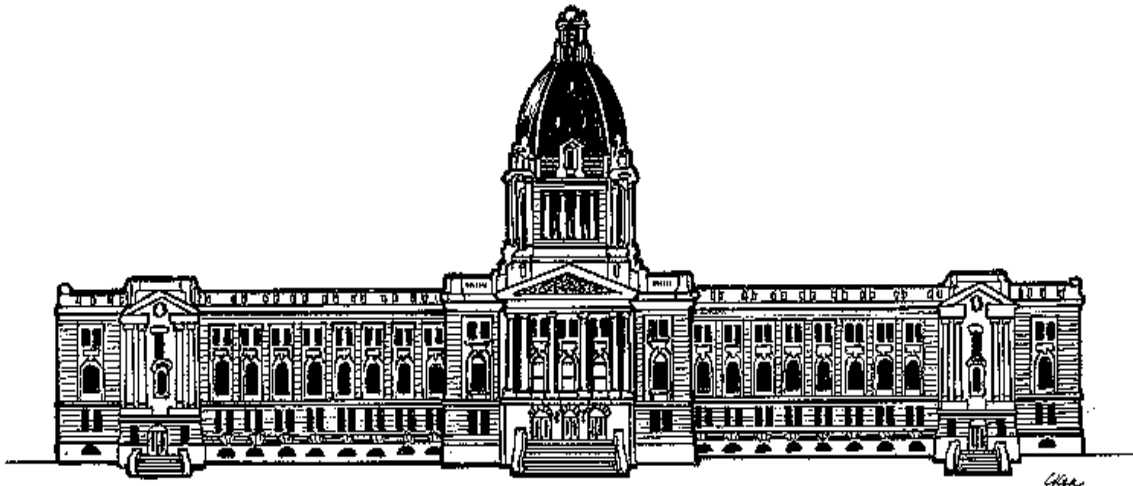




STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL
AFFAIRS AND INFRASTRUCTURE
2007**

Mr. Ron Harper, Chair
Regina Northeast

Ms. June Draude, Deputy Chair
Kelvington-Wadena

Mr. Denis Allchurch
Rosthern-Shellbrook

Mr. D.F. (Yogi) Huyghebaert
Wood River

Mr. Andy Iwanchuk
Saskatoon Fairview

Hon. Len Taylor
The Battlefords

Mr. Kim Trew
Regina Coronation Park

[The committee met at 19:00.]

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

Subvote (HI01)

The Chair: — Good evening. We will now convene the Standing Committee of Intergovernmental Affairs and Infrastructure. The item before the committee this evening is a consideration of estimates for Highways and Transportation, vote no. 16 which can be found on page 91 in our Estimates book. Mr. Minister, if you'll please introduce your officials.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank the committee for inviting us here one more time doing our estimates.

I would like to introduce my officials beginning with John Law to my left, who is the deputy minister. To his left is George Stamatinos who is the assistant deputy minister of policy and programs division; to my right, Terry Schmidt, the assistant deputy minister of operations division. The table behind us, on the right hand is Ted Stobbs who is the ADM [assistant deputy minister] of corporate services division, and to his left is Tim Kealey who is the director of corporate support.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I assume you do not have a statement you wish to make at this time.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — I think not. We've been before the committee before, and we spent some considerable time with questions. I've outlined the direction of the department, and so I think we're ready to go.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Ms. Draude.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and to the minister and your officials, good evening.

I'm going to start this evening by asking you about my favourite highway, Highway 310. Can you tell me when the last time was the department did a traffic count on 310, and what the traffic count was?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, I think it would help if I were to just send a map that is public and open and available to the public that outlines traffic count numbers on all of the highways that we deal with in the province. I think . . . Do we have an extra one here tonight?

Mr. Schmidt: — Yes, sure.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — We'll table one and send one across the way.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you to the minister. Can you tell me how much money was spent last year . . .

The Chair: — Excuse me, Mr. Minister, could you make enough copies available for all the members of the committee?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Yes we'll send one to the Clerk, and the Clerk can copy them. I should say that we do them every four years, so there might be some variance, but for the most part they're fairly accurate.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Ms. Draude.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and to the minister: can you tell me how much money was spent last year on Highway No. 310, repairing the highway?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, my officials are checking. I should just mention to the member, we are planning for this year to resurface four kilometres from Ituna to Balcarres, and the officials will try and gather that information. If the member has another question, we can move on.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you. My concern right now is the highway from Foam Lake to Fishing Lake. The road is in drastic shape. When I travelled down not too long ago to the lake to see the flooding, there was an RV [recreational vehicle] had just turned over, and they were using the jaws of life to retrieve the occupants. Luckily no one was badly hurt. But from speaking to the residents in that area, they told me that accidents on that highway happen very frequently. I'm wondering if the minister's office does keep track of or if they're given reports on the number of accidents on any certain highway during the year.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, we do have numbers for all of the highways on the province, and we can make those available. We also have the maintenance for last year and the upgrade for Highway 310. We can forward that to the member. We can make that available.

Ms. Draude: — Can you also tell me how much money will be spent on 310 from Foam Lake to Fishing Lake this year?

Mr. Schmidt: — Mr. Chairman, what we will be doing is, seeing as though Highway 310 is a thin membrane surface highway and some sections were reverted to gravel last year, we're assessing the conditions of that roadway right now. As you're well aware, there's been extreme wet conditions out there. So we're assessing what will be the best treatments to undertake. Right now at this time, we're doing that analysis, so what we will do is when we've completed that analysis we can provide you with the planned maintenance for that section of road this year.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, if I could just add. It would be, and it would really make this process a lot simpler if members of the opposition would forward some questions with respect to detail on specific roads. Highway has a number of staff people in who deal with casework, deal with inquiries from members of the opposition and from the government side on a regular basis. And it would really be helpful if there are detailed questions on these issues, if they could make us aware of them, and obviously we would be more than willing to answer them either on a daily basis or in estimates and bring the information here. We just don't have that kind of detailed information, and some of it changes with weather patterns.

As that member will know, the water level is very high in that area of our province. It's creating some difficulty for the thin membrane surface roads. In some cases, the base is disappearing on us. That's the nature of 6,000 kilometres of roads that we have in this province that we're attempting to upgrade on a daily basis. But we can get that information to the member.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you. The people in the area have asked these questions, and I guess I won't be able to ask any further questions on the amount of money that was spent until I'm actually told how much it was. I won't be able to ask any more questions on the number of accidents until I know the number. The traffic count that I have asked for information on, I was told that the actual count was taken on a Tuesday and Wednesday, and most of the traffic numbers are of course on the weekend when it comes to that road. So it's difficult to let the people know what's happening in their area if I can't get the information from the minister during the estimates.

And I also know that if you're doing the work to determine the shape of the highway right now, session will be over by the time I receive the information most likely. So it's going to be very important that the people know that there is some hope that that road is going to be fixed. So I would really appreciate the information as quickly as it is available to the minister and from his officials.

And for the record then, if you would like some more . . . if you'd like the number of questions asked, I also want to ask about Highway No. 23 from the town of Porcupine Plain and the RM [rural municipality] of Porcupine Plain. I received a letter on January 31 of this year stating that the government has determined that this road cannot be seen as a primary weight road even though the area and the RM have stated a clear case, the need to have this highway seen as a primary weight highway. And they've been told that it's not possible due to the structural capacity of this road.

And I'm wondering for this road as well, if the minister can update me on what the plan is for a road this integral linking Hudson Bay and Porcupine Plain.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, I'm going to ask Mr. Stamatinos to respond to the primary weight question, and Mr. Schmidt will speak to the plans for that stretch of road after Mr. Stamatinos has responded.

Mr. Stamatinos: — Yes, Mr. Chairman. We did receive a request for primary weight consideration of Highway 23. The way it was left, after some discussion with a number of interested parties in the area, is that they would submit a formal request to our weight advisory committee. The weight advisory committee has sat now on two occasions, and we're just in the process of reviewing all the requests. And we hope to get back to them hopefully some time in early July.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — And, Terry, do you want to respond to the . . . [inaudible] . . . on that road.

Mr. Schmidt: — The plans for Highway 23 are, there's the section — as you are probably well aware — from Weekes to the junction of Highway 9 is a gravel surface, so we will

continue to provide blading and gravelling and spot gravelling as required on that section of highway. Then from Weekes to Porcupine Plain, that is a structural pavement, and so we will continue to provide the maintenance activities on there as well. There's no capital upgrading plan for that portion of work. It will be ongoing maintenance activities such as spot sealing, crack filling, hand patching, machine patching, preventative maintenance on there to continue to keep that road in the best condition possible through maintenance activities.

Mr. Law: — I just wanted, if I could just add a comment on the primary weight request. The decisions that are being made concerning adding primary weight status to the network are all being done at the same time by the advisory committee on primary weights. So any indications prior to the review that Mr. Stamatinos referred to would have been in the context of not necessarily saying that that road could not be considered or might not be eligible for primary weight status, but rather that the process by which adjustments will be made are all being handled together in the current process. So Highway 23 will be considered at the same time as some of the other applications to the committee will be considered.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you very much. I appreciate the information. I'm wondering when the Department of Highways determines which roads are going to receive upgrading or reconstruction, is any of the determination based on the number of accidents there are in a year on that piece of highway.

Mr. Schmidt: — When we undertake the program designs at the start of the year, safety is a prime concern. So we do look at the accident history on when we are planning capital upgrades. That is one of the components. We also look at the condition of the road as well, which is directly related to safety of course. If there's rutting or surface breaks, it's going to impact the safety of the road. So yes we do look at safety as a major component of investment criteria when we are undertaking capital improvements.

Mr. Law: — Your question as I heard it also was in reference to primary weights. And the primary weight criteria do not ignore any of the things that Terry has talked about in terms of the asset assessment that's done. But that is not a specific criteria for primary weight consideration. The safety component would be part of the work that we would do as an assessment of the condition of the road. But the primary weight criteria are primarily predicated on economic criteria — commercial truck traffic, traffic counts, movements of goods between centres — and there's a variety of things like that that are the determinants. The safety component is a consideration as part of our road program, but is not a specific criteria under the primary weights program.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you. The communities right now that are looking at possibly being involved in ethanol or biodiesel plants or livestock facilities, does that information on long-range plans . . . is that part of your determination when you look at primary weight highways?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well, Mr. Chairman, of course it is. If activity is taking place, we do an analysis; we do a cost-benefit analysis. The member will be familiar with the new \$5 billion, 10-year program that we announced on March 6 of

this year that commits more money on a 10-year basis than this province has ever committed to the transportation system. And frankly, it's based on economic development, and it's based on allowing this transportation system to facilitate economic growth.

It has six key points: the international gateways and corridors — the member will also be familiar with that — urban connectors, rural economic corridors, the northern economic infrastructure strategy, the First Nations access roads, and of course regional short-line railway and airports. And why we put this together is so that we can better focus on economic opportunities.

Obviously we work with the other government departments — Industry and Resources — to determine the areas where economic growth has taken place. We determine, working with their officials, what proposed plans are put into the mix. Sometimes we don't know about them and sometimes we do. But obviously we try and anticipate areas where there will be growth. This new \$5 billion program will very much help to facilitate new development in areas where new activity will take place.

