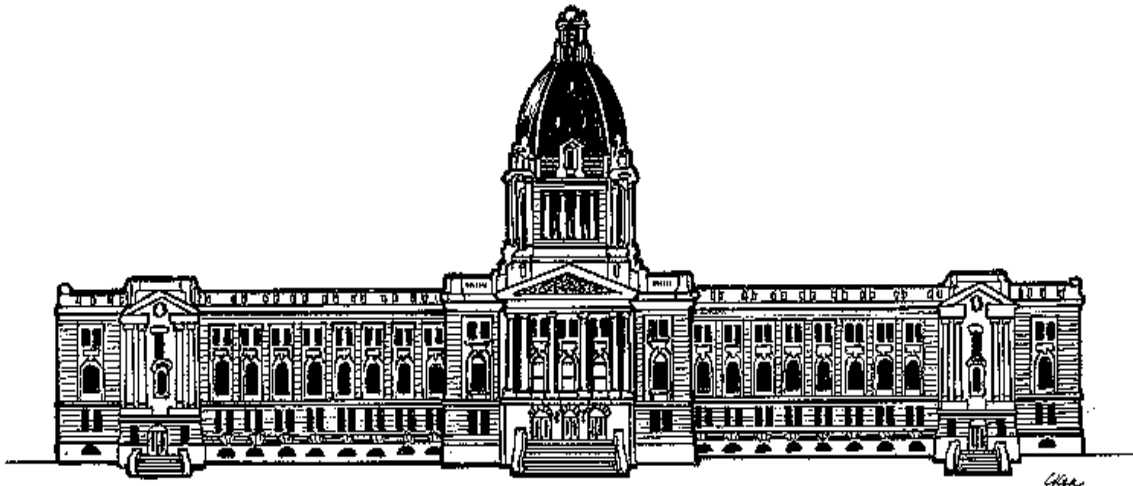




STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL
AFFAIRS AND INFRASTRUCTURE
2004**

Mr. Ron Harper, Chair
Regina Northeast

Mr. Bob Bjornerud, Deputy Chair
Melville-Saltcoats

Mr. Denis Allchurch
Rosthern-Shellbrook

Ms. June Draude
Kelvington-Wadena

Ms. Sandra Morin
Regina Walsh Acres

Mr. Kim Trew
Regina Coronation Park

Hon. Mark Wartman
Regina Qu'Appelle Valley

The committee met at 15:00.

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

Subvote (HI01)

The Chair: — I'd like to call to order the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Infrastructure. We have sitting in for Mr. Wartman, Mr. Frank Quennell today.

Today we'll be continuing with the consideration of the estimates for the Department of Highways and Transportation. I would invite the minister to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Again seated with me here today I think we have essentially all of the same individuals. Immediately to my right is the deputy minister, Harvey Brooks. To his right is Terry Schmidt, the assistant deputy minister of operations. To my left is Don Wincherauk, the assistant deputy minister of corporate services. Directly — not directly behind me — but behind me and to my left is Fred Antunes, the director of corporate support branch. Directly behind me is Terry Blomme, executive director of southern region. And behind me and to the right is George Stamatinos, the assistant deputy minister of policy and programs.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Krawetz.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And to you, Mr. Minister, welcome this afternoon, and to all of your officials.

Mr. Minister, I'm going to deal with a very specific topic that has been around for a while and I just, I hope you would bear with me while I bring you up to date on some of the problems that the RM (rural municipality) of Sliding Hills is facing in my constituency.

Mr. Minister, as far back as in June 2000, just about four years ago, a bridge collapsed that crossed . . . A bridge was damaged, I should say first of all; a bridge was damaged that crosses the Whitesand River. This was assessed by the Department of Highways and it was declared unsafe that fall and has been closed since then.

The RM has had numerous meetings with various groups, and I think you'll appreciate the concerns first of all were with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, who I'll refer to as DFO. DFO had some concerns with the replacement of either a bridge or a low-level crossing or whatever was designed for, you know, correcting the problem. They had some concerns around the movement of water and spawning of fish, and there was a lot of discussions that took place with DFO. My understanding now is that DFO is aware of a design plan that has been put together, and they are supportive of moving forward and resolving this issue.

The other group that was a bit of a problem was the Canadian Coast Guard. The Canadian Coast Guard of course is

responsible for navigable waters, and they were concerned that if a low-level crossing was implemented that that would hinder canoe transportation in the river. And I think in one of the letters, I believe . . . At that time I corresponded with the Minister of Highways who at that time was the member from Saskatoon Nutana yet. And then the member from Yorkton and I corresponded and his involvement with fisheries and SaskWater, he was responsible for SaskWater in July, 2002. And basically Coast Guard understood that you know the coureur de bois had portaged around obstacles in the past and now because there was also still I believe six other low-level crossings already in the Whitesand River that this wasn't going to be a problem.

So I would ask you, Mr. Minister, do you know or do your officials know whether or not the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard is on board — if I can use that term — or approves of a replacement of the design that has been prepared. And I should add, Mr. Minister, that Jason Puckett of the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority came up with a design for a low-level crossing in the summer of 2003, well over a year ago. And then that design was vetted through to DFO (Department of Fisheries and Oceans) and CCG. Do the officials know whether or not this has met with approval from those two departments?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Let me just make a very brief opening statement. I think because probably there will be many specific questions in most of the instances through the afternoon, I'll probably have just officials answers just to save time. And if any of the questions get political, which they rarely do in this Chamber, I might intervene occasionally but I think that's unlikely. So I believe my deputy minister, Harvey Brooks, would answer a series of these questions probably.

Mr. Brooks: — We are aware of the history of the bridge and the department involvement with the municipality and with the DFO and the Canadian Coast Guard and we have worked with them to try and find a solution to this. This is actually a municipal bridge and a municipal system and therefore is of interest to us in that it connects to our system.

We have worked with them to try and find an appropriate design. I know we've had staff inspect the area. At the current time I'm aware we have exchanged recent correspondence but as to the specific question, we would like to get back to you on that as to whether or not DFO and Canadian Coast Guard have actually addressed that issue and come up with a resolution.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Brooks, and I appreciate that. And I know if you don't have the file with you it would be difficult to respond to it. I do want to indicate to you, Mr. Brooks, that as you've indicated, the bridge is a bridge of a municipal infrastructure but it is very important to the traffic that travels down No. 9, especially agricultural equipment.

There has been a great concern by the agriculture producers in that area that have now been forced to take large machinery down Highway 9 because the bridge is no longer useable. And as a result, there is a fairly large distance that needs to be covered before they can get back on the other side.

The other concern is of a family, the Weinbenders, who actually have a cattle operation on both sides of the river. And every day the gentleman has to drive between 16 and 23 miles to get around the river to get to where his cattle operation, even though it's literally a stone's throw across the river. And the need to fix this bridge is in the RM's, you know, wish list.

They've been told in the design stage that the cost was going to be \$170,000 for a low-level crossing. That would include, I think, probably all the bells and whistles and the frills because I think the estimate that was looked at initially was going to be much lower than that. The RM has indicated that through, you know, grant reductions and infrastructure grants that they're prepared to put in \$50,000.

Now, Mr. Minister, I know you said, not being political, but I do have to mention one of the officials who I think made a political statement; a gentleman by the name of Dave Altwasser — if I'm pronouncing it correctly. Mr. Altwasser, from the Department of Highways, has indicated that he couldn't figure out why that bridge would even be . . . want to be replaced, that he didn't feel the infrastructure was important to the area and suggested that, you know, the expenditure of money there was not something that was necessary.

Now I find that strange that a member of the Department of Highways responsible, I understand, for bridge maintenance in the province — if that's his official role — would say . . . would make some comment about the infrastructure of the municipalities.

Now the question then that he posed to the RM was that even if they did get involved, if Highways did get involved, the maximum would be \$60,000. So we have a situation where a bridge cost is 170, the RM is prepared to go up to \$50,000, and Mr. Altwasser has indicated that \$60,000 is the maximum.

So to you, Mr. Brooks, there has to be either a resolve of this by getting everyone to the table, and I've been trying for four years to get members of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, to get Canadian Coast Guard, to get the RM, to get Highways — or someone from, you know, whoever responsible for bridges — to be at the same table in the RM office with the RM of Sliding Hills. And reeve, Mr. Zeiben, has expressed that that's what he wants. He wants to pull everybody together and we can't do that.

