation or authorities or powers. It's actually more the process in which we can engage a private landowner to access their land to remove some of these obstructions, and the process that we would do that. So it doesn't mean that we would have to expropriate that property. It's just how we would go about removing any of those obstructions from a public safety perspective.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you for that as well. I understand the bill introduces new monetary fines for some violations of the Act. Can you speak to what those changes are and, I guess, the justification.

Mr. Wagar: — If I'm understanding correctly, it adds some authority around administrative penalties as opposed to relying on summary offence alone, which puts extra burden on some of the court system in terms of going through that process.

So we've looked at other pieces of legislation in the province where they've applied administrative penalties, and that's what this enables. There's a lot more work I think that we're needing to do on a go-forward basis in terms of how we apply those penalties and consultation that we're going to want to do, including the development of some regulations as well about how we're going to apply them.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Minister, are there any further questions I should be asking?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Well, we could go back and talk about fishing, but . . .

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I was thinking there would be no weight issues with you pulling your boat after a trip on those weigh scales there. Would be pretty light.

Listen, I don't think I have any further . . . oh, I guess maybe just one last area. How does this bill . . . or does it contemplate or respond at all to concerns around blockades at all?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — There's other sections in the Act to work with blockades, so that's . . . Yeah, that's not in this particular bill.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I don't have any further questions at this time.

The Chair: — Are there any questions from any other committee members? Mr. Cockrill.

Mr. Cockrill: — Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, in one of the earlier answers the minister talked just about some of the response, some of the findings from the Humboldt Broncos crash. And obviously we're coming up on the anniversary of that

tragic event here in the province. I'm just wondering if the minister can update the committee on how many of the recommendations from that crash have been implemented.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Yeah. There were 13 recommendations, and all of the recommendations except one has been implemented. We still have SaskPower that's going to be moving some power lines there.

And I'd just like to say, I drive through that intersection on a very regular basis, and you know, it's well signed. The sight lines are good. The rumble strips are all in. They've moved the approach that went into the Cargill elevator. It's moved over to the other highway.

So basically the only thing left to being done . . . Like, going up to that intersection there's eight signs going up to that intersection, so it is a busy highway; 35 is a busy highway. And it's always been when you got up to that highway, you make sure you stop and look. Like, you don't do a rolling stop there. It's one that you look.

And I think that the Humboldt tragedy made everyone in the province take a look at what we had to actually go out and do to improve safety at the intersections. But basically, to answer your question, yes. The only thing left to do is to move the power line there, and SaskPower's working on that. And I believe it's going to be this summer, isn't it, I think, if I remember right? Wayne, would you . . .

Mr. Gienow: — I'm not sure. I don't have that information.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Yeah. It seems to me that I heard that it was going to be this summer that they were moving that power line. But other than that, no. And it was, you know, it was something that woke the province up to say this is what we should be doing.

Mr. Cockrill: — Thank you.

The Chair: — Seeing no further questions, we will now move to vote off the clauses on this bill. Clause 1, short title, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

[Clause 1 agreed to.]

[Clauses 2 to 16 inclusive agreed to.]

The Chair: — Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows:
The Highways and Transportation Amendment Act, 2021.

I would now ask a member to move that we report Bill No. 47, *The Highways and Transportation Amendment Act, 2021* without amendment. Mr. Lemaigre so moves. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Minister, if you have any closing

remarks, you may make them.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Well thank you, Madam Chair, and I want to thank all the committee members from both sides of the House for being here. And I want to thank all the officials for being here. And thank you very much for your attention to this very important subject and this very important bill. Thank you.

The Chair: — You're welcome. Mr. Wotherspoon, if you have anything you'd like to say.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Yeah, thanks so much to the minister. Thanks to all the officials that have joined us here tonight and all those that are involved in this work every day.

The Chair: — Thank you. That concludes our business this evening, and I would ask a member to move a motion of adjournment.

Mr. Francis: — I so move.

The Chair: — Mr. Francis so moved. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. This committee now stands adjourned until the call of the Chair. Thank you everyone.

[The committee adjourned at 17:40.]