I should say it's going to be making some choices, and sometimes I think some don't understand that. Why I say that is because we have a road system that's very much misaligned with economic development at this point, and it's because our economy has been growing rapidly. The railways have been making decisions, and the federal government has been making some decisions that are impacting on our ability to align the system. So is it hooked to economic development? The answer is, of course it is. That's who the program is all about.

I think it's very much a visionary program. I think it will service our rural community as well as the urban communities who are experiencing some changes themselves. And so I think, obviously, our \$5 billion commitment is designed to assist in those kinds of activities which are growing opportunities in rural Saskatchewan, and we certainly welcome them. And I would want to say that this department is very much up to the challenge of serving the needs of new industry as they come on stream.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, for reading the six pillars that we all have and we've all heard about. And my question was for proposed industries, ones that are not already on stream. And I heard you did mention in the little speech that you just made that you did look at that. And I guess if people haven't, communities haven't had the opportunity to get a hold of the Minister of Highways and his department to let him know that they're working on it, that's something that should be done.

I also know that there are highways that obviously need money spent on them. I'm hoping that the \$5 billion is looking at roads like Highway No. 310 that have been falling into disrepair — and not just in the last year but over many years — and that tourism opportunity that's been out there is lacking greatly because not only of the flooding but of the infrastructure or the lack of infrastructure in that area.

So like, we're talking about visionary. There wasn't a lot of vision there when it comes to letting the road fall apart. So I've

been trying to just get some answers, and the one question I have left is, if the map that you told me you're going to give me or give to this committee, does it talk about the accidents on every highway? And also, do you get the information from individuals, or does it come from SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance]?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — The information is compiled, and it's under the Department of Highways and Transportation. That's how it's put together.

And I mean, I'm sorry if I've offended the member by describing a multi-year, largest commitment program ever in the history of this province to her. And if that offends her, I'm sorry. The fact is we have a highway system that is seeing more money on an annual basis and will continue to see more on an annual basis. And so I don't want to offend her by talking about that, but you know, of the years I've spent in this legislature, it's been my experience that most opposition will attempt to speak to public policy as part of their discussions during estimates because that's what this is about.

This place is, in my mind, about creating a vision and presenting a position on a go-forward basis in different areas of our economy. Tonight we happen to be talking about Highways and Transportation. And we can sit here and do casework as we did the other night — all of this work that can be done just by inquiring to my office. And we're more than willing to do that. And we'll do casework here tonight.

But I think it's important to put on the record this government's vision for our transportation system and the fact that we have committed out of this budget \$432 million, which is the largest capital project ever in this department. There's a carry-over of some 40-some million dollars for last year and we are close to maxing out what industry's capacity is this year. And I'd like to share that with the member. She may not be interested in that. She may be more interested in presenting a, you know, circumstance on a particular road. And that's fair and fine; we'll deal with that. We'll give her the answers to that.

But I think it's important for the people of Saskatchewan to understand that this government does have a public policy direction as it relates to the transportation system — which is obviously void and lacking from anything that we've heard from members of the Saskatchewan Party opposition. I have heard not one plan from them, not one time.

And I tell you, whether it's the Department of Highways and Transportation or whether it's education or whether it's health care, they trot in here requests. I have said last time we were doing estimates, I'm estimating they spent about \$700 million on the TMS [thin membrane surface] system in this year. There's \$2 billion worth of fix-up on it and they want it all fixed and they want it all fixed this year.

I think people of Saskatchewan know that we need to have a multi-year plan so that industry can build out its capacity based on the commitment that they see in terms of the growth of our economy and the commitment that the province of Saskatchewan is making through this department. And that's what we have done.

Now from the opposition, I've heard nothing. I've heard complaints about every road that they represent in every part of their riding. And they may not like to hear what I am saying, but it is the truth. They go out to every part of Saskatchewan — and I hear it from people in those communities — they're committing to upgrade TMS roads to granular pavement. And they're committing that, I get in, you elect us and we'll get in, we will do all of this next year. They're even, I understand, having fundraisers now, Mr. Chairman, on specific highways. Fair enough. And they can do that.

But I think what they have to do is they have to present what their alternative is. And they have to present a way that they would choose to fund it. Because you can't spend more money on transportation and spend endless amounts on nursing and endless amounts on school closures and endless amounts on any other expenditure because these people, Mr. Chairman, promised everything to everyone and nothing is ever good enough. They can have a hospital built in their backyard and it's not good enough for them.

But I say, Mr. Chairman, this government is allocating funds to people. We have more Highways money going into this system this year than we've ever had before, and if they want to debate public policy and the vision that we put forward on Highways and Transportation, match their own and we'll have our discussion.

And the member from Wood River can yip and holler all he wants from his seat, but I'm going to take the opportunity to tell the people through this venue that this government has a plan on Highways and Transportation. It's the largest dollar commitment ever in the history of this province. They may not agree with it, and if they don't, what's their alternative, because I've heard from not one of them anything, sir.

The Chair: — Ms. Draude.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well the minister just went on another rant and I'm sure the public knows, even if the minister doesn't, that in that whole rant there was not the answer. I asked one simple question and he didn't manage to find the answer at all.

He didn't mention that he spent a \$700 million deficit. He didn't talk about the fact this government decided to spend \$275,000 on the Carriere case, and it was his government's choice. He didn't mention that upgrading is not to gravel in most people's mind; an upgrade is to pavement. Gravel was what we came from 100 years ago, hopefully. And the \$45 million that is part of this year's budget was money that wasn't spent last year. And I know that maybe the minister and that doesn't want to talk about that, but people in rural Saskatchewan do.

I'm sure the minister knows that the people on this side of the House represent all the far-flung areas of Saskatchewan and we all have highways that need upgrading, and they all want answers. And it's difficult to get an answer from this government, whether it's in writing or in this forum here, because I still have yet to hear the answers to my questions. There is no point in asking questions of this minister because I don't get any answers.

Just like the plan that the minister's talked about, his \$5 billion. He talks about money but I've yet to see a plan. So if he wants to give the answers to my constituents, fine, I'm sure they'll be waiting with bated breath to hear from the minister. Thank you very much.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, I will and as we have . . . We're committed to be given the accident count. We're committed to giving the maintenance dollars that have been spent in the past. We're committed to all of those answers to the member. And I'm, you know, I'm sorry that she's frustrated that we don't have that kind of detail here.

But I want to correct her. There is 40-some million in carry-over, but the 432 million is new money, sir, and it's not deficit budget money. This is a balanced budget and she can argue that, but we'll get to that.

But why don't we talk about the policy? She says she doesn't like this policy. So tell me, is the \$5 billion that we've committed to highways not sufficient?

The Chair: — Order. Order. Order. Order. The Chair recognizes the minister.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Is the \$5 billion that we've committed over 10 years insufficient? Why don't we start there? Is it not enough? And if it's not enough, tell us how much the amount should be. And then I'd like to know how they're going to fund the \$2 billion worth of thin membrane road upgrades that they've been promising all over this province — sixty-some-hundred kilometres of it left, what we haven't upgraded from 10,000. How is she going to do it? Is it going to be a multi-year plan?

And I want to know what they're going to do with Native access roads, with First Nations access roads. Do they agree with that or do they not, hooking communities, First Nations communities to this economy? And if they don't agree with it, why don't they just say so? Do they agree with putting money into urban connectors? I'd like to know that. And if not, what's their alternative?

I mean it's pretty simple to understand, Mr. Speaker, they want to be everything to everybody, Mr. Chairman. They want to be everything to everyone and they promise everything in communities from schools to hospitals to roads. No plan on how to get there. And I've heard this before; people of Saskatchewan have heard it before. In 1982 the people heard it in spades. There's so much more we can be — I can remember it well. And that's exactly what these people are doing.

And so I say to you, Mr. Chairman, I will defend our policy if they're willing to speak to it. But if they're not willing to put forth their own, the people of Saskatchewan will understand quite clearly that they don't have a plan. Their only plan is to give everything to everyone now. And it doesn't work that way, Mr. Chairman. It can't work that way. The people understand that we have to plan over the long term.

The Chair: — Order. Mr. Allchurch.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister,

welcome to your officials here tonight. I have a few questions regarding my constituents and other parts within my critic area. I want to start with Highway No. 40 and the concerns I have with Highway No. 40 — yes, there is potholes to be fixed or whatever. That's not my question. My question's regarding signs along that highway. Apparently some of the signs were knocked down due to the amount of snow this year, and the trucks pushing the snow off knocked the signs down. Some of the poles are rotten, whatever the case may be.

In regards to signs near the turnoff going to Richard, it has been talked that those signs are not going to be put up again. Could the minister correct me if that is not true? And if it is true, why are they not putting those signs up again?

Mr. Schmidt: — Mr. Chairman, what we do is . . . you're correct that, you know, sometimes in heavy snow that the signs do get knocked down from either the snowplow trucks, or in summer activities it can be from the mowing activities or things like that, or heavy winds come through. But what we do do is, as those occur, then our local maintenance crews make note. And they do contact the sign crews, and then the sign crews do work those activities into their regular work plan.

So we try to work those activities into their work plan so it's efficient, and of course we will put all the warning signs back up, you know, the yellow signs, the curve signs. All the regulatory signs get replaced because they are there for safety. And what we will then do is we will look at the information and the guide signs to ensure they're still current and they're still applicable. And if they are, we will mount them.

I can't speak specifically to the signs at Richard. I'll have to touch base with our local crews to determine what the plan is for those, and if that suits the member, we'll get back to you with that information.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, I think that makes my point. We bring senior officials to this venue based on a general desire, I would hope, to deal with public policy issues.

Local, regional, maintenance, day-to-day maintenance and sign repair is best answered by the local people who do that work. And if a question would come to my office, we would refer it to the department who would refer it to their officials in that area who have the answer and the member could have a response in a very short period of time.

Now, I mean, fair enough — we'll go, we'll search out that information. We'll bring it back to you. We do have an office in here, and we have staff to serve those needs. If the member would choose to use those services, we'd be more than willing to help facilitate answers.

Mr. Allchurch: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. I thought this is what estimates is for, is to ask questions of concerns within the constituency. And I feel that's what my job is, and that's what I'm doing.

Another problem regarding Highway No. 40 is the signs at the Redberry Regional Park. Now in regards to those signs, those signs that are there, are those signs the responsibility of the Highways department, or are they the responsibility of the park

itself?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — In the regional park or are they along the provincial highway?

Mr. Allchurch: — They are along the provincial highway.

Mr. Schmidt: — Mr. Chairman, I can speak to that. I believe the policy we have with the regional parks is that we have a tourism signing policy in place. I will have to double-check on that because we did have some programs in place during the, for the centenary.

Typically how those work is that we install and provide the signing for the regional parks at their cost, and then it comes with a five-year warranty. So if there is any defect in the material, if they blow over, if they get knocked down, for the first five years we would reinstall or replace those signs at no direct cost to the applicant. If the signs need replacing after five years, then we would consult with the applicant if they would like them replaced and new signs put up.

Mr. Allchurch: — Well thank you, Deputy Minister, and that's in regarding exactly what my question is. The chairman of the Redberry Regional Park phoned me, and the poles were rotten or broke off or whatever. Five years for . . . Posts usually don't last that long. So they were blown down, and now they are assuming or will have to assume a cost of \$8,000 to put these signs up. It seems like an enormous price to put them up, and yet they can't do it themselves because of it being on highway property.