So I'm wondering if I could count on your leadership from the Department of Highways to try to ensure that the RM, as I've . . . I talked to Mr. Steele, who is the RM secretary this morning. My constituency assistant talked to him this morning and said that council is becoming very, very frustrated. They want to resolve this problem for their rate payers. And for now, for almost four years, there's been just obstacle after obstacle after obstacle.

So, Mr. Minister, what I'm looking for today is that your department would take on this challenge of trying to resolve this as quickly as possible; keeping in mind of course that, you know, to suggest to the RM, well it's resolvable by you paying, you know, \$110,000 to add to the department's 60 would resolve that, that's not a solution.

The solution is to work co-operatively and try to figure out a way. I'd ask for your comments, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well let me just . . . I don't know if my deputy wants to supplement this answer at all. But might complicate this even a little bit further by actually indicating that you might want another department at the table, maybe even in addition to Highways or maybe instead of Highways.

But the Government Relations is actually where the funding, you referenced . . . I don't know the exact amounts, but you referenced \$60,000, if there was that pot of money, would probably come out of Government Relations which is out of their heavy haul . . .

A Member: — Municipal.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Municipal? Okay. Municipal bridge allowance. And those are the folks that should be there at the table as well, I would think.

I guess, let me just make a general statement. My experience has been, for the two times I've been in the department or the minister responsible, I mean we try to work with the RMs as much as possible and try to find resolutions.

But I would say that even with the significant increase in funding that has come to this department — the Department of Highways and Transportation — since the last time I was here, there's still actually significant challenges on our infrastructure in the province, let alone trying to find funds for the municipal infrastructure.

Again, having said that though, we . . . I mean, we've worked with them to access money from the federal government through prairie grain roads, and the heavy haul programs, and through the municipal bridge pool as well. So if there's things we can do to assist, we certainly will.

On this specific question, is there anything that you want to . . .

Mr. Brooks: — I think that covers it.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Okay.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, one of the other concerns as I indicated, this figure of \$170,000 has been sort of thrown out as a cost factor. And the last low level crossing that was put in through by the same RM was back in the mid '80s and the cost was about 20 per cent of that.

So whether or not there are new regulations or whether there's just a new design or whatever, but that seems to be almost . . . it's like an obstacle that has now been thrown at the council to say, well if you think you really want to go ahead with this low-level crossing, we're going to . . . the price is really up here. And there doesn't seem to be the leadership at all of these levels. And I thank you for indicating that the Government Relations and Municipal, you know, Affairs is involved in this, but the problem still exists that we have a piece of infrastructure in rural Saskatchewan that is not usable, it hasn't been usable for four years, and the council is getting frustrated.

And I must also say that I'm getting frustrated because I've written letters, I've talked to people, I've been at the SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) convention where I know that the RM councillors and the reeve of Sliding Hills met with officials, and we're still at the same stage of no progress.

So I will ask the council to continue discussions with your department and with municipal department and if we can get leadership from both of those avenues maybe we can get this resolved before we get through to the fall haul season, which of course as grain harvesting occurs that bridge is even, becomes more and more valuable.

The Chair: — Ms. Harpauer.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. According to an answer that I was provided by your department to a written question, the provincially operated road network consists of 26,264 kilometres of pavements, thin membrane service highways, gravel highways, and ice roads.

Would it be possible to get a breakdown of those four classifications?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — This is out of the 2004-05 provincial budget documents. Our performance plan is actually what it is. And we can provide you with a copy if you want.

The provincial upgraded infrastructure of the 26,264 kilometres is broken down as follows — I'll add one more little piece in here — is 836 bridges, 31 large culverts, 18 airports in northern Saskatchewan, 12 ferries on the Saskatchewan River system, and a barge on Wollaston Lake. The road network consists of 8,952 kilometres of asphalt concrete pavements, 4,744 kilometres of granular pavements, 6,763 kilometres of thin membrane surface or TMS highways that we refer to, 5,674 kilometres of gravel highways, and 131 kilometres of ice roads that are, of course, seasonal.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you to the minister, and thank you very much to his officials for giving me a copy of that document. I haven't had a chance of course to look through the document quickly but the term pavements, when the answer to the written question was given back, the four terms were pavement, thin membranes, gravel highways, and ice roads. The term pavement — is that used to describe primary weight highways? Is that what that description was for?

Mr. Brooks: — There is a difference between the structure of the highway and then what is allowed as an allowable haul weight on the road. For the most part there is a lot of congruity between them having the structural capacity to carry the heavier primary weights and the asphalt concrete or sealed granular. The sealed granular pavements also have the capacity in most cases. But in certain instances we will have some structural pavement where, because of the traffic incongruity, we won't be allowing the principal weights at this point in time and part of this is what we're exploring during the weights consultations. Our primary weight highway system is outlined in regulation and, as I say, is for the most part congruent with the asphalt concrete system, but it wouldn't be 100 per cent.

Ms. Harpauer: — Also referring to answers that I had to written questions. Over the past four years including this projected year, I was told that your department will upgrade 962 kilometres of thin membrane surfaces to paved standard, rebuild 210 kilometres of northern roads to gravel standard, resurface 1,380 kilometres, and upgrade 12 kilometres of gravel surface. That makes for a total of 2,594 kilometres of roadways that the department has or will be doing major work to, as well as the usual annual filling of potholes and minor repairs.

Now if we do the math very quickly with those numbers and divide the total kilometre of roadways by the average number of kilometres that will receive major repairs and upgrades, the answer would be in a very ballpark estimate of how much time will elapse before any given roadway would receive major upgrades.

And I realize that there's other factors that come into play and it's not quite that simple. But the calculation still is a fairly significant indicator of the long-term strategy for the road network in our province, and it's astounding. And the answer's 40 years.

So I don't think too many of our highways are built to the capacity to last 40 years without some major, major repair. So that leaves the department, I'm sure, with quite a dilemma of how to handle the long-term strategy of how we're going to sustain this network.

Now there's a number of options available, but what is your department planning? What is the long-term strategy? How are we going to deal with this significant problem?

Mr. Brooks: — As laid out in the department's strategic plan, the preservation and maintenance of the existing capital structure and the upgrading of the capital structure is a main component of our strategic plan. And we weigh that off against the need for allowing the economic development within the province, which to a certain degree speaks to the primary weight issue.

You're quite right that the amount of roadway that has been repaired in the last several years does not put us on a life cycle for many of the pavements that we are gearing towards. We have committed to trying to reduce the life cycle of our pavements to 20 years in the primary highway, principle highway system and to 25 years on the regional highway system.

That would require an ongoing investment of something in excess of \$90 million a year. And we are being slowly ramped up from the low level of about 47 million in 2001 and the planned level of about 72 million in 2004-05 and about 78 million in 2003-04 is a staged compromise to help fund the existing capital requirements and move forward as we go forward.

So the availability of some of the federal funding at this point in time allows us to complete the 20 projects ahead of schedule, and that adds greatly to the economic capacity of the province and some of the safety initiatives as well. And that, combined with a preservation and maintenance strategy that is aimed at stretching out the life cycle of the roads, is what we're

operating on at this point in time.

So we have in this year invested something . . . or plan to invest in the neighbourhood of \$31 million on preventive maintenance and repair on our TMS and gravel highway system, and we will also put money into the preservation and maintenance of the principal highway system as well, in addition to our capital upgrades.

But it is . . . The size of the system continues to be a real concern for the department and our ability to maintain and preserve and upgrade in terms of safety, and the economic necessity of the primary weights in many cases is a real concern for the department.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — I want to add just a little bit to that as well if I could. First of all don't forget the 131 kilometres of ice roads that we build every year as well. Although it was so cold this year, I'm not sure, they may not go out every year.

I do want to say the following though because the deputy alluded to it at least. There has been significant, recognizing the very problem you identify, I mean there have been significant increases in the last number of years. And just for reference, the department has invested 900 million over three years; the province made that commitment in the 2001-02 budget.

In the fall of '99 we committed to investing 1 billion over four years, and this commitment has actually been exceeded by \$100 million. And then in the spring of '97 the province had committed to investing 2.5 billion over 10 years, and the department's on track to meet that investment.

I think the big issue as well is — for myself and for previous ministers before me obviously — is the lack of participation at this table, as is the case in a number of other portfolios, by the federal government.

We have I think . . . The number of times that I as Minister of Highways and Transportation have been stopped and talked to about the need for accelerating the twinning of highway . . . of the divided highways, I think there's a general belief by the public that that is paid for, because it's the Trans-Canada, 100 per cent by the federal government.

Well until very recently — I think it could stand to be corrected a little bit here — but it has been for all intents and purposes really nothing. It's sort of been 1 to 2 to 3 per cent and I think it went up to 5 per cent at one time. And now it's sort of in the range of I think 14 or 15 per cent. Is that . . .

Mr. Brooks: — On the twinning expansion we're doing now is 50 per cent for the upgrades.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Yes. For the twinning expansion, for the upgrades it's 50 per cent, but for the overall cost, it is really insignificant and yet . . . So I mean, it's a real challenge, not just for this province but for every province. Technologies, as the deputy has indicated, have improved I think the life cycles of some of the roads that you've identified.

But really if we had significant funding from where we think a lot of that money should come from, we would largely address

the concern that you've identified.

Ms. Harpauer: — I appreciate the minister's response in that yes, you have increased the budget significantly since I've been elected. And we all appreciate the fact that it's a huge network and our appreciation's well shown in the number of Highways questions you've had to answer during the session.

But nonetheless the problem still sits there, that the track we're on isn't going to keep pace with the deterioration of the roads so alternatives have to be looked at. And there are . . . I think there's alternatives in engineering. I think there's alternatives in how, you know, cost saving methods. There's been studies done; should we be outsourcing, should we not be outsourcing. I'm not suggesting any given thing, because I certainly don't have the knowledge to be doing that.

But you know we're going to hit a brick wall at some point in time because we're not keeping pace. So that was my concern in what different areas the department was addressing.

The Chair: — Mr. Trew.

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, minister, and officials. Though it's always fun to talk about pavement and thin membrane and that, you've had a number of questions and I've enjoyed both the questions and the answers and they've been necessary.

But I want to switch paces a little bit and I'm wanting to look a little bit towards the future. And I'm of course referring to young people and how we make either a generational transfer of leadership in the department, the Department of Highways in this instance. I guess what I'm really wondering is what is the department doing to facilitate today's youth becoming tomorrow's leaders? And I'm not talking about tomorrow's leaders two and three decades out. I'm talking about tomorrow's leaders this decade, or at least I hope I am to some extent. So I'd be interested in hearing your comments on that.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Okay. It's a very good question. Well first of all, we did the obvious thing. They looked youthful but they weren't that young when they retired. We've now have two very young, new assistant deputy ministers with us as is evidenced here today. And — Oh, he's not here any more. I was going to say, and a much younger, new minister as well. That's not quite true though.

But let me . . . Seriously, let me say the following. The department has viewed this to be an important area and we have many initiatives targeted at youth. One of the major student initiatives is the hiring of approximately 150 summer co-op or intern students each year. We have the largest government . . . We are one of the largest, I should say, government employers of summer students in the province.

You will have heard, in the last little while, some of the initiatives where we have involved young people in the development. As an example, I can't remember the exact term, but the Orange Zone competition. And in northern Saskatchewan, we have worked with many of the First Nations to try and employ younger First Nations people as well.

I think this question is a very good question, not just for our department but for all departments of government. As we see many of our senior civil servants nearing retirement age and retiring, it's just critical that we employ young people in the province.

And I think . . . Let me just slip on another hat here as well. As the current Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, as I have said many, many times, this is really an area where we have, I think, huge opportunity for employment of young people; that is in the area of young Aboriginal people that . . . very, very young and talented and qualified young people that we . . . I'm sure they will be a huge part of our success, not in just this department but in lots of departments.

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Minister. And I know that Aboriginal youth will be a significant part and I was pleased to hear you talk specifically about it.

And I know, because I know you, you're not talking about Aboriginal youth being a significant part of the shovel gang. You're talking about a significant part of the entire Department of Highways, right from management to shovel or from shovel to management, however you choose to say it.

I'm curious though about what has changed in the department in terms of how there's recruitment? Has that changed? Like we both agree we should have more Aboriginal young people hired. Is there something that's happening specifically in your recruitment process to help make that so? And then there's training issues. And then what I'm really interested in is, is there a retention plan?

Like when you hire, you mention, 150 co-op students in the summer — and I know this is a wonderful program that provides SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) and university, you know, post-secondary students an opportunity to earn an income through the summer so that they can go back to their studies through the winter — but what do you do to retain? Or how many of these young people stay with the department once the summer is over? Or is that not the expectation?

Mr. Brooks: — Certainly we work with the major educational institutions on trying to track specific types of individuals with training that will be key to the department in the future. And we try and offer co-operative placements for them within the department to ensure that it not only helps them through their studies and provides the department with a skilled employee while they're going through their education, but also provides a bit of a relationship and a link, that we have a good capacity to retain them in the long-term as an employee.

And we have . . . we try to do that and try to key in to areas that are critical for the future of the department. We have a human resource management succession framework that is current in the department. It has just been part of a pilot project by the Provincial Auditor to review. And we believe that we have identified the issues for the department and that we have plans that can address the critical shortfalls that we see coming.

Certainly in the next decade we expect that somewhere between 60 and 70 per cent of our workforce will retire. And with the

increasing need to be competitive for many of the skills sets that are out there, we are trying to address a number of areas where we believe we can be more competitive. And we need to look at women in non-traditional occupations, the Aboriginal people, visible minorities, and people with disabilities to replace our retiring workers.

We have a number of initiatives underway where we're trying to recruit more employees from demographic groups that have been historically under-represented in the department.

We instituted this year an Aboriginal apprenticeship program in our P.A. (Prince Albert) shop to try and develop heavy-duty mechanics in partnership with the P.A. Grand Council and the SGEU (Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union) to ensure that we have a stream of trained individuals coming through that, while not obliged to work with the department when they are finished their education, certainly there will be a relationship there where we will have a very good opportunity to attract them.

We have an active group for women in non-traditional occupations in the department and are addressing that area. And we keep an eye to promotional opportunities for all people within the department and outside the department, to try and make sure that people are well represented. And we do take the succession management framework very seriously. We're very encouraged by the report of the Provincial Auditor. We know that it's not going to an easy task and we know we do have some work to do yet on that file.

Mr. Trew: — Thank you. I'm very encouraged. I have one more question, Mr. Chair, along this line and then I'll allow the . . . be done this series, that would be a better way of putting it. And it has to do with . . . Do you keep track of, do you have records of . . . it almost sounds like you have a target, you know, that you shall have X per cent of non-traditional workers, X per cent of Aboriginal, so on. Do you have statistics on that and can you share . . . are we gaining in the areas that we've spoken of today? I'm just wondering what the department is doing along those lines.

Mr. Brooks: — We do keep track of those statistics and we report regularly to the Public Service Commission. I haven't got the statistics with me at this point in time, but we could certainly provide those to you. We do know that in certain areas we are going up and in certain areas we are holding our own. And we have certainly taken steps to make sure that we gather some momentum as we move forward, but we can make those statistics available.

Mr. Trew: — I appreciate that. And I have one plea, and that is there's one group that I think is just hugely overlooked. I mean we've talked about a couple of underemployed or historically underemployed groups that have a tremendous potential to be beneficial, win-win, all the way around.

There's another group that is often ignored and this is people with physical disabilities, sometimes very severe physical disabilities. And I know that, all of my life, I have witnessed too many people seeing somebody who requires the use of a wheelchair, for example, and I've witnessed people thinking that because the person uses a wheelchair, that somehow their

brain is addled. And usually, the absolute reverse is true.

With today's technologies, computer technologies, we have got a phenomenal number of people that can work from home. And I'm hoping that the Department of Highways and other government departments really consider tying into that; you know, where you can. I know it doesn't always work. But there's a tremendous number of people right across the province that could contribute and could be very useful and, again, it's a helpful thing all the way around.

So that was more a comment from me. But if you have a comment on that very matter, I'd appreciate hearing that. And then, I really am done, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Brooks: — The department does have an employment diversity group and we have an employment diversity coordinator that meets regularly and works on these issues. And they have been quite successful in accommodating people with physical and mental disabilities within our workforce.

We have a program that provides an opportunity for people with mental disabilities to perform duties within seven of our shops. And it's in coordination with the Saskatchewan Association of Community Living and it is quite successful, well received, win-win situation. And we believe it's a very innovative program and it's been copied by others actually, so we're very proud of it.