So if this is the case, that the signs were put up and it's over the five-year period and it's now off warranty, isn't there some other mechanism that even the people from the park that put the signs up . . . All they need is posts up there to put the signs. There's nothing wrong with the signs. Why should they have to pay that exorbitant price just to put those signs up? And without those signs, how does one know where our regional parks are? They're essential. They have to be there, but the cost is ridiculous.

Mr. Law: — We will have to get a little more information on the background as to the specific costs that you've referred to in your question. Our suspicion is that if the cost has been quoted at \$8,000, that there's probably something more to the work that's involved than putting the posts back up. It might be that the sign's ability to, you know, it's reflective characteristics or something else that may be of concern in terms of its current condition. But we will undertake to provide that information back to you as soon as possible.

Mr. Allchurch: — Well thank you. What I'll do is, I will get the information of the person, the contact person which is the chairman of the Redberry Park, Redberry Regional Park and get a phone call one on one, and then you guys can decide what to do.

My next question is regarding the Petrofka bridge. We've gone on for years about this, and to date nothing has happened. Is this in the works for this year to put guardrail on the Petrofka bridge?

Mr. Law: — Mr. Chair, to the member's question, that project, the guardrail, is not part of our safety improvement program for the current year.

It was considered this year as it has in past years. Each year all of our highway safety improvement project candidates are rated according to a set of criteria according to relative urgency. And based on the available funds, we work our way down the list and cover off as many as we can do within the fund. In this instance we did not have this project rated higher than the other ones within the funding allotment, and so it's not on our program for this year.

Mr. Allchurch: — Okay. Thank you for that. The highway south of Blaine Lake from the Petrofka bridge south to the, I believe, it's the Hague turnoff. There's about probably 10, 12 kilometres there. I know two years ago that was redone, and last year in the fall time there was mega problems. There was some slight work done there. And of course this winter it broke up real bad. They've been repairing out there, and as I go home, it's still being repaired. What is the long-term plan for that stretch because it is a problem stretch of road for some time? And with the amount of traffic on that road, especially this summertime coming with the people going to the lake, what is the plan, or is there a plan in place for that portion of road?

Mr. Schmidt: — Yes, Mr. Chairman, we do have some work planned for that section of road this year. As you mentioned, some work was undertaken this year.

And what we will be doing this year is the project will be tendered for resurfacing from the junction of Highway 312 near the Hepburn corner, I actually believe it is, to six kilometres west. And I just was over there myself about a month ago on my way to the area transportation planning committee meeting in Blaine Lake, and so I did provide that information to the ATPC [area transportation planning committee] at their AGM [annual general meeting] that there would be six kilometres, which is the worst section. The remaining section from that location to the Petrofka bridge has some surface failures as well, some isolated ones. So what we will be doing there as part of that tender, we will be cutting those sections out and removing them. If the sub-base and the base and the granular material is wet and that was the cause of the failure, it'll be removed, replaced with granular material, compacted, and repaved.

So the intention and the plan is then that by the end of the year — you know, it'll be based on contractor availability, when they plan it into their work program — that the section from the Hepburn corner all the way to Petrofka will be either resurfaced or the surface failures will be repaired.

Mr. Allchurch: — Okay thank you for that answer. Another issue that was brought to my attention from constituents in my area is the Ahtahkakoop band and regards to the gravel resources that they have. Apparently the chief, Mr. Larry . . . [inaudible] . . . and some of his councillors was in contact meetings with you, Minister, and your officials regarding the gravel resources. And the chief, Chief Larry Ahenakew, has or thought that out of that meeting that took place in Prince Albert that there was some different arrangements then as what there is now. And can the minister elaborate on what took place there

and what the proposals are from now set forth in regards to Ahtahkakoop First Nations and their gravel resources?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, I can tell you that I have met with the chief and one of his officials, and he described for me their resource, and we agreed that we would work together, that I would bring officials from the department together to help work with him to see if we could develop a plan for the utilization of their gravel. There's other gravel in that area, but I think it's fair to say that we are committed to assisting the Ahtahkakoop First Nations in developing that resource by sharing knowledge internal to the department. They're not in that business and the chief indicated to me that they don't totally understand the business, but we're going to work with them to help go forward on that proposal.

And I think that's a good public policy. I think it's a good public policy initiative because it's a resource on First Nations that can generate some economic stability for that reserve. And so obviously it was of interest to me and is of interest to the department, and we'll continue to work with them on developing that plan.

Mr. Allchurch: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. I know I met with Chief Larry Ahenakew and his colleagues, and has there been any meetings taking place since January '07?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — My official is not aware of the last meeting, but the offer stands, and we're there and more than willing to work with them. But I don't know that there are any meetings subsequent . . . Well we just don't know when the last meeting is. But we've extended the offer. The department is willing to work with them, and the expertise within the department is open to them. And I just don't know if there's been a meeting since then, but obviously they know that we're open to working with them.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you. According to the chief at that meeting, which was January '07 and that's the last meeting that took place to my knowledge, at that time according to the letter there was to enter into a formal agreement to assist the band in developing a gravel resources. That was his assessment of what the meeting took place, but since then nothing has taken place. So is it been put on the back burner? Or is still the Minister of Highways and his officials looking at helping or assisting the Ahtahkakoop First Nations in their gravel resources?

Because they have a great deal of gravel and as you know gravel in the province of Saskatchewan, especially in that area, there's not a lot of gravel. And they have an abundance of gravel, and they need some help in exploring that resource. And like you said, it would be a benefit for the First Nations reserve if that could be up and going. So is there any plans in the very, very near future to sit down with the Ahtahkakoop band to assist in this project to get it up and going?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, we'll meet with the chief tomorrow if he's available. My offer was made and my offer stands, and we would wait for the Ahtahkakoop First Nations to contact us. There was, as my assistant deputy indicated, a meeting with me. I did offer. We haven't, as I know, heard from them, but we will make contact with them to ensure that they understand that our offer remains. It was made

to assist them and we'll contact them. We'll have our officials on to them tomorrow.

Mr. Allchurch: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. I take it from that that I will definitely phone the chief tonight and tell him that the minister is anxiously waiting to hear from the band and to set up another meeting, and then they can go forward with it.

Just in regards to roads that's being built on First Nation reserves: is the plan to build those roads going to be chip seal roads or are they going to be pavement?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, I think it depends on the road. It depends on the reserve. There are a number of reserves that have very poor access to them. Some will be paved surface. I can't speak to all of them because, obviously, we're not doing all of them in one year. That was my point when I was discussing the reason we put together the program that we did, Transportation for Economic Advantage, and the reason it's a multi-year program, because you just simply can't do everything in the first year of a 10-year program. It has to be staged over a number of years.

Now I would say some of these will be of a paved surface. Others may not. Others may be a heavy haul gravel. I don't know that because we haven't done the design work on all of the different reserves that may require that kind of assistance.

But I can say this, that the First Nations that we have discussed with are very comfortable with the fact that we've chosen to put jurisdiction aside so that we can support these growing communities and that we can connect Aboriginal communities to our road system through our infrastructure to the rest of the province. I think it's important that we allow First Nations children the same access to education and to sporting activities and sporting events with all-weather roads. I think that's important to me.

What I haven't heard, frankly though, from members of the Saskatchewan Party opposition as to whether they support that component of our program. I would very much like to hear from the member who has a number of reserves in his riding, some of whom are going to be receiving these upgrades, if he's supportive of that program because I have heard that there are some members of his caucus — and it's rumour I would assume, and I can't document it — but I have heard that there are some who would criticize this program.

We don't know the position of the Saskatchewan Party opposition, but I think it would be important that they would tell chief of Ahtahkakoop and others that they support or that they don't support. And as a matter of fact, as they are aspiring to be government, will they continue with the program? These are all, I think, very important. So if they'd be willing to answer that question, I'd be more than willing to hear the answer.

The Chair: — Mr. Weekes.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, to the minister: we're here to ask questions about constituents' concerns about highways. You want to . . . I don't think it's appropriate to be making speeches about what the Saskatchewan Party plan is. You will hear what the

Saskatchewan Party plan will be in the upcoming election. This is not the place for us to lay out our election platform.

We are asking you questions about what you are going to do, your government is going to do about fixing the highways and roads. All I can say is we are here to ask questions about specific highways and concerns, and I would think that you should answer those questions.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chair, I'd say that we have been. But the fact is that members of the Saskatchewan Party have been criticizing the program that we put forward without offering an alternative. And the members of the Saskatchewan Party may believe that it's good politics not to put forth any of your thoughts or your ideas in a concrete way until the election writ is dropped. But I think, Mr. Chairman, that members of this legislature who are in opposition have a responsibility as well to put forth a alternative to government's policy.

And on the Highways and Transportation, I asked a very simple question, and I know they don't like to have questions asked of them because they are very soft-skinned and they don't like to be criticized. I'm saying that I am hearing that there are — and it's anecdotal, yes — members of his caucus who don't agree with the First Nations connectors. Maybe they could clarify that tonight.

And the answer to the question is we're paving the roads that we're working on right now, but this is a multi-year plan, and I can't speak to four or five years out. We'll be developing this as it goes on. But the goal is to connect every one of these reserves to our economy and to our system.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, to the minister. First of all, none of our members have ever said we're against the First Nations connectors. I don't know, can't imagine where he got that information. But if you want to know about the Saskatchewan Party policy, look, it's on our website. It's available, if you'd like to print it off and read it.

But we're here to ask questions about what your government is doing for the constituents of Saskatchewan about their roads and highways. All I can say is they're not very confident in your plan that you have for the future because there's no plan. No one knows what's going to happen year two, year three, year four. And you've had 16 years, quite frankly, of failure as far as keeping the highways up to standards that the people of Saskatchewan and the business community of Saskatchewan expect.

We're here to ask about what your plans . . . because you're the government. When the election is called, the people of Saskatchewan will hear what the Saskatchewan Party plan is.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well I say, Mr. Chairman, that may be good enough for members of the Saskatchewan Party caucus, but here's why people question where you're headed. And I'll give a quote from one of your members, and here is the comment: "While the Saskatchewan Party and area residents are ready to see immediate action [this is on one specific road], the provincial government has a plan to implement the road repairs across the province over time." And the reason why I ask you this question, your members in this session have called for

granular pavement on three-quarters of a billion dollars — roughly — worth of thin membrane roads. And you don't want it next year. You want it now. So the question has to be, how do you plan to fund it, sir?

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Chair, we're asking the questions of what your plan is on these roads that we bring up. We don't see your plan. Tell us your plan. Tell us your 4- or 5- or 10-year plan, whatever — how many years to go out in front. Tell the people of Saskatchewan when the roads and highways are going to be fixed.

We bring the concerns of our constituents to this forum to ask the minister of the day and his officials about what your government's going to do about roads and highways. Let's hear it. When someone brings up about a highway, instead of saying all we do is criticize, well tell the people back home because we're going to go back, and we're going to let the people know what you said. Tell them when the road or highway is going to be fixed, what's the time frame, costs — those types of issues. That's what we're asking.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well you know, I think that's fair enough, Mr. Weekes, and that's why we announce our winter schedule and our '07-08 construction projects. And that's why we make them public. And that's why we have in this year more money than we have ever had in our budget, and that, I think, demonstrates quite clearly that we're serious about our \$5 billion commitment over 10 years.

But you have been on record as saying it's a pittance, and it's not enough. So then the question becomes: if it's not enough on a record amount of expenditure to do all that you want to see done, maybe you can explain to me how much more you would put into this annual budget and how you would afford to pay for that, where you would get the balance of that money. Would you take it from health care or from education or would you take it from daycare programs? I don't know that.