As well, we have a number of individuals within the department where we've been able to accommodate specific physical disabilities that allow them to perform their work to the same high standard that we expect from others. And we find in those situations that it has been very rewarding for the shops involved.

The Chair: — Mr. Bjornerud.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Chair, my first question to the minister, and I'm not sure if this is Highways or Government Relations, but you can correct me here. It's to do with the new heavy-haul roads and the new signage. I understand the signage for the new heavy-haul roads is going to be changing, and we've had some concerns brought to us by the RMs. But I wondered if that, the signage change, is in conjunction with Highways and the heavy-haul roads. Is that under the jurisdiction of the Department of Highways?

Mr. Brooks: — It's a very interesting question. And certainly it appears that these are changes that the municipal system is undertaking, and it is probably related to the change in classification of several of the roads and the service levels of those roads, and there is some sign changing going on that we are aware of. It wouldn't necessarily relate to the weight that people would be allowed to carry on their commercial vehicles or farm vehicles on that road, but would indicate, essentially, the level of service or the classifications for the road.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Brooks. I guess the concern that's been brought forward to us . . . And I don't think I have to tell anyone in the Department of Highways the cost of signage right now and to replace that signage, and I think you're well aware, I'm sure you're very aware, more than even

the RMs are out there and the municipalities. But that was one of the concerns they had out there and, you know, we can deal with Government Relations also on this issue.

I guess the other issue was that with heavy-haul roads are changed now. We have grid roads out there that have been — I can use in my area, for an example, No. 637 or something like that — that people have become accustomed to. I know even if someone in the rural area calls an ambulance or something, we use those numbers a lot more than we ever thought we would when they were first part of the infrastructure out there. And I'm wondering if that will be changed now as part and parcel of the heavy-haul roads or are we still going to stick with those designations all across the province. Or again am I getting into the wrong department? Is that really under Government Relations?

Mr. Brooks: — I believe that we're still talking about system changes that the municipalities are undertaking for themselves. And even with regards to any requirement or move towards uniformity in the signage that is it something that they would be undertaking themselves without any directive from the department.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Brooks. I want to ask a few questions on some of the local highways in my own constituency, and the first one that comes to mind . . . and you did work out there on No. 8, from MacNutt north to No. 10, last year — made a vast improvement to that piece of that road. And I'm wondering, is the . . . going the other direction now towards Langenburg, is that slated for resurfacing or surfacing this summer or in the near future?

Mr. Schmidt: — The highway you're referencing there, Highway 8 from MacNutt north to Highway 10 that was resurfaced last year, was the last phase or component in kind of a multi-year strategy that was undertaken there between several jurisdictions. I believe the RM of Langenburg, the RM of Churchbridge, as well as the Department of Highways and Transportation entered into a multi-year project there where assistance from Prairie Grain Roads Program was also used to help deliver the program.

And it involved building a municipal heavy-haul route between Highway 16 and Highway 10, and that was then designated as the heavy-haul route. And in conjunction with that, Highway 80 was then weight restricted to allow the TMS surface to be maintained and sustained as a TMS surface.

And then the final component of that was to provide a dust-free surface on Highway 8 from MacNutt north. And that was all done in consultation with the RMs and with local industry and with local ratepayers as well. And the funding was not there to surface all of Highway 8 between 16 and 10. So what was decided was that this would be the strategic link that the community felt would be the best option to surface. And so there is no plans to do continued surfacing on Highway 8 South. We'll continue to maintain that as a good gravel highway for the residents there.

And Highway 8 now is a dust-free surface, and I believe as well too that there is a weight restricted component on that as well too, so we can sustain it as such.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you for the answer. I guess my concern though, and I think we've talked about this in the past, is that the local people out there much appreciate the resurfacing of what you've done out there.

But I think part of the problem is, is that I think especially the community of Langenburg and many of the area people that live around there are somewhat worried that we've improved the highway to let people go out of the province to do their shopping, and to buy machinery parts and things like that and we're actually promoting Manitoba. Because Roblin sits down just through the valley there at the end of where we have built this road and yet we're still going on a dust road which is not — let me be very honest — when it rains, very good condition that road to Langenburg. So we're actually promoting out-of-province shopping and spending our money.

And I think that was one of the big concerns of municipalities of, I know Langenburg and others had with that. We'll leave it at that for now because I'm sure you've heard me on this one before.

Two other areas that I get a lot of complaints out there from Langenburg south to Spy Hill on No. 8 and the other one is No. 80 from Churchbridge to K-1 mine. My office gets an awful lot of calls on those two roads.

I know the No. 8 from Langenburg south to I believe it's the junction of 22, after that junction it improves but to the junction of 22 is . . . every spring it needs a lot of work done to it. And I'm wondering if there's sometime that's going to be . . . have some money spent on it and maybe a new surface put on it.

Mr. Brooks: — At this point in time, we don't have plans that would include for an upgrading of that section from Langenburg south. We continue to see Highway 8 as a very important component that is a TMS highway, least up to the town of Gerald. Have I got that right? No, to the Junction of 22, I'm sorry. And we right now have a condition report that shows that as operating in good condition so far this spring, and we'll try to keep it in that condition.

The department does enter into discussions with the local municipalities to try and find solutions that may take off some of the heavy haul from those sections, to try and make sure that we can maintain them in good condition. And particularly in cases where we aren't able to identify programs that we can use to fund, you know, an upgrade to the road, we will try and ensure that we've at least explored those opportunities to ensure that we are trying to maintain that in as good a condition as we can.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well thank you. I'm going to go out of my constituency now and talk about a couple . . . 16 Highway, I always felt in the last 10, 12 years was probably the best highway, best condition of a highway in the province. And I'm starting to wonder if that's not changing now, and maybe because of the twinning up past Saskatoon, maybe that's taking some of the funds that used to be used.

It seemed to me that 16 Highway was looked after very well before. There was always sections of it that were being resurfaced every summer. And I make a number of trips every

year to Saskatoon; it seems to me there's areas there where the dish-out is from the semis I'm sure, but it just seems there's more areas of 16 Highway, especially from Saskatoon east to the Manitoba border, that aren't near the condition that they used to be.

And I'm wondering, is it because of the twinning that's taking funds away from surfacing, or are we actually still spending as much on 16 Highway for resurfacing as we were before?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well it would appear that a fair bit of this is going into the Humboldt constituency. You may want to talk to your colleague there.

We are . . . East of Guernsey to west of Viscount, we're putting in rumble strips. This is all for '04-05. Also on Highway 16 Junction, Highway 2 to east of Viscount, which is a distance of 32 . . . or I should say, from the 32.75 kilometre to 44.72 kilometre, a distance of 12 kilometres of resurfacing. The cost is a million there.

Colonsay east and west, 10 kilometres we are resurfacing there.

And then, from Bradwell access road, that's a maintenance agreement or a truck agreement, I should say. We have also . . . That's not a large amount, but we also are putting money in there.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm beginning to wonder what the member for Watrous has done to deserve all this attention out there on 16 Highway. I would hope, next year, you would look farther east. Thank you for that answer, Mr. Minister.

No. 1 Highway last year, I believe it was last year, on the south side of No. 1, twinned highway going out of Regina here, you resurfaced. The part coming in was in terrible condition; a tremendous improvement.

But on the south side now going out, I believe there's a section there — and I'm guessing at this, but maybe of 10 kilometres there — that is kind of caught in between there that hasn't been resurfaced. Is that anywhere in the projections of coming up and being resurfaced? Because the rest on both sides would be in very good condition, but there's that one section there that's in very, very poor condition.

Mr. Blomme: — Yes. For 2004, we are doing some major resurfacing on Highway No. 1 in the vicinity of Regina but, unfortunately for the member, it is on the westbound lanes between Regina and Moose Jaw and the contractor is commencing work on that project.

There is a number of locations between Indian Head and Regina on No. 1 East that are being considered for resurfacing, but there is no major contract planned for 2004.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Can I just add to that just for *Hansard's* sake, Terry Blomme has slipped in to answer those questions.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you for that answer. I realize that, you know, you're doing work in other areas but I hope that that could be added to the list in near future because we've made

vast improvements on No. 1 at that end. It seems a shame to have such a short section there to probably deter people from using Saskatchewan to cross on No. 1 Highway when we have sections like that so . . . And I want to thank the officials and the minister for their answers.

The Chair: — Ms. Harpauer.

Ms. Harpauer: — Yes thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to ask questions on Highway 16, however not . . . not redoing Highway 16, you're doing a great job in the Humboldt constituency. When is the department planning on beginning the construction of twinning the highway through the community of Clavet?

Mr. Schmidt: — Thank you. At this point in time the department has began some long-term planning studies and we have a consultant who is undertaking that work at this time. Public consultation has taken place with the community of Clavet and residents and the rural municipality of Blucher and Corman Park.

And there is no time frame for the twinning through the community of Clavet at this time. But we are taking care of the planning at this stage to allow orderly development in the area for the community and the surrounding RM as well as to identify where the future four lanes will go, and then to take the steps we need to do to protect that corridor for future construction.

Ms. Harpauer: — I understand that there has been some meetings held in the community of Clavet which included the two neighbouring municipalities. Initially my understanding was that the village was told, or the residents were told, that there was to be a final report for March 1 and then that was delayed. Has there been a final report completed that's been submitted to the department for recommendations of where the route should go?

Mr. Schmidt: — No we have not received the report from the consultant to date on the final recommendations.

Ms. Harpauer: — Now I've sent a letter to the minister, and I've also forwarded to the minister a number of letters that I've been receiving and phone calls that I've been receiving in concerns with the consultation process. The community have got themselves extremely concerned about that process. They were hoping to have an open town meeting and discussion. There was a number of questions that they wanted asked, and I know myself when I went to the one open house, if you went to one presenter and the next and asked the same question, you didn't necessarily get the same answers. And that is frustrating a lot of the members of the community, and I think an unnecessary fear is arising. So my caution would be for the department to perhaps have that open house.

And I realize in the minister's response . . . and he said that it is your experience that an interactive communication with presentations sometimes results in, you know, one or two people dominating the discussion and then everything goes south. I'm not so sure that would happen in this case. They've been holding open house meetings — the community themselves — but rather than constructive suggestions coming

forward, they're building fears. And I don't think that's a problem that you need when you finally do come into that community.

The community, by the surveys that were handed out to them, have strongly expressed a desire to keep the corridor through the village. And there is some that wanted to go north of the village but the vast majority have asked for it to be through the village. I understand that the utmost concern must be the schoolchildren, but however, that isn't new. The school has been on one side of the highway since it was built and the community on the other, and there is ways around it. So I would like to really strongly suggest that before there is trouble brewing, that the department consider an open town hall meeting.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — I just wanted to make sure we had all the information before I responded to the question. I think it's fair to say that the department would be of the view that they do have all of the input. They understand there will be differing views; clearly there are differing views.

At the end of the day when the consultant makes the final report, I think it'd be fair to say that they would want to communicate that final report to the community and if that means a public meeting, that would probably be the way that they would want to go. If that appears to be the best way to communicate the final report, that's what they would probably do. And I mean, that'd be well advertised so that everyone who would have an interest would be aware of it.

But as it stands now, I'm advised that there have been two public meetings already, as I understand it, a number of consultations with stakeholders specifically, not — in addition to that — not open. But they're convinced that they do have all of the concerns that would be raised, already brought to their attention.

Ms. Harpauer: — I really have to, like I said, I'm cautioning the minister that the concerns, the concerns are becoming fears. And yes, there was, there was two, sort of consultation meetings, but basically there was demonstrations or maps put up. The initial meeting, the maps were very outdated. There is quite a extensive acreage settlement outside of the community of Clavet that didn't exist on the first maps. So the first drawing of one of the roads on one of the maps went through someone's yard. It was very poorly done, so then they repeated it and had a second one with more updated maps.

So there has been indication to the community members that the planners were leaning towards going north of the community even though the majority of the community members have expressed that they would like it to go through their community. And they've also been told that, yes, you know, their opinion or preference will be taken into consideration. They don't feel that it is being taken into consideration.

So I guess the question is: before the final report is submitted, is the minister suggesting that the community will know what's in it?

Mr. Brooks: — This is a very important issue for the department and many communities, as we have a fairly major

capital program that raises issues for each community as we go through, particularly around the twinning project, but also when major intersection improvements are put forward.

And I mean it is a process of doing up some initial options and meeting with the community, trying to see whether or not the options are appropriate for the community and there's some feedback. Clearly in this situation the community wanted some additional information, and there've been a number of meetings with the owner of the Esso service station and some of the other developers in the area, as well as a couple of meetings with the RM, and then the open houses.

It's always a balancing act of, first of all, making sure that we understand people's issues with regards to each of the options. Because we clearly want to hear what people's concerns are. And as those concerns are heard and worked into the process, then the question is, what are the trade-offs of safety and cost and future development. And that's where some of the issues come into play.

The department clearly tries to go for compromise solutions that serve the same ends with regards to safety and economic development and the local community needs. But even the compromise solutions do, in certain times, mean that not everybody's issue — even though they're well understood — would be addressed in the final design parameter. And that's actually probably the case in every instance, is that there are some particular individuals who feel that they didn't have their concern appropriately addressed in the final design.

My understanding is that the consultant is still sort of going through the process, and if new concerns are brought to the floor, that that's important. And clearly I hear that it's important for us to be out there and communicating when the design recommendations come in, to let the public know what the recommendations have been to the department.

Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Brooks, do you have any idea when those recommendations will be completed?

Mr. Brooks: — We don't have that information at hand but we can get back to you on that.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you. The other issue that I have is totally different, but how many highway sign supervisors are employed by the department?

Mr. Brooks: — We currently have a manager and three sign supervisors within the department to manage, I would say, a very large sign program that is over 100,000 signs in total.

Ms. Harpauer: — When a sign corridor is established at the entrance or the exit of a town, village, or city, who establishes the rules of the corridor? Does the provincial government decide what signage can be there — what size, whatever — or does the municipal government make . . . establish those rules?

Mr. Brooks: — The department instituted a municipal sign corridor program several years ago, and during that process did consultations with municipalities and other stakeholders to try and identify what would be appropriate in terms of signing in the corridors. After consultation with the stakeholders, the

department put together a set of criteria for the signing corridor program and that criteria is then used to established agreements with each of the municipalities when they would like to put a sign corridor in place.

So we use the same criteria across the province to try and establish some sort of harmonization of the criteria, and also to reflect the generally accepted principles that the stakeholders reflected to us as we did the consultations.

Ms. Harpauer: — Is it possible for me to get a copy of that criteria?

Mr. Brooks: — Yes, we can provide that to you.

Ms. Harpauer: — That would be great. What authority does the department have over signs on private property if they do not obscure the view of travellers. Examples that come to mind that I see quite frequently are, seed for sale. Or there will be people that will park their vehicle out there and put a big for sale sign. Does the individual need to have a permit in order to have a sign on their private property if their property is along a highway?

Mr. Brooks: — I might start the response by saying that this is an issue that does occupy a lot of attention for the department. We are aware that people desire signs for many commercial and other reasons, and we receive a lot of correspondence regarding sign issues, whether they're related to tourism or points of interest or commercial enterprises.

Signing opportunities are usually viewed as two types. There's the private signing adjacent to provincial highways outside of the right-of-way, and that's governed by private signing regulations. Then there's the official signs within the right-of-way that are governed by department policies.

For the private signing outside of the right-of-way, The Highways and Transportation Act regulates all private signing within 400 metres of the rural provincial highways, and that's for reasons of safety and aesthetics. And the Act applies only to rural lands and not to lands inside the incorporated limits of municipalities.

For signs that are inside the right-of-way, they are governed by department policies and the department has put together policies that allow certain signs and provide opportunities for people to, particularly if it's an adjacent sign, that would allow them — or a sign adjacent to a premises, commercial premises — they would allow the sign.

Ms. Harpauer: — Would the list of criteria that I spoke to or asked for earlier, would include then the restrictions on highways?

Mr. Brooks: — It would not, but we can certainly provide that as well.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you. The next topic is again totally unrelated to the former two. Just to read into the record, it's a letter written by Lucky Lake and district health foundation, and to Mr. Hermanson and the letter states:

The Lucky Lake and district health foundation represents a large area including the villages of Lucky Lake, Birsay, and the RMs of Canaan, Cote, and King George. We have a team made up of a doctor and primary care workers, nurses (I'm sorry) who work within a larger area that stretches all the way from Lucky Lake to Kyle. The smooth operation of our health system depends on that team being able to get to work. The primary care nurse travels across the Riverhurst ferry to work.