And this is why people say that you have a responsibility. And the media is even calling for you, who hasn't touched you guys for two years, haven't laid a glove on you. And the media is calling for you to come forward with your plans because it's not good enough to say you want to be sitting on that side of the House and governing without putting forth some concrete plans as to what you would do.

Because, you see, people will not buy this. They did some 25 years ago. The anniversary's just a few days ago. And that's exactly what Grant Devine, the predecessor of this government, did. He promised everything to everyone and at the end of the day he had amassed a debt of 1 billion dollars a year on an annual basis for 10 years. And so the media is calling for you to come forward with some concrete proposals as to alternatives.

And that's what I'm asking of you tonight because, frankly, that's what my constituents are asking of me. They're saying, what do these people stand for? And I'm saying, the only thing I can answer to you is spend, spend, spend on health care and on highways and on education and on anything.

I mean your colleague is out in Lake Lenore the other day, and he's promising \$20 million of granular pavement. And he has a

fundraiser to support his candidacy to win the riding, to support his campaign. So you have a rally in support of a highway to raise money, and so you're tying yourself to the commitment of \$20 million expenditure. And you're doing that in other areas of the province, and we know it.

And so when you come in here and call for this government to spend three-quarters of a billion dollars on TMS roads, you also have a responsibility to share with us what your plans would be. If there's an election coming this fall or this June, I think people would be asking, what are you going to do? And you have an opportunity to lay out an alternative to this government. If you say that \$432 million — a record amount of expenditures — isn't enough, tell us what is the right amount.

And I don't argue that you should be coming in here and asking questions on behalf of your constituents. But you know something? You could have all of these answers on a regular basis by simply phoning my office. It's a phone call away. And people are saying, we don't know what the Saskatchewan Party stands for on highways and education and on health care. And I'm saying to you, I'm passing on to you through my constituents — who have a right to be represented here as well — what are your plans if you don't like ours?

Mr. Weekes: — Well a number of points. First of all, you accuse us of not saying, telling people what we're going to do, and then you've accused MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly] from the Saskatchewan Party running around the province making announcements. Well which is it? That's number one. That's the number one point.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — That's not the point. We had \$20 million on one single road, one of \$2 billion of roads without telling people how you're going to pay for it. We put our budget forward here. We tell them how we're paying for it. You guys, you've just been out promising here, there, and the other place. That's why I'm questioning what you would be doing.

Mr. Weekes: — And I have an answer for that. Right after the next election our government will bring down a budget, and you will know exactly where we're going to get the money from. But in the meantime you are the government, and the official opposition we are going to ask questions.

You've just said to us, to the people of Saskatchewan, we could pick up the phone and phone your office any time to get answers to these questions. Well last time I checked, this is estimates. This is where we ask the questions, where it's public, it's on TV. People can sit and watch us. Now if you're saying you won't answer questions tonight, I guess you could go home if you like. We're going to stay until 10:30 tonight, asking questions.

And as far as your \$5 billion over 10 years — well good. You could have said it \$10 billion over whatever number of years. It could be \$20 billion, but if you don't have a plan, if we can't ask you, well in year 3 or 4 or 5 is my highway or my constituents' highways going to be fixed, what is the point of your announcement? There is no point of your announcement. It was a political statement with no plan for the people of Saskatchewan to look at, to say, well where do we fit in in the Southwest or the Northeast or the Northwest? Where are

highways going to be fixed?

This is the forum to ask those questions. We're asking the questions. I'd appreciate you answer them.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well, Mr. Chairman, that's exactly what I'm doing. Because we put forth a multi-year plan. We just came off a multi-year plan, and I want to remind that member that we fulfilled our commitment — our financial commitment, plus. We spent more on the Highways budget than we committed to, and I think that's a good idea of where we will go on the \$5 billion.

If the member was interested in understanding where we would go, he would pick up the economic corridor maps that we shared with SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] and with SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association] and the construction association. He would understand where we're going with respect to economic corridors because he would understand that we have earmarked what we believe, subject to change, are the roads that we need to put our priorities to because we can't do them all. You can't promise everything to everyone.

So what we've said is, based on traffic and based on economic analysis, these are the roads that we believe needed to be upgraded to a primary pavement standard. And I'll give that member one example — Highway 13. It's an economic corridor. It runs the southern part of the province, south of No. 1. And we don't have another one there, so obviously it's a candidate for upgrade and priority. And I think that makes some sense.

Can you tell us what this economy is going to look like in five years from now? No, you can't. Can you tell us where an ethanol plant is going to be built? No, you can't. Can you tell us where you think one might be? Of course you can. You can speculate. You can have a look at where some of the development in the manufacturing sector will take place.

There's maybe a new plant in Birch Hills — a new ethanol plant. Iogen may be investing big dollars there with the support of the federal government. Obviously that might mean that there would be pressure to build infrastructure which otherwise wouldn't be there if that plant weren't built.

And so your economy evolves, your economy changes. Communities grow and some communities don't grow. And that's been the history of change in rural Saskatchewan.

So can you outline a 10-year plan and be totally and absolutely definitive? No, you can't. But what you can do is you can have a general idea of where your economy has taken you in the last few years. And you can do an analysis of that and put forth some thoughts and work with local communities to determine which are the priorities. But what you can't do is take this map and pave it all. You can't do it. And that's what you people keep trying to do. And it doesn't work.

The Chair: — Mr. Weekes.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well the minister would like me to tell him where the economy is going to be in

five years. I seem to recall him just saying a few minutes ago that the government came out with \$5 billion a year over 10 years. Well I would assume your government must have some idea where you're going to get the money in year 2, 3, 4, 5. It's your announcement. You're asking me?

So you came out with a plan. You have no idea about whether you can keep that commitment or not, obviously, from your comments. Because you don't know where you're going economically in the future.

And the other thing: your announcement, Mr. Minister, is what? Well when you take into account inflation, when you take into account of soaring asphalt and oil prices which are the main ingredients of pavement, what is your announcement? Well I suspect that your announcement is less roads and highways being paved this year, next year, and the year after than in the past years because of inflation. So what is your announcement about 5 billion over 10 years? Well who knows? That's basically what you're saying. It could be anything, but we've got an announcement out.

And anyway, as far as your corridor announcement, you promised the corridor announcement last June or July after our Saskatchewan Party's highway program which embarrassed your government so severely because of the terrible state of the highways in this province. We're still waiting for your announcement.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, the member opposite talks about the inability to fulfill a commitment and I want to tell that member that from '97 to 2006, we were working on a \$2 billion commitment to Highways and Transportation. We in actual fact spent 2.5 billion, and I don't know if that might happen at the end of this 10-year plan.

But I can tell you this. We're starting with an average of a half a billion dollars based on the \$5 billion 10-year plan. And over that period of time, we believe that industry is going to build the capacity to be able to achieve those goals.

Now it may be that this economy continues to grow as it has been at 3.3, 3.5 per cent on an annual basis, year over year. And it may be that 20,000 new people in jobs month over month, where you see our population starting to rebuild, it may just be that the tax revenue from potash and oil and gas and uranium would allow us to spend more than that. I don't know that. But I can tell this member that we have made the commitment of \$5 billion over 10 years, and we will achieve that.

With respect to no vision for our road system, Mr. Speaker, it is no secret that we have met with the associations around this province — SARM and SUMA — and we have worked with them on this program. It hasn't been done in isolation. You know members of SARM well enough to know that we have been working with them, and this is in no small part their plan. And this is in no small part a vision that comes from rural municipal governance. And I want to say that I'm proud of the working relationship that we've built with them. And it's partly because partnership, the program, and Clearing the Path has now been melded with what we're doing provincially and it will work.

And this is the economic corridor map, Mr. Chairman. This outlines primary weight roads. It outlines phase 2 of the primary weight expansion. It's got on it the existing primary weight, new request segments, national highway system, which by the way their friends in Ottawa in this year's budget — that they elected, worked to elect 12 of them — have not got a nickel into it. But fair enough, we'll deal with that later. It deals with the national highway system.

And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, it also outlines on this map some of the economic activity that's taking place in oil and in gas. And I think it's a good map and it's some good information and I wish the member would take some time to review it. Because what he would understand is that there is a system and a network in this province that makes some sense both from hooking communities together with other communities, hooking our province together — north, south, east, west — and I would say, Mr. Speaker, does very, Mr. Chairman, does very much in terms of hooking the economy to, the industry to our economy.

Now I want to say, we aren't going to do it all in one year. We can't because the capacity is not there. We're taxed, we're right at the max according to the work that my officials are doing with the contractors. We're doing everything that their capacity will allow them to do. What we need to do is build their capacity out. We need to continue to grow this economy in a way that it's been growing — the population, the tax base — and I say, Mr. Chairman, all of this will be achievable.

And that is part of the program which is the debate I was wanting very much to have tonight. And I'm glad the members have chosen to join me on that debate, because this is what the people of Saskatchewan want to hear. Of course they want to know about their specific roads. That's important to them. But they also want to know that their government has a plan going into the future.

And we've announced a plan. The members of the Saskatchewan Party may not agree with it — fair and fine — but I think people understand that we have done the right thing by putting this forward and I want to say that SARM seems to support what we're doing. SUMA seems to support what we're doing. The construction industry seems to support what we're doing, so it couldn't all be wrong.

The Chair: — Mr. Allchurch.

Mr. Allchurch: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair. I didn't know that 20 minutes ago asking a question regarding chip seal versus pavement on some roads going into First Nations led to that kind of a debate. I will like to say though, Mr. Chair, that when we ask questions and the minister gives up his time — in other words doesn't say a word and gives up his time to the deputy minister to answer the questions — they do a great job.

And I think this is what estimates are for. Estimates are for members of the opposition to ask questions. And that's exactly what I'm doing. We could continue this discussion if the deputy ministers were allowed to answer the questions. As far as I'm concerned, the minister can go sit down someplace else. We'd have a great evening. And we would get our work done, thanks to his officials that are here tonight. But if the minister's going to keep answering the questions in the state that he is, then

we're not going to get nowhere.

So in regards to the question I asked, chip seal versus pavement, in regard to the maintenance of those roads — whether it be chip seal or whether it be pavement — is it the responsibility of the Highways department to look after the maintenance of those roads, or is there another plan that you have in regards to chip seal and pavement?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, I want to thank that member for the question. And I mean, I know they're offended by hearing about this economy, and they don't like to hear that because it was short months ago they were complaining about a stagnant economy and population declining. You don't hear that from them now. Not a word, nothing. The 45 days we've sat, 53 days — I don't know how many in this session — heard nothing about the economy, not one question. And I understand why. I understand why because this province is on a boom, and it's doing very, very well.

So I understand your pain, and I understand you don't want to hear about this program. You don't want to know that there's the largest commitment ever in the history of the province, and I understand that. Because it's not good politics for you as Saskatchewan Party members. And I understand you don't want to hear about promising every road in every community. I understand you don't want to hear that. But the truth has to be brought forward, and that is the fact.

And the fact is that we're committing \$5 billion over a 10-year program, and we're going to fulfill that commitment. And we're going to continue to match this road system with the economy because that's what this program does.

Now it's obvious by you not responding that you don't agree with it. And that's fair enough, and we'll pass that on too. And we'll also pass on the fact that you have no alternative and weren't willing to put one forward. Specifically I'll have my deputy respond to your question.