Since the spring of 2003 the ferry has broken down too many times. A ferry upgrade was supposedly just finished prior to that time. A second-rate ferry upgrade is jeopardizing our health care needs. Persons needing care will have to wait another day to make a long trip to a doctor somewhere else. Other members of the team have to try to double up to try to serve their clients.

Our foundation would like to see an honest evaluation of the poor service being provided and then a real effort made to eliminate all the problems with the Riverhurst ferry. We have human resources issues that threaten our ability to provide health services. Now a second-rate ferry service endangers that ability even more. We wait for your decision on improving this situation.

So in reference to that, it's my understanding that the Riverhurst ferry was refurbished and has been back in operation since May 17, 2003. How often has this ferry been out of service or down for repairs since refurbishing?

Mr. Brooks: — The Riverhurst ferry is certainly an integral part of our transportation system within the central region, and the investment that the department has made to upgrade that transportation link speaks to that — the total cost for the investment in that project in the neighbourhood of \$1.6 million.

And we believe we've had a substantive improvement in the capacity of the ferry. And also as we move forward, we do believe that that service is going to be, you know, acceptable to the local residents.

We know that that ferry takes the second most passenger trips of our ferries in the province and approximately 14.4 per cent of the vehicles in the province that travel on our ferries travel over that ferry. And we have been able to maintain an operating consistency on the ferry of about 98.1 per cent since it was refurbished, so it's a very high rate of in-service maintenance.

Certainly the department strives to do better and strives for the 100 per cent. There are always aspects of this that we will improve as we go along after the ferry refit, but we believe that we are starting from quite a high level and are in a position to improve on that.

Ms. Harpauer: — How much was budgeted for the refurbishing project and how much was actually spent when the project was done?

Mr. Brooks: — The refurbishing of the Riverhurst ferry is perhaps one of the most unique projects that the department will undertake, in the sense that it is our largest cabled ferry within the province and one of unique design. And we are dealing in

this situation with new regulations under the Canada Marine Act, and we have certain occupational health and safety issues that had to be incorporated as we went into the major refit as well. So we had budgeted for over \$1 million to refit the ferry.

Project changes, these were additional works that were added to the project as we got into the project due to issues that came up from our consultant on the marine side, that raised the project to over the \$1.6 million figure.

So clearly the scope of the work that we ended up doing on that — I would say not unlike the discussion we had with regards to the bridge over the river — that new regulations are tending to increase the costs as we get into these. And that certainly in this situation, that was the case. And having said that, the facility is integral to the transportation system in the region and we believe merited the expenditure.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Brooks. I'm moving on to yet another totally different topic, unrelated. A couple of months ago I received a letter from the RM of Wolseley, expressing concern about the department's intention to reroute Highway No. 47. And I have since that time met with the council to discuss the issue personally. They're telling me that the department plans on rerouting Highway 47 to Grid 616, from Highway 1 to Highway 48. Is that correct?

Mr. Blomme: — Highway 47 between the junction of Highway 48 and the junction of Highway 1 was a TMS that was under severe distress and the majority of it has been transferred back to a gravel roadway. We've been having ongoing discussions with the RMs out there of what's the best way to move the system to a sustainable network.

Those discussions and thoughts were brought forward, where perhaps there was opportunities to look at routing the highway down the adjacent grid road to the east. So that remains one proposal. The other proposal remains to keep the highway on its existing location.

As we've had those discussions, there's been a number of difference of opinion and to date we haven't built a consensus on the issue. So there is a report, an assessment underway now and the commitment to have further meetings with the RMs, with respect to the findings of that assessment and what the resolution of the location should be.

So to date, there has been no final decision on the changing of the location of Highway 47.

Ms. Harpauer: — Well I can understand that there isn't a consensus out there. But Highway 47 is a direct route from the US (United States) border to the Trans-Canada. And if it wasn't allowed to deteriorate into such a horrible state, I have no doubt that tourists and truckers would prefer a straight route, especially the trucking industry. It's quite significant to their bottom line as to the routes that they have to take.

Now I also understand your reference to they're not being able to come to a consensus, because there's three municipalities involved in this project. And if the highway is rerouted to Grid 616, it's my understanding that two RMs will gain a highway and one will lose, and the loser will be the RM of Wolseley.

Now the RM of Wolseley are telling me they don't have the tax base to be able to take the extra cost burden of maintaining this as a heavy-haul road. So basically, if it is rerouted, the RM of Wolseley is, in essence, going to bear the brunt of the cost of the Department of Highways' neglect on the original highway.

So has your department met with the RM of Wolseley on a one-on-one or in a community meeting, again where I'm going back to the concept of a town hall meeting. Has there been consultations with the community of Wolseley and your department?

Mr. Blomme: — Yes, there's been individual meetings with the RMs with respect to the routing. The RM of Wolseley was consulted in those meetings and expressed the concerns in some of the opinions that you have expressed.

That is the intent — to review all those options, outline network options of how the network could be jointly managed and then to follow up with public meetings with the RMs and the general public on what would be the best solution with respect to the location of Highway 47.

Ms. Harpauer: — Has that meeting taken place?

Mr. Blomme: — No, that meeting is planned and would be hoped to occur later this summer.

Ms. Harpauer: — We don't have a date yet?

Mr. Blomme: — No, a date hasn't been set. We're still in the process of securing the final report, the draft report. I would anticipate we would have discussions with council on that, and at that point, with the concurrence of council, go to public meetings.

Ms. Harpauer: — Have you communicated that to the municipality council, that you plan on having that public meeting later this summer?

Mr. Blomme: — Yes, I believe we've communicated that, and I would have to check. But I believe we've communicated that both in our discussions with them and in letters to the municipalities.

The Chair: — Mr. Toth.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and Mr. Minister, and to your officials. I'm going to do a bit of follow up on Highway 47. And while we've been talking about the fact of some public meetings, public consultation regarding this highway, rest assured, Mr. Minister, I think when everything being said . . . Highway 47, we all acknowledge that direct route right up to No. 1, as it is right now is probably the easiest way of moving traffic — and especially when we talk about tourism in the province of Saskatchewan — of having a dust-free service from the American border right up to No. 1 Highway, and then the jog over to pick up 47 just east of Grenfell, is the easiest way of traffic flow into the northern Saskatchewan in that area of the province.

Now we're quite well aware of the fact that this highway is in an atrocious state once you get to the Ocean Man Reserve . . . is

about 20 miles north of Stoughton. And at that point we basically, we can't even compare it to a grid road any more. It's just really unfortunate that we've allowed this highway to get to that level of disrepair.

And I guess the concern I've had, and I've talked to the RMs of Elcabo. I've talked to Chester. I've had the RM of Montmartre . . .

A Member: — Golden West.

Mr. Toth: — And yes, Golden West have called. And, Mr. Minister, while we've got heavy traffic flow has moved onto 616 and we're aware of the fact that we do have Pipestone Feeders are on 616. We've got the pipeline, the major pumping station. Moving tourism traffic onto that grid road isn't . . . I would not suggest is the best way of getting people to look at Saskatchewan as a place to visit, when you've got heavy trucks coming at you all the time and gravel flying.

And it would seem to me that we really need to look seriously — and I'm pleased to hear — seriously at maintaining 47, in fact upgrading it to that dust-free surface that we . . . that traffic flow can move on freely. And I'm pleased to hear that you're looking at and will be moving forward with the meetings with the RMs and with people locally to address this question. And I would trust, Mr. Minister, that we will indeed look seriously at maintaining Highway 47 and its current location.

Is there any other comment outside of what we've had to date regarding Highway 47? Even the southeast transportation authority recognizes that they've had . . . there is some differences of opinion with the RMs, but I think their view is 47, in its current location, is certainly one that we should be looking at, should be the priority.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — I think just generally there's not much to add from what Mr. Blomme has already said. It's just that we'll continue to work with the communities to work on the upgrading of that road.

Mr. Toth: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, following up in regards to highways of this nature — Highway No. 48. As you're aware the understanding of the southeast transportation authority was that last year would be continued construction west of No. 8 on Highway 48, through to the town of Wawota. And I guess my colleague, the member from Cannington, now has this highway actually in his constituency. However it's still a major concern to me because a lot of my constituents use the highway.