Mr. Law: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. The first question about chip sealing versus paving on our First Nations access road program, all of our current work in the current year, we're planning to provide surfaced roads, and our plan does require us to do an engineering design for each of those depending on the circumstances. So we haven't made a decision that all will be paved or some will be paved and some will be chip sealed. But we have decided that we are going to ensure that it's not a gravel surface that we're working to and have started the focus of our program on communities of populations of greater than 500 where, in general terms, the economic activity or the needs of the community are higher.

So we're starting there, and we will be providing combinations of chip seal and paved surfaces. All of them will be engineered surfaces and will not be gravel, so that's our plan for the program.

As to the maintenance, once the capital programs have been put together, we will be looking after the maintenance either by directly providing the maintenance ourselves or in some instances, we're attempting to establish partnerships in all cases with the First Nations and the surrounding RMs in terms of the

best long-term maintenance of the surfaces into the future. And so in some instances, they may choose to provide the maintenance themselves in which case we will provide funding support for the maintenance. In other cases, we will be directly providing the maintenance. It will vary according to the nature of the agreements we reach with local First Nations groups.

Mr. Allchurch: — Well thank you for that, Mr. Deputy Minister. I appreciate that answer. As you know there are a few First Nations that are getting these roads, highways in, and talk that came to me was the fact that if it was put on through pavement, then the Highways would look after it. If it was just, if it was just chip seal, then there would be a partnership agreement set up between the RM and the First Nations itself. Is there any relevance to that?

Mr. Law: — There has been no blanket policy or program position established by the department with respect to differences between who would look after the road surface if it were chip seal versus a paved structure. I was just conferring with my colleagues about whether in some instances we may have come to a position that we may have some greater capacity or expertise with respect to looking after a paved surface because of the nature of our, you know, our capacity as an organization as compared to some of the local RMs or First Nations communities.

I'm advised that some of the local stakeholders will have suitable equipment to look after chip seals and in some instances we may include that as part of the negotiations with respect to the partnership agreement into the future. But in each case there's no . . . We haven't sort of come to the position of saying if it's a particular surface, we're doing it; if it's a different kind of surface, you should do it. Those are subject to individual negotiations and discussions within an effort to try and maximize the best available resources to look after the road.

Mr. Allchurch: — Okay thank you. Another line of questioning I have and that's in regards to the Sled Lake-Dore Lake area. As you know, a few years ago there was a partnership between Weyerhaeuser and the government to build those roads. With the closing of the mill in Prince Albert and around regarding Weyerhaeuser, what happens with the roads in that area now if . . . And maybe the minister can comment on what's happening with Weyerhaeuser with the road building. Are they still in with their road building or are they out?

Mr. Law: — With respect to Highway 924 and the work that was planned to do some upgrading and safety improvements, that — the member is correct — was originally part of the allocation that was covered under the agreement with Weyerhaeuser. And we negotiated to include the upgrade within the overall envelope of funding that was provided and directing it to some improvements. There was a multi-party agreement with some of the communities and Weyerhaeuser and the government through our department to try and facilitate that, and that work will continue. So there is no change with respect to the completion of that work.

I'm not aware, although there may be some individual circumstances if the member has some in mind, but I'm not aware of any other changes certainly within that area that we have contemplated.

If you're speaking more broadly about the general agreement, we have certain circumstances where the company is agreed under terms of an agreement with us to do some delivery on our behalf of some of the roads where there are some significant hauls that take place, not only for Weyerhaeuser but for some of the other related forestry companies in the area. So there may be some specific circumstances there where there may be some delivery changes or something of that nature, but I'm not immediately aware of any of that have changed as a result of the circumstances of the agreement with Weyerhaeuser.

Mr. Allchurch: — Well thank you for that answer. In regard to 924 going up to Sled Lake and then on to Doré Lake, that road is fairly windy. And I know there was improvements going to be done to the road which weren't done — I guess that would have been two years ago — that was because of the wet weather. Last year it also was wet at times, so there was little or very little done.

Is that work still scheduled to be done this year? And that's because of the wet weathers the last couple years. Is that road work still scheduled to be done?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, I'm glad that the member acknowledges the wet weather and the difficulties that we have had in terms of the central and the northern part and on the eastern side of the province. It's been very difficult keeping a surface on some of these roads, keeping them together, and it's been an extra challenge in terms of manpower. And so I am glad to hear the member acknowledge that we have some challenges with respect to high-water table and rains. I think Mr. Schmidt wanted to respond in more detail to that particular road.

Mr. Schmidt: — Yes, Mr. Chairman, I can give you some specifics on the plan, the go-forward plan for the continued upgrading of 924. As you mentioned, the first tender was let about two years ago. And those were extremely wet conditions up there. The contractor started late in the year, and it just turned out that it was too wet, and they had to actually demobilize from that project to go to another one.

We did work over the winter, based on concerns from some of the locals that we needed to accommodate traffic during construction, and we just could not use that wet material as it actually resulted in the road being shut down for a period of time. So over the winter, we did some more exploration, and we were able to locate some sandy dry borrow in the area. It did need a little increased haul-length, but we determined that that was the best avenue to go.

And so I believe that the contractor has basically finished up construction now of the first eight kilometres because we were able to use that dry material, so over the winter they could construct, and so I believe the first eight kilometres are now open. They've gravelled it, and they're blading it continuously. As with any new construction, there's going to be some soft spots for the first little while until we can get the top dried out and a good crust formed on the top.

As far as the remaining roughly 23 kilometres to the junction of 916, we have a tender on the tender schedule, on the April tender schedule, and so we're just finalizing the details there

too. And we are hoping to go to tender with that in the next two to three weeks — that that will be tendered. And that will be, we split the project in two . . . is what we have done now. So we're looking at dividing the remaining 23 kilometres over two projects — one this year, one the proceeding year. And as well, as we always had with the agreement, there's a few upgrades from the junction of 916 north of Dore, not upgrading the whole road because you don't have the same volume of truck haul on there, but there are some spots that have been identified to improve some curves. And even on the chunk of 924, south of 916, there is some relocation involved there too to straighten out some of those curves and improve safety. So that's the go-forward plan for 924.

Mr. Allchurch: — Well thank you for the answer. I appreciate that. My final question, Mr. Minister, is in regards to your plan last year; I believe it was Roads to Prosperity, and that's in dealing with the roads, the northern roads. Has much work been done in the northern roads? And I'm talking basically from Wollaston north to Stony Rapids and/or in between I guess, up to Points North and then up to Stony Rapids. Has any work been done as of last year, and what are the plans for this year, weather permitting?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, one of the elements of the northern program has been capacity building, meaning that we would like to — after a number of seasons with this northern infrastructure program — that we would be able to leave some businesses in that area with capacity to be able to do northern work by northerners and by northern companies. Obviously this is going to take more time than if we just continued to bring in existing contractors from wherever they happen to come based on a low bid.

And so we are working in terms of gravel crushing. We're working in terms of construction to be able to put in place the capacity for northern people to partner with some businesses from outside to do their own work. Obviously we are going to take the time it takes to do that.

Mr. Schmidt will give you an update in terms of the progress that has been made on those roads in that area and what our go-forward plan is. And I think they're ready to do that now.

Mr. Law: — This is the end of the first year of the NEIS [northern economic infrastructure strategy] program in terms of actual construction. We will be spending approximately 50 to \$55 million in total on our roads in the North this year under the program and related maintenance activities.

With respect to the Wollaston section of the road, we have focused in the first part in the first year of the program on getting some of the other sections of the road that were more immediately ready for construction. The program is really, as the minister referenced in terms of capacity building, a bit of a blend of us trying to get the infrastructure in place on the one hand and on the other hand ensure that we do work with the local stakeholders to afford them an opportunity to participate in some of the lasting opportunities — some of the jobs, some of the training, and potentially some of the longer term benefits of perhaps being able to provide some support into the future to meet the needs of the program.

And so there's been a fair amount of work that's gone in from our staff in the North in working with local stakeholders on helping them to mobilize and coordinate some of their business capacity to be able to participate in the effort. And so I think we're still ramping up in terms of the actual incremental amounts of funds. We're about doubling the amount of dollars that are going into the NEIS program in the current year from last year which was really, sort of, our first start-up year.

We can give you an inventory of the actual specific components of the work that were done in our first year of the program as well as some of the winter crush work that went into preparing for the current year and what the program is for this year.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you for the answer. I know one of the obstacles that is a huge problem up in that area is regarding the land base itself is a lot of sand. And you can't build road out of sand because there's nothing there to compact and hold together.

I'm glad to hear that you're working with the groups from the North to give them an opportunity to partnership and help build the road because they know themselves working with the engineers with the Highway department that that's the only way to sustain a road up there. And I'm glad to see you moving forward in roads to the North because, when I was up to Stony Rapids with my colleague from Last Mountain-Touchwood, they were really hoping that the soonest that this road could be built, the better it'll be for the people up there.

With that, Mr. Chair, I think you're asking for a 10-minute break. And I'm finished questioning, so we can have a 10-minute break.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — If I could just comment on that. It would appear that Mr. Allchurch is supportive of this program, and I appreciate hearing that. That is, I would have to say, a first.

And I think he understands the North in a way that many others may not, and so I want to thank him and commend him for his understanding. And I know that his support for this program will be well received by First Nations and Métis people in northern Saskatchewan. And I look forward to further discussions; perhaps some of his other colleagues could be as forward with their thoughts as he is.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Because of the length of time that we'll be sitting here tonight, we're going to take a little break here right now to answer mother nature's needs and so on and so forth. So the committee will reconvene itself at . . . what would that be? It'd be at 8:40. At 8:40 we'll reconvene. We stand recessed until 8:40.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

The Chair: — It now being 8:40 we reconvene the Committee of Intergovernmental Affairs and Infrastructure. And Mr. Toth.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Welcome, Mr. Minister, and your officials. I just want to go to one issue regarding signage, and it's in regards to the point of interest signs that we see or historic point of interest signs we see around the

province.

In my area in 2005, the centennial year, a group of people and a community that no longer exists — in fact it has nothing to identify it — decided to preserve the namesake of the community by putting up a cairn; however it's two miles off of No. 48 Highway. And I'm just wondering what the process is to get a historic point of interest sign on that highway to direct people to this cairn that has been established.

Mr. Schmidt: — Yes, Mr. Chairman, I'd be pleased to provide some information to help these people start the process. And what I would suggest they do is they can contact our southern region office in Regina, and I believe the address and the contacts are on our website for the southern region office.

And the process there then is they would make an application for the point of interest. And of course there would be criteria that needs to be met, so we can maintain the integrity of these points of interest so that when tourists do see the sign they know they're certain tours and facilities there and certain minimum things. And so there will be requirements there. And if it meets those requirements, we will be pleased to work with the stakeholders in having those signs put up. So if they would contact our southern region office, we will move forward with that process.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you. I was just wondering would you happen to have a phone number handy. If not, if it could just be . . .

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — If the member wants to call my office, we can forward that information. That's why we're there; that's why our staff is there.

Mr. Toth: — And if it's just forwarded too, that would be fine. We'd appreciate it.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — As a matter of fact, the officials have that piece of information here, Mr. Toth. We'd be more than willing to share that with you.