My understanding is there's been contracts let to continue grading. And as well, can you inform me as to what's happening from Highway No. 8 through to the Manitoba border? Are we at the point of actually getting the dust-free finished surface on that portion of the highway?

Mr. Blomme: — Yes, that remains as the plan for 2004. We were able to finish the pavement structure in 2003 other than the second and final seal. And that remains the plan to go this spring. The amount of moisture and that of course has the effect on that.

And at the same time the grading of the second section of roadway is scheduled and funded to be undertaken in 2004. And our plan remains then to continue, subject to the legislative approval of funding, the surfacing of that section in 2005.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you. In regards to the ongoing maintenance of Highway 48, once we've certainly reached the town of Wawota, there is from Wawota to No. 9, there has certainly been a lot of breakage on that portion of the highway. What plans does the department have to upgrade the surface of 48 from the community of Wawota to No. 9?

Mr. Blomme: — We're working in partnership with the municipalities in that area, and they've been very significant contributors in that partnership. And the scope or the intent of that partnership is to complete Highway 48 from the Manitoba border to the junction of 9. We're working from the east to the west.

Once we get to the community of Wawota, from Wawota to 9 was graded a number of years back, so we are in the position of needing to put the surfacing structure on that. And that remains the plan — so following completion of the sections to the east of Wawota, to continue with the surfacing on Wawota to Junction 9. And in the interim recognizing that that is still a couple of years away, we're focusing our maintenance attention to try to keep that dust free and in a safe and passable way.

Mr. Toth: — I'm wondering if — sorry, Mr. Minister — if officials can give me an idea of what timetable you've laid out in regards to completing the construction and the resurfacing of highway . . . and I'm just going to start to the Manitoba border. You've already indicated the plans are this year to put the final touches on No. 8 from the Manitoba . . . or No. 48 from the Manitoba border to No. 8, construction upgrading of the base from 48 west of No. 8 to the Wawota community, and then resurfacing there on in.

Has the department kind of got a plan in place that would say, this is what our intentions are, provided everything works, falls in line, recognizing whether it has an impact; that by this period — in, say, 2005, 2006 — we will have this highway upgraded right through to the No. 9 Highway? Any idea of when we could expect this to be finalized?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — While they're looking for the specific timing, let me just provide for you the detail of the '04 commitment on Highway 48.

First of all, I know Mr. Blomme referred to some of the specifics, but here is a bit more detail for you. From west of Fairlight to east of Wawota which is part of the Prairie Grain Roads Program, there are 19.9, essentially 20 kilometres of grading for we're estimating a cost of about a million dollars, also on 48 from west of Fairlight to east of Wawota — again Prairie Grain Roads Program. This would be 2004 winter crush and paving. This is a smaller contract — 300,000 roughly. And then also on 48 from Kipling to the junction Highway 9, again Prairie Grain Roads, but also municipal roads and maintenance agreement has a truck management agreement there for roughly 150 to \$160,000. And that's the commitments on Highway 48.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, I'd like to do a follow-up on that

from No. 9 to Kipling. When you're talking about just an agreement, and trucks actually right now are certainly using the grid road system, is there a plan in place to upgrade the structure of the current No. 48 from No. 9 to Kipling to the same standard that it will be from the Manitoba border to No. 9? And thereby completing and having the same level of structure from basically Regina right through to the Manitoba border eventually?

Mr. Blomme: — When we were looking at the infrastructure demands in the southeast . . . and completion of Highway 48 was viewed as essential by the local municipalities and towns, as well as the area transportation plan to complete the link from Kipling to the Manitoba border. In recognizing the pressures that were there, it was also recognized at the local level that there was an opportunity to put a truck route partnership in place from Kipling to the junction of 9.

In putting that in place, it relieved the pressure to enable other areas that there weren't those opportunities to be addressed. It is the understanding of the partners that this is viewed as an interim partnership and that the long-term strategy remains completion of the Highway 48 corridor including Kipling to the Highway 9.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, to your officials. I think that's imperative because I know that in the long run the costs of maintaining the grid system is just going to be an ongoing burden because there's no doubt — living right on that grid that is currently used east of Kipling, you can see the need to maintain that grid is becoming just an ongoing problem, and it will be an ongoing issue.

And so I think it's imperative that we have that upgraded highway network, especially when we . . . here again just talking of the tourist aspect. And so I'm pleased to hear that it's interim. It's a means of addressing a problem there right now. And I can certainly say that I think most people appreciate the fact that at least for light traffic it's passable, certainly much better than it was in the past however isn't the ideal. And we would hope that . . . And in my consultations with the southeast transportation authority, that's one of their recommendations that we have that upgrade right through from Regina to the Manitoba border.

Mr. Minister, a couple of other questions, I know my colleagues have some questions as well. And first of all . . . and maybe I'll do this in this way. When it comes to No. 1 and the . . . As we're going around communities, we've got a debate going on at Whitewood. We have an ongoing debate at Moosomin as to access to the communities. The big debate is certainly in Whitewood . . . is how the auction mart is going to be impacted in regards to construction of the highway.

I would like to know, Mr. Minister, what authority the officials have when they're going out to talk to businesses such as the Whitewood auction mart to work out arrangements that do not put the ability of that auction mart to . . . or have a major economic impact on a facility of that nature.

And also in the same question I'm going to ask what specific guidelines and monetary values does the department have when it comes to approaching local residents regarding access to

granular substances that are needed to grade your facilities, whether it's the access to clay, whether it's light granule or heavy granule products? Is there a specific monetary value that you have for levels of material so that when you're going and approaching individuals you can say, okay, on your property we believe you have a fairly coarse granule or material that would be very suitable for us in building this grade and we're prepared to offer you . . . this is a normal level.

My understanding is most people are finding out when Highways is approaching them, they're not coming with any specific level of compensation, they're basically asking individuals, what do you think your material is worth? And that's the question raised even regarding a facility like the auction mart.

I think the department should have some pretty specific guidelines as to what it would cost and be able to go and negotiate, rather than starting from, what do you think your material is worth.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — I'm going to let Deputy Brooks answer that question specifically.

But let me just . . . I just want to make one quick point on your earlier question with respect to Highway 48 and it's actually a point that I think a lot of the public are unaware of.

While we certainly appreciate, as travellers and motorists, to have an upgraded infrastructure that would include pavement because it's nicer to travel on, I think I understood you — and you can correct me if I'm wrong, but I think I understood you to say that the ongoing maintenance cost — even if you didn't say it directly, the ongoing maintenance cost on a grid system, it would serve the . . . I should say it would be cheaper to move to a paved surface and then you wouldn't have the ongoing maintenance.

The truth of the matter is that while it's much nicer to travel on the paved surface and the upgraded surface, to maintain a grid system in perpetuity is by far the cheapest route to go in terms of ongoing maintenance, irrespective of whether that . . . I mean, you have maintenance every year, but the cost of the maintenance is very, very much smaller than the maintenance of a grid system . . . or of a grid system, of a paved system over the long haul.

Mr. Brooks: — With regards to situations that arise such as at Moosomin, where businesses might be affected by the capital upgrades of particular roadways, this is an area that the department does do some consultation with the groups.

My understanding actually at this point in time is that discussions with the auction mart in Moosomin are still proceeding positively and that we have been able to find some accommodation there.

The department has the capacity to review different design alternatives and other alternatives that affect, you know, affected parties.

The question becomes, is there a cost increase? And given that we are managing a very tight budget here, we are very attentive

to the trade-offs that we're making at any point in time as we try and accommodate particular interests. Where we can accommodate it with ease, we attempt to do that while, of course, safety and other aspects are of utmost importance as well.

Taking that further into the question of what are department protocols when we are meeting with citizens who might have gravel on their property and that the department may be interested in, certainly I can imagine that several of our individuals would, first of all, be open to listening to the particular individuals to find out what their expectations are, whether they are aware has the property been tested before, has it ever been removed before, things of that nature.

One of the things that we would do as well would be to test the property to find out what type of aggregate is there and what volumes are potentially there, and to do a bit of an analysis on the amounts that we take out. And then we would enter into negotiations.

The department is bound in several senses by fair market value, in that we certainly can't go above fair market value for the property. And that, however, also provides assurance to the individuals that they are not being . . . in any way having this taken without a fair compensation. And there are appeal processes in place that they can access and we make all that material available to them as well, if there are concerns that they would raise.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, and Mr. Brooks. Just one final comment, and it's a couple of questions. And there's a couple of direct issues I'll just communicate by letter to see where we are in regards to a couple of individuals.

But it would seem to me that . . . Well you say fair market value. I know a couple of the situations I've dealt with, I've checked with local RMs and there certainly wasn't any comparison in some of the values that were given. And of course, RMs are, each individual RM has different ways of dealing with getting access to material; no doubt about it.

The one final question is, regarding the third option about the third entrance to Moosomin — main street continuing No. 8 right on to, directly on to No. 1. Is Highways giving some serious consideration to that proposal?

Mr. Blomme: — Yes, we are seriously looking at that option. We've commissioned a consultant to undertake a review of the issues and the safety concerns around that. It is our plan to take the findings and have a full and frank discussion with RMs and the community and to see what conclusions we can come with respect to that third access option.

The Chair: — Mr. D'Autremont.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My colleague, Mr. Toth, from Moosomin took my questions on 47 and 48, and I'm glad he dealt with those. He actually drives it more than I do so . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . But, yes, that's right, I have other questions so it certainly won't slow me down too much.

I have some questions about Highway 361, and I think that the use of the word highway in relationship to that stretch of road is highly exaggerated. The only way you would actually recognize that that is a highway is because of the highway signs.

Over the years, over the last 10 years it has become simply another gravel dirt road from No. 9 across to the Manitoba border. As you know, we've had a significant amount of rainfall and snow over the last three weeks to a month in the Southeast, and that road is virtually impassable. I drove it on Sunday and I'm thankful I was driving a 4-wheel drive because my car would not have made it down the highway.

It needs some serious, serious work on it. It's a road that does get a lot of heavy traffic because of the oil industry in the area. That oil industry is generating a significant amount of revenue for the province. It's generating a significant amount of revenue from the taxes that are charged on the licensing of vehicles, on the fuel taxes that are collected off of those vehicles, and yet very, very little money is returned on to that stretch of road.

What is the government's plans to do with 361?

Mr. Blomme: — If we look at the highways in the Southeast — and 361, as the member points out, is a gravel road that is clearly showing some of the distresses of a gravel road going through its life cycles and in need of some significant clay capping and other improvements — at the same time our focus currently remains on, as we've discussed, Highway 48 and the upgrading of it under the Prairie Grains; likewise the Highway 8 corridor.

To date, working in partnerships within the municipalities, we've made significant improvements on Highway 361 between the junction of Highway 9 and Highway 47 in and around the areas of Lampman, and that does include the last 10 or so kilometres which we were able to jointly rebuild to a good gravel road.

So we recognize the member's concerns with the need presently on some sections in the near future to do clay capping or other improvements on that gravel road. I stand to be corrected but I believe we were able last year to do some sections of raising the grade and improvements, but very limited areas.

For the 2004, that will continue to be our focus to bring blading and regravelling to that roadway, but recognizing the need in the future to do some more substantive heavy preservation treatments.

Mr. D'Autremont: — That stretch of highway apparently from No. 9 on to Alida from the west is very much a heavy-haul road for the oil industry. And there are a lot of trucks going there to the Alida terminal that gather oil to the west of Alida, but near No. 9 and perhaps a bit to the west of No. 9, and then travel down that road. And so there's significant revenues being generated from the work being done in the area that is using that road, and yet virtually none of that revenue is being returned to maintain that road.

And what's happening is it's pushing those heavy trucks off onto the municipal roads now because they simply can't travel down on that road whenever the weather is a bit damp. And it's

extremely rough when it's dry. And we've had over six inches of rain there this spring and it's impassable for a heavy truck. They have to avoid that at the present time and most other people are avoiding it as well. So you know when you do a traffic count you're not going to get a very high traffic count on there because people are simply avoiding driving on that road because it's no longer safe to travel on.

There are a number of other highways in that area as well that are in severe distress, and you've mentioned No. 8. I believe that there was a plan in place for 2003 to do another, I think it was, 10 kilometres south of Redvers; 11 kilometres was done and then preceding 10 was supposed to be done. But it seemed that in early to mid-summer that project was shut down. What was the reasons for that?

Mr. Brooks: — Certainly in 2003 there was a contract that was let out and completed on Highway 8, south of Redvers, and this year there is another contract that is going to be let for approximately the same distance and is scheduled for completion this year.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Was there not an . . . Like the 11 kilometres were done from Redvers south. Was there not also that project or an additional project in place to have done a further 10 kilometres south, so it would've been a total of 21 all told?

Mr. Blomme: — The plan was to complete the section from Redvers to the junction of 361 — or sorry, let me get my bearings here — yes, from Redvers down to Storthoaks over a two-year period. So last year we let and completed half of it, and the plan was in 2004 to tender and complete the sections . . . second section. So that's in keeping with our funding and cash flow under the Prairie Grain Roads Program.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well the people in the area had the understanding there would've been an additional 11 or 10 kilometres done last year, and then the remainder of the road to Storthoaks would have been completed this year. What is the distance then from the south end of the 11 kilometres that was completed to the junction of 361 at Storthoaks?

Mr. Blomme: — In 2003 it was Redvers to 11 kilometres south. In general terms, I see it was about 11.2 kilometres. Storthoaks to 11 kilometres south of Redvers. So my sense is it's about of an equal length.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay, thank you. And that work will be done this year then, will it?

Mr. Blomme: — Yes, that is the plan to have that constructed and completed to the same standard and same type of road as the work in 2003.

Mr. Brooks: — I should note that when the PGRP, the Prairie Grain Roads Program, put out the schedule last year, it would have included projects that were multi-year in nature. So while the project may have been on the list, it should have been on there for 2004. And there may have been some confusion regarding that.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay, thank you. When you are doing

this work this year, will you be repairing the road 361 from the junction of No. 8 and 361, into the village of Storθοaks? It's approximately a mile and a half, two miles, I believe.

Mr. Blomme: — The approved project under the Prairie Grain Roads, where the funding is provided, is for the work only on Highway 8. Having said that though, we are in discussions with the RM and the community of Storθοaks on what options or what opportunities may there be in some type of partnership to look at doing strengthening and a dust resurface on that access road. But any work in that area would be outside of the Prairie Grain Roads Program work under highway . . . currently going underway on Highway 8.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well it would seem to make sense that if you have the equipment in the area, that it would be done at that time. Because the area going from south of 8 and 361 to Carievale is already in good shape and you wouldn't be coming back to do that for a good many years.

So if you have equipment in the area that is doing road repairs and construction, it would seem to make sense to fix that stretch up to give the people of Storθοaks an opportunity to have a dust-free surface to get out to No. 8 Highway since it's obvious you're not going to be providing dust-free surfaces on 361.

Mr. Brooks: — One of the operational mandates that we have is to try and do as much work as we possibly can with the budget that we're provided, and this means using the cost-shared programs, where they are available, to the maximum amount. And that's Prairie Grain Roads funding, the Canada Strategic Infrastructure Fund, the Border Infrastructure Fund, the strategic highway improvement program, and our strategic rural roads programs as much as possible.

So if we can't find a partner, then we will be looking for one because it allows us to complete twice as much work as we can otherwise. We have essentially opportunities out there to partner some of the money to try and get the work done sooner. So when we can leave our money to extend the amount of work that we can actually complete, we take advantage of those opportunities.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, I guess that leads to another question. What is the Department of Highways' relationship with urban municipalities when it comes to building . . . or highways that go through their jurisdictions?

Mr. Brooks: — Under the current legislative and regulatory framework, urban municipalities with a population greater than 1,000 are responsible to operate and manage the highway connectors within their urban limits. And that allows the urban centres the flexibility to manage the developments and roadways within their boundaries.

Having said that, there are many cases where the urban limits have expanded over top of the highways and the department has continued to operate the system until an appropriate time for a handover is available. And in many cases those highways continue to operate as a rural highway even though the urban jurisdiction has extended over them.

In some cases their nature changes quite dramatically to an

urban character, in which case the Department of Highways is uncomfortable with maintaining a presence within there, and in particular when we look for opportunities to transfer the ownership and maintenance of the roadway over to the urban jurisdiction.

And we are in various states of operation throughout the province trying to put forward a consistent approach to managing the transfer as we move forward.

The Chair: — Well it now being 5 o'clock, the committee now stands adjourned. Thank you.

The committee adjourned at 17:01.