Mr. Schmidt: — They can contact our signs standards analyst. Her name is Dawn Schmidt and her phone number is 787-4754.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you very much. I appreciate that. Mr. Minister, there's a couple of areas in the Moosomin area where we've had some significant challenges, and number one is in the intersection of No. 9 and No. 1. Since the four-lane highway was opened, we've had a number of accidents. And most recently, just this past week in fact, we had two significant highways at that intersection again. And over the year . . . and haven't been opened over a year, but I forget the number of accidents that have happened at that intersection.

One of the concerns is the distance between the two highways coming off the No. 9 and trying to get across without impeding traffic going either east or west. The other issue originally had to do with lighting, and I believe the lighting has now been addressed on that issue. And I will acknowledge that. It certainly has improved the visibility of the intersection.

But I think one of the most important issues continues to be the

— and I'm going to use the word inadequate — warning coming from the north of the No. 1 intersection where it currently exists. People were used to travelling south on No. 9, and you'd go by the Petro-Can. You had a visual idea of where the road was. Now it's basically out in the open; it's not as visible and not as noticeable. Even local people find that they are on the highway before they actually realize it's there. And prior to the four-laning of the highway, there were red flashing lights with the big stop sign.

I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, if something can be done to just give greater advance notice of the imminent approach of No. 1 Highway and just a greater warning even. Right offhand I can't think whether we've got a rough board or whatever to slow down traffic as you approach the highway, if some of that could be even put in place. But what can be done to address the problems that have been arising continually at that intersection?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, I'm told by the officials that we do have some plans to upgrade that particular intersection.

I mean obviously when you have an expansion and twinning in that area — all new — I mean it creates some circumstances, and people aren't used to what they have been used to for decades and decades. And so I think it takes a little awareness with the local community, but I think as well it takes some work from the department to assist in better making people aware of the changes that have been made. And I think Mr. Schmidt or Mr. Law have the details, and they would share them with you.

Mr. Schmidt: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. You are correct in that since the intersection have opened, we have been working together with the local community identifying some of the concerns. One of them of course was the nighttime, and the lighting has been installed.

The other two is now that the intersection has been in operation, I believe, for well it will be a year, I think, a year coming up this fall. As the minister mentioned, anytime you do make changes to especially highway intersections that have operated for years and years and years, there is going to be a bit of an education time or a time that it takes for traffic patterns to adjust. But we still want to ensure that we have all the safety measures in place.

So my staff is working on reviewing the traffic patterns and looking at some of the recent accidents to see what the causes were, and we're looking at mitigating factors including some of the measures you've talked about — the red flashing lights above the bigger stop signs, even the advanced amber flashing lights. And another countermeasure we always look at too is the rumble strips you mentioned which are very effective. Now we are a little careful with the rumble strips when we have close to urban areas or close to residences nearby because we have had issues back on the noise, especially at nighttime when those big trucks do go over there. It is very loud. And so we want to be sensitive too to the neighbouring residents and the urban municipalities that we're balancing safety with some of the noise issues that have been brought forward.

So yes, we're continuing to analyze that intersection, continuing to look at additional safety countermeasures other than those

that were built in during the design, and we'll look to completing those as soon as possible.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you for those answers. And regarding the rumble strips, you're probably familiar with the new intersection that's actually got less population around it than the old one had, so I don't think the rumble strips will certainly be an issue, but I know they'll be a welcome addition. A lot of motorists get somewhat aggravated, but when you can see how they can alert you to the fact that there's an important intersection coming up, they certainly play an important role.

Another question that has been raised . . . and I believe, Mr. Minister, you've had a request to come out to the community of Grenfell. One of the ongoing issues, and this even goes back to the discussions prior to the twinning, was the access to the community. And on the west side, the west entrance certainly is not very visible especially with the curve going and the way the highway has been built. It's not as easy to notice the intersection at the west entrance. And two things come into play. At night, very poor lighting, there's very little lighting. I believe it's one light on either side of the highway which doesn't leave too good visibility, and it's hard to pick out the intersection. And in the daytime, of course when you're going west, it's just to facilitate the curve and the speed we've got, the way the highway's elevated makes it difficult to see.

And I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, if you've had a chance to respond to the community, and what responses will be made in regards to that request.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chair, I am told that the officials at a local level have met with residents of Grenfell and will continue to look at suggestions and options from them and would then be reporting back to Deputy Minister Law and to my office. Obviously if there are some things that we can do to support safer access and, you know, better visibility in that, we would like to work with the community on that. And so my commitment would be that at a local level we'll be searching out the suggestions from the community, and they will be reporting back to me through the department.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, in regards to No. 1 and I'm going to make a few comments just regarding the last two questions I raised as we move forward. Because your department officials are quite well aware of the fact that we're going to be, and I would think probably close to Moosomin . . . or at least opening more four lane as we move further east and no doubt in the near future past Wapella. And I'm hoping, Mr. Minister, that before we actually get to where we open the four lane that we do, if at all possible, make sure that we do have that adequate lighting and some of those warning systems in place prior to, just from what we've experienced as we've opened up the four laning, say, past Whitewood and by Grenfell.

I'd also like to comment on the fact that despite what we were led to believe in a number of the meetings prior to construction of the twinning around Whitewood and the . . . At one time we were told by department officials that a service road would have to come in, I think, about a half a mile west just by the auction mart, and that would be the west access. And the argument had always been, well the current No. 1 just as the highway goes

past, just use that as a service road and come right in, and it would work in very well.

And I notice that that's exactly what Highways did instead of having a conflict with the golf course and all the work they'd done. And I must say that it's worked very well. And everyone was certainly pleased to see that at the end of the day that was the decision — just to use the current No. 1 Highway instead of adding some additional costs by putting in the service road.

And so I think, Mr. Minister, we've shown in the past that if there is consultation even with local communities, local groups, local governments — and while we may not see eye to eye in the beginning — with compromise we can certainly come up with solutions that at the end of the day work a lot more smoother in transition as we change highway and move forward with highway construction. So in that matter I want to give that bouquet to the Highways department and their officials.

However, as I say that, I might add that I do have a fair number of miles of highway still to be completed in my constituency on No. 1. And we've . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well we've resolved some. There's a few ongoing. And I think until we finally have got completion done, there'll be a few. But at the end of the day, there again, if we learn how to work and co-operate, we probably can come up with a workable solution that pleases everyone.

So having said that, I want to move on to Highway No. 47. And you'll be aware of the fact, Mr. Minister, unfortunately about a week ago just north of Stoughton there was a terrible accident, in fact a fatal accident where three individuals who had just moved to the Whitewood area, purchased the Whitewood motor inn, and travelling down to Stoughton, their van, vehicle left the highway just as you . . . Actually I believe they were going north at the time. And when you come by the Ocean Man Reserve, that's where the pavement runs out, and then all of a sudden we get into a narrow section. There's about a 3-, 4-mile section of narrow road, and sometimes it gets quite washboardly . And it appears that the people lost control of the vehicle.

What I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, is we still have that narrow section of highway that rolls through that little bit of a rolling section of topography in that area. What's the department doing, or what are the plans to address that piece of road?

Mr. Law: — Mr. Chair, thank you for the question on 47. The member raises the unfortunate circumstances surrounding the recent fatalities on 47 where the road changes. I would say this is probably the toughest part of the job is reading about . . . We get the direct reports on each of these kinds of accidents directly and are always concerned about whether or not road condition may have been a contributing factor.

The investigation at my last reading — and we've been receiving regular updates — is still ongoing. But my early understanding is that road conditions were not a direct factor in the initial investigation of the accident.

With respect to the condition of the road, the member refers to the narrow section on 47 where we actually did some upgrading of the gravel section of 47. We then have the narrower part which was the former TMS section which is a little bit narrower

than the other section. We do not have on our plan this year any plans to widen that section or to do any substantial upgrades in our current program. It will be evaluated again as part of the overall assessment we do. There will be some regular maintenance work done on that section of the road, but we do not have a discrete part of our plan this year that would provide for upgrading of that narrower section in the current work program for the current year.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you. In a most recent article, a comment was made by the trucker who had stopped. Actually he had noticed an individual walking through the water from the submerged vehicle. It caught his attention and he stopped and he . . . And this trucker happens to drive that road quite a bit, and he mentioned that . . . Well yes, I've heard the same reports about highway conditions not a factor.

He did mention that there was a fair bit of loose gravel, and there was washboard just as . . . And I think we all know what happens on washboard. And if people aren't that familiar with driving on gravel roads, and no doubt these individuals all coming from BC [British Columbia], and I believe the Vancouver area, probably wouldn't be that familiar with gravel roads as well. So I think in some ways while it was dry, the conditions were dry, and it wasn't . . . those weren't major factors.

A washboard road certainly can create a significant hazard especially for people not that familiar and even for good drivers. We've seen it happen time and time again. A lot of our rural accidents tend to happen on washboard roads. So I think we certainly have to do whatever it takes to, number one, warn people about the significant change in the quality of the road and then to ensure that it is properly maintained to at least control the washboard and minimize those challenges. So I would hope that those are some of the things that we're going to be mindful of.

Mr. Minister . . . okay.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — . . . respond to that. That is one of the reasons that we have dramatically increased our Highways budget, and that is why there's more money going in to maintenance. I mean obviously we've got a lot of roads in this province, and it's important that we have adequate ability to be able to maintain those roads in the . . . [inaudible] . . . and into the spring.

And I'm just wanting to give you an idea of the incremental infrastructure money or maintenance money. In '06-07 our total amount in preservation activities was \$126 million. This year we'll be spending 170 million. So there's an increase of 44 million roughly, in terms of our preservation activities, and I think that will go a long ways to help support the work that the department is doing.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, I thank you. Mr. Minister, you talked just earlier on with one of my colleagues. You talked about your new 5 million over 10 years expenditures for Highways, and your new multi-year plan. But I remembered a debate we had — and I'm trying to recall whether it was three, four years ago — but at that time as well we talked about some of the long-term plans Highways had.

And one of the plans at that time was to work with the transportation authorities around the province.

And a number of years ago I was informed that the southeast transportation authority had been asked, in co-operation with the department, to look at the highways in their area and come up with a game plan of number one priority, number two priority, and what have you. And at time, number one priority was No. 48 from the Manitoba border through to Kipling. Now of course over the last couple of years . . . and part of the delay certainly has been some of the weather conditions, the wet conditions when construction first really took place in that Maryfield-Fairlight area. And as I understand, you're now pretty well complete from the Manitoba border to the community of Wawota. I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, where the final upgrade from Wawota to No. 9 is as far as that construction and improving the surface on that, and then construction from No. 9 to Kipling.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — That portion of that road has gone to tender. The tender has closed, so that will be completed this year if the weather isn't failing us.

I guess I had also spoken a little earlier . . . And this does, by the way, complete the partnership that we had agreed to with the area transportation planning committee. But I should say one of the difficulties that we've had is in federal programming. First of all, and what I want to relate this to is the federal funding that was available for those kinds of projects and those kinds of partnerships. And your colleagues, one of your colleagues, indicated inflationary costs of tendering and contracts and labour and all of the things that are happening in a strong economy and that our cost per kilometre is going up. Those are capped costs in terms of that program — now expired — that we used to get from . . . and financing that we used to get under that program from the federal government. So that has to be now completed with all provincial money.

We again, we're completing the twinning through your riding. There's a lot of money been spent in that area in completing, you know, completing the twinning as you will know. It's a commitment that we made. The federal government came on board. They did put some money in, but again it was capped, and so inflationary costs have eaten a lot of it up. And pretty much we're going a lot of that on our own right now, so it's not the cost-share percentage that it used to be. And that's part of the pressure that we're facing.

And it's unfortunate that we're one of the only countries, G8 [Group of Eight] countries, that doesn't have a national highways program. If we had, obviously we could transfer some of our commitment to twinning of Highway 1 and of Highway 16 to some of the other economic corridor roads that area transportation planning committees have recognized.

And I think from this government's perspective, that is why we are so incredibly disappointed with the lack of ability of the 12 members of parliament that were sent down there to be in any way effective in the transportation file. We have received this year's budget of the \$432 million, which is a record. We haven't . . . There isn't a nickel of federal government money yet. And that's unfortunate because I think that this province deserves similar support to what we see in the Maritimes,

similar support to what we've just seen that came out of the national government for twinning of some roads in Alberta. And not one thin dime have these members of parliament been able to raise for us.

And I really do believe that's unfortunate especially when there's only two from any other political party. We've never had that many people sit around a government caucus in Ottawa, and it would appear to me that their ability to raise Saskatchewan's profile at that table has been flat, to be polite.

But in terms of that planning committee, the area transportation planning committee, this does fulfill our commitment; 48, the completion of that road has gone to tender. And I'm hopeful that we'll have it completed this year, weather permitting.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I think, as well we were talking earlier about long-range plans and certainly the Saskatchewan Party highways plan, and in '03 was a plan that included an enhanced construction and completion of the twinning of No. 1. And I'm pleased to see that the government has moved forward on that. It's certainly long overdue.

Another part of the plan was, as well, to get the federal government to come on board. And we don't disagree with you that there should be a greater federal share when it comes to the national highways program. We've never, we've never disagreed in that matter. In fact we've raised the same question at the federal level regarding highways construction because when you're looking at a national program and you look at . . . Of course we're all aware of the number of highways that we do have in the province of Saskatchewan. And to have to foot the total bill of the twinning of the No. 1 and the Yellowhead in comparison to what a lot of other jurisdictions have, it eats up a lot of our Highways' resources. And so you've certainly got our agreement in that regard.

You mentioned earlier, Mr. Minister, that tenders were out, and I think I heard you say they may be or are close to being closed on 48. Is that just Wawota completion to the No. 9, or is that as well including that section from No. 9 to Kipling?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, the proportion of 48 from 9 to Kipling or 9 to Wawota — I'm sorry — is the component that we're talking about. There is also from Kipling to 9 a truck haul agreement with the RM at this point.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And, Mr. Minister, in view of the fact that you talked earlier about the economy and the traffic flow as well . . . and certainly I know that the completion of 48 from the Manitoba border will open up a good thoroughfare for traffic flow from the east into not only the business and the oil sector but also the tourism sector in that part of the province. But as well, 48 is quite a traffic flow for people from — especially from Regina — coming down to Moose Mountain Provincial Park through the summertime. So I think I would hope that in the near future we can get to the point where we can complete that and have an east-west corridor completed rather than portions of the highway left with the old thin membrane and having to continually rely on agreements with the RMs to try and maintain their super grid system.

One other set of questions I'd like to ask prior to other colleagues getting in is, No. 47 was also one of the priorities with the southeast transportation authority. And, Mr. Minister, earlier tonight you were talking about other corridors moving east-west across the province. What I would suggest that between No. 9 . . . We really don't have another north-south corridor between 9 and 6 of a good quality road. And No. 47 being halfway in between would seem to me would be an appropriate north-south corridor. And I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, in view of the recommendations of the southeast transportation authority and now the overall picture with the new plan you've put in place, where No. 47 would be in regards to a north-south corridor, dust-free surface, in the province of Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, the area transportation planning committee, in our discussions with them, made very clear what their priorities were. The first priority was No. 8. Their second priority was No. 48. And as you can see by the capital projects that we've been spending in that area, you know, of our province, that we have supported their recommendations.

I should say as well that the other area of interest that they had was Highway 47. And we have identified this area as part of the primary corridor.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, one final question and that is in regards to that . . . Again I come back to comments about the new multi-year plan, and I believe you were working off a map or a proposed map of what you're looking in for the long-term. And I'm wondering if it be possible to receive a copy of that map. I don't know if I've seen it of that nature which makes it fairly easy to read and understand what current objectives are in regards to long-term haul, heavy haul, and primary construction. It would be certainly great to have a copy of that. I appreciate that. Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Chairman, yes. It's not a very well-kept secret, this map. It's been published and is on our website. We have shared this with both SARM and SUMA. And we have been receiving some feedback on it. And I think it's, so it's been a very worthwhile effort. It's been, you know, it's been part of a lot of work that has been done working with communities.

And the response that you received tonight on the dialogue in some of the communities, Grenfell, some of the people who are working making recommendations to government through the area transportation planning committees has been, I think, one of the successes that the department has experienced. And I would suggest that if we're going to be successful in rebuilding and realigning this infrastructure here in Saskatchewan that we need to continue to listen to communities, and we need to continue to work with groups like the area transportation planning committees, SARM, and SUMA.

I mean obviously there is some frustration in some communities when you have flooding conditions. When we have a thin membrane road, in the spring the sub-base is not there. A lot of it's built on blow dirt as you will know, so there's no base to sustain any kind of weight. You have exceedingly wet falls, a

lot of snowfall, and rain in the spring. You have roads that break up. And I know it's frustrating for people in Saskatchewan, not only rural but urban as well, because urban people travel these roads as well. But we have a \$2 billion expenditure if we're going to bring them all up to paved standard. So obviously the need for a multi-year program makes some sense. It wouldn't make sense to continue to be patching this infrastructure.

I think we need to transform it, and we need to transform some of it to a paved standard. We need to make an economic case for the investment that we're going to make which is what we're doing. And we need to continue to work with the communities around this province to upgrade our system.

And it's partly based on exactly what you're experiencing in your riding. The activity in the oil and gas sector is unprecedented. We're experiencing record drilling numbers. We're experiencing new companies starting up. And we're experiencing water trucks and pumper trucks on the roads that we never had before, and it's created some difficulties for us. But on the other hand, it's also created some opportunities for us. And that's been evidenced by this large commitment that we're making to transportation.

We can't get there all in one year, and I think you'll recognize that. It's going to take a number of years for us to get to where we want to be. But I think the fact that we've begun and the fact that we do have a long-range plan and we have a target in terms of our investment, we'll have the people of Saskatchewan understand that we really are thinking through where we're putting our road dollars.

You know, I read in the paper with some interest the other day, and I'm just going to quote. It says:

"Infrastructure is a priority of the Sask Party," said Kirsch, "To quote Kevin Costner in the *Field of Dreams*, 'build it and they will come.' If you don't build it, they can't come. How can things happen if ... [you] can't reach your destinations?"

And I have to say that I agree with some of what Mr. Kirsch said. But we built an awful lot in areas where they didn't come, and we've got some economic activity in places where we never, ever expected, and we never built infrastructure to be able to support it. And we've had some small communities like my home town that have pretty much disappeared off the face of the map, and it's nobody's fault in particular. It's a change in agriculture. It's a change in people's desire to live in larger urban centres.

Urbanization is not a phenomenon in this province. It's a North American phenomenon. And so it creates some special challenges because we've got roads that really don't go to a large population, and so what we have to do is prioritize where we're going to spend our dollars which is why we developed the economic corridors.

And I would look very much forward to your feedback after you've had a chance to have a look at what we're proposing because I think it's important that members of the opposition have constructive criticism as you generally do when you come

to this House, and I appreciate that as well.

Having said that, Mr. Chairman, I know that members will all be excited once they've had an opportunity to have a look at this map; to know that a lot of work that's been done by area transportation planning committees, by the Department of Highways and Transportation officials have been very well worthwhile expenditures in both time and money.

The Chair: — Mr. Toth.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, the one question I did ask, you didn't give me a direct answer to other than the fact that you indicated the map of the quarter is certainly on the website. And I've seen it in some small newspapers, but I need my glasses to see it. I'm looking for one of those original copies that'll give me something to see easily, so I appreciate that. Thank you very much.

The Chair: — Mr. Chisholm.

Mr. Chisholm: — Mr. Chair, I just have I think what'll be a few short questions. My first question is regarding Highway 21 south of Maidstone on either side of the Battle River.

There's a section there that's been under construction I guess for three or four years. Certainly in 2005 with the wet weather it was, you know, people understood why things didn't progress. However the whole summer of 2006 ... and the minister suggested that we should phone into the department; I was doing that. My office was doing that. Our constituents were doing that on a regular basis. And in that particular case, the project was just put off all summer until late fall, and then it was too late. I wonder if you could comment on what is happening there now and what we expect by the end of this fall.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chisholm, I will have the officials respond to the specifics of Highway 21. But I would want to say, part of the difficulty is, and this time of the year creates some pretty difficult circumstances on some of those roads as you well know. The other component of this is that we have had contractors who have been working to their limits, to the extent of their limits. I mean the more money you put ... you come to a point in the highway system when your industry has maxed out capacity. And what we found last year is the combination of industry capacity and weather meant that we couldn't get some of the projects done, and all of the projects done, that we wanted to do.

And that's why when some people are calling for three-quarters of a billion dollars of expenditures in this fiscal year, it can't work because we haven't got the capacity to deliver that kind of activity. And so obviously we don't want to price ourselves out by putting too much road work on the market because that drives the price per kilometre. And so we have a pretty good understanding through economic studies and capacity studies — that we've done both within the department and external to the department — of what that capacity is. We think we're about at the peak. And I will ask the officials to respond specifically to Highway 21.

Mr. Schmidt: — Thank you. Mr. Chairman, the member is correct. We have had a multi-year plan in place to upgrade

Highway 21 between the junction of Highway 40 and 16, and this is the last projects that's remaining. And unfortunately there's been a combination of weather and contractor availability that has delayed this much longer than we would have liked to have seen.

If I recall correctly — this last section — the grading contract was actually tendered back in 2004 I believe. The contractor did move on, and that was the year that there was extreme rain conditions in that Maidstone area. And if you recall, I think that was the same time they were working on the bypass around Maidstone, and the grading as well and the mud and the wet.

So the grading contractor did move on, but his progress was severely impeded by the weather. He did return in 2005 to complete the grading. The surfacing contract was let, I believe, over the winter of 2004 with the crushing occurring in the winter of 2004. The surfacing contractor did move in, in, I believe, spring of 2005 and caught up with the grading contractor about July 2005, and as such could not move forward and make anymore progress on the surfacing because the grading contracting was holding them up. So he had other work at the time with the department and with some of the municipalities in the area. So the servicing contractor chose to demobilize, move to those other projects. And I think subsequently the grading contractor did complete late summer or early fall of 2005. However the surfacing contractor was tied up and mobilized on other projects for the rest of the year and did not move back.

Then again in the spring of 2006, the surfacing contractor chose to complete some of those other projects that had been carried over and did not end up moving back until I think it was September that they moved back in, in 2006. And fall closed down on us quickly. I think it was the middle of October. So very little work was actually done in 2006 as well. We did try to work with the contractor to leave the road in, you know, a safe condition over the winter.

So we are working with the contractor. We are doing our best to get the contractor back this spring first thing on that project to get it completed. The contractor will be assessed all penalties for time completion. They will be deducted from the contract. They are in penalty so any penalties for time completion will be deducted.

So that's our plan. The contractor is in place, and we are just now working with that contractor to get them back as quickly as we can.

Mr. Chisholm: — Thank you. Further to that piece of road, there was a proposal I know that came from the community to actually . . . part of that would be upgraded from the original plan. The area just south of the Battle River is kind of the main source of gravel for the oil patch in a pretty large area and, as a result, is as heavy a traffic area as we have in our community plus the oil traffic itself. Is that the plan, that there is about, I think it's about five kilometres of that section will actually be paved to a different standard than was originally intended?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, I would want to say yes, the department has recognized the incremental activity on the collection of gravel on that road, and they're going to be

doing some upgrade on the whole back side this year as I understand it. And I would want to say, as well, the department . . . and we have put into this year's budget — recognizing the activity taking place in your backyard as it relates to heavy oil and the impact on municipalities for the first time ever — a first-time program that will assist municipalities in some of the heavy-haul or heavy oil roads in your communities. I mean obviously we welcome the activity, but on the other hand it creates some fairly substantive pressures for municipalities. So there's new \$5 million into the heavy oil program there.

And I don't know what feedback you may have received from municipalities, but I can tell you that I have met with many of the municipalities in that area, and we have agreed that we will work together to develop this program. There was no program developed prior to the budget. We allocated \$5 million to see what that could do, and they're going to help us to prioritize where we spend that \$5 million. And I'm not certain if this is part of that, but I'm going to have the official share that knowledge with us here in a moment.

Mr. Schmidt: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. You are correct. We have been working with a local municipality and some of the industry in that area there, recognizing that there is a significant activity there with the gravel pits near the river as well as the oil and gas activity.

So typically this road would be built to a standard where you have the sand and the gravel, and then we put a double chip seal on the top for the wearing surface, recognizing though that there are limitations to that type of a surface with heavy truck traffic. So we have identified it as included as part of this contract, surfacing, I believe, the section going up the hill where you see a lot of distress from the trucks climbing up the hill and the extra stresses from climbing up the hill.

And as well I know there's one area for sure and possibly two where we are actually surfacing right in the area of the oil battery as well. I believe there's a major oil battery between the river and Maidstone. So where there's a lot of turning activity and damage done to a seal coat surface, we will be putting a pavement structure on top of there, provide a better, a lot more long-lasting wearing surface there as well there as part of this contract.

Mr. Chisholm: — Just a . . .

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman?

The Chair: — Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — If Mr. Stamatinos can give us an update on some of the meetings that have taken place with the municipalities that I wasn't aware of and update on what I just responded to if he choose.

Mr. Chisholm: — Certainly.

Mr. Stamatinos: — I just wanted to give you an update on some of the progress that we've been making with regard to the municipal heavy-haul resource program that we have.

We have had the opportunity to now meet with the industry,

with CAPP, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, to understand their interests in such a program. We met with the, I believe, the president of that association, Mr. Tony Marino, and another representative from the executive director, too. We had the opportunity to meet with them along with officials from Industry and Resources as well as officials from Government Relations to discuss some of the parameters that might go into the design of the program and how we might be able to execute it.

We've also made arrangements to meet with, I believe . . . Well we're in the process, sorry, of making arrangements to meet with nine of the key municipalities in the Northwest that have significant heavy oil haul activity. It is our hope through that process that we will be able to have a better understanding of some of the issues that need to be addressed with respect to the implementation of a program and some of the design parameters and considerations that would allow us to make the best maximum use of the \$5 million that have been allocated to that program for '07-08.

As you can understand, there is some urgency to finalize the program, given that we only have short window in which we can enter into contribution agreements with those RMs that have an interest in improving the roads that serve that particular sector of the economy. We're hopeful that, following that meeting, we can have some preliminary design that we can go out and share with those municipalities.

The focus of the program in '07-08 will be to address the highest needs in terms of the haul activity that's occurring in the Northwest. We're hoping over time that as the program progresses in future years is to provide some relief also to other RMs in the area as well as look at other sectors of that economy, particularly in some interest that might exist in the southeast part of the province as well.

We see this as a first-year program. It almost could be characterized almost as a pilot. Because there is an urgency, this is a transition year. We hope that this will be a bit of a learning experience for us. The main objective and certainly some of the discussions that we had with some of the municipalities in the Northwest is a sense of urgency to get out there and get something done. And we hope to have that money out as soon as possible.

We understand that there are projects already on the shelf, that people have already done the design work. It's just a matter of putting together a process that will prioritize those investments that provide the greatest return to that particular part of the province. So we're hopeful, and we believe that following the meeting in the next two and a half weeks with the municipalities that we can demonstrate some progress with respect to that program.

Mr. Chisholm: — Thank you very much. My other question is regarding Highway No. 3 from actually, well Glaslyn to Turtleford. A portion of that highway has already been, received an upgrade to the Livelong turnoff, I think or that's what I call it, but the section from that turnoff to Turtleford.

I wonder, I've received information that people found out that the Prairie Grain Roads Program that was in place at one time,

that the federal money as you explained has kind of run out. So for some people, to them, that meant that well that's . . . I guess that's the end of the project and that was pretty concerning. But it was my understanding that, over the next couple of years, that that project is going to continue. I wonder if you could just tell me where we're at on that, if there's been part of that job tendered, or where we're at right now.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, the member is right; I did say that the PGRP [Prairie Grain Roads Program] program has run out of federal money. But I should say that any commitments that we have made, we will honour. It won't be probably in the same timelines as if we had an injection of federal capital, but I haven't seen any evidence that that might be an option from their side — which is unfortunate. Maybe some of your members could make some phone calls that might assist us in that regard. I know some of your members are very familiar with the federal administration, both through election campaigns and in the workplace.

We will be completing the component from Livelong to the area that you describe. We have no capital available at this point to complete the balance of it. But obviously if it's part of the PGRP commitment, we will be honouring it irrespective of whether we get federal money or not. That seems to be the way of the world around here these days, and if we have made a commitment, we will carry it through.

So I'll ask Mr. Schmidt to back up my comments here.

Mr. Schmidt: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. If the member, if it so pleases, I can find an update on where we're at on that corridor. As you mentioned, the corridor between Glaslyn and Turtleford has been identified as a PGRP corridor and a rural economic corridor under our new transportation strategy so, as the minister mentioned, we are committed to honouring those commitments for upgrading.

The project was divided into three for delivery purposes. The first one on the east side from Glaslyn west was completed several years ago. The middle portion was tendered last year and carried over for, you know, contractor capacity. They just didn't get all the project done. They had some weather problems there too. So we're looking at completing that. We're hoping the contractor will mobilize there first thing in spring to complete that project. And then in anticipation of completing the corridor in the third and final project, we'll be undertaking the necessary design work and planning that we are prepared to tender that project when the funding is secured so that we can deliver it in a timely manner.

Mr. Chisholm: — Thank you. That's all I have. I'll turn it over to my . . . or you'll turn it over to my colleague, whatever. Go ahead.

The Chair: — Go ahead.

Ms. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. As the minister will know, my riding, it's a rural riding but it's growing and it's growing quite quickly. You'd be hard pressed to find an existing house for sale, and there's housing starts in just about every town in my community. And with that comes increased traffic on the access roads from the main highways. And so I

just have a few questions about those access roads.

One is the access to Hepburn from Highway 12, and the other are the access roads to Dalmeny, one off of Highway 16 — it would be Highway 684 — and off of Highway 12 on Highway 305. Particularly on the access road to Hepburn from Highway 12, it's an adventure every time you drive that highway. And as the weather changes, so changes the highway, so it's not like you can memorize the bad spots and drive accordingly. As the temperature goes up, the highway heaves a little bit differently.

And I was wondering. I realize these aren't major routes but for the people who live in these small towns, these growing towns, this is a pretty big deal for them. A lot of them work in Saskatoon, so they're driving these secondary highways every day. And I was wondering if there were any plans in place to address the poor state of the roads on 684, 305, and the access to Hepburn from Highway 12.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — I can tell the member that that is very, very much a part of the new strategy that we're embarked upon — transportation for economic advantage. That's part of why we designed the program. The member is quite right. And I'm very familiar with the communities along the Prince Albert-Saskatoon corridor, and that's why we're twinning. And that's why we've made a commitment to twin and complete twinning of that particular stretch of highway. The communities along that area are growing, Martensville as well. The doughnut effect is not exempted in the Saskatoon area. And so you've got growth in a small community because people choose that lifestyle.

And so obviously we need to keep this system in tune with what the people of Saskatchewan are demanding, both on the economic side and on the social side where they choose to live, which is why the old way of doing things — build it and they will come — has to be discontinued. Because we did a lot of that, and we built a lot of roads for, let's be honest, for political reasons in years back. And this administration is no longer interested in that. We're interested in doing an economic analysis, cost-benefit analysis on the roads, choosing the best option in terms of how much we invest on which road, working with outside consultants, working with communities. And that's how we're determining, and that's how we're prioritizing the amount of investment that we're making.

I mean we can't just continue to build roads that have a dead end. And we need to hook economic development, and we need to hook communities to this new infrastructure, which is part of what we're doing with the urban connectors and that part of this program.

And I recognize what the member is speaking of. I would have to tell her that her father was quite eloquent just a short period of time ago as he described one of the connections to the new twin highway in his riding — as he always was — he made his point quite clearly. And I know that stretch. I know the pressures. I drive it. My family drive it. And so I can tell you that to ensure safety, to ensure that we upgrade some of those areas that have been under some change because of the twinning, it is a priority for us. I would have to say I'm not going to be . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . I'm sorry?

Ms. Heppner: — These towns that I'm speaking of aren't on the twin highway. They're on the other highway. They have nothing to do with the twinning.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — That's part of the problem that I'm describing for you. There's a whole change taking place there, and so some of our priorities are the Martensville road and north. And some of our priorities are Highway 11 and twinning Highway 11 to allow safe access to where people are choosing to work. So you know we can . . . There is change taking place, and we have to change the system to go with it. But we aren't going to get it all done in one year. I'm going to ask Mr. Law or his designate to respond to the specifics of what you're speaking here.

Mr. Law: — Thank you, Minister. There are two comments I'd make with respect to the access roads that you've referred to. There's a specific part of our policy in the plan that we're introducing that deals with access roads to communities like Hepburn which have been identified as growing communities. We've started with . . . And we're in the early days here, but we've started with a population threshold of about 500 where we've identified communities that have the characteristics you've described. And in those cases, what we've done is we've identified that we'll be attempting to move some of those TMS access roads to structured pavements over the course of the 10-year plan.

So it is our plan to try and address . . . These would be good examples, the ones you've used, of what we have planned for the access road upgrade as a part of our community plan. I can't give you a specific time frame this year, but it is part of what we are currently working on in terms of an access road provision for communities like Hepburn that we would be introducing an upgrade of your TMS roads here to take those changing conditions that you've described from season to season and provide a structured pavement for them so that those things won't occur on a seasonal basis.

Ms. Heppner: — And I understand that it won't be done this year. You said that you couldn't give me a timeline. Within this 10 years, is there any way to indicate — because these towns are unusual in Saskatchewan for being small towns and they're growing very quickly — and is there any way to give some indication like within the next two years? The next three years? The minister spoke about analysis being done for some of these secondary roads. Is there a timeline for the analysis to be done and then a timeline past that for the road to actually be fixed?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, you know the communities that the member raises are obviously good candidates for what we envision as part of this program. We are in the process of developing the specifics and in a process to prioritize. This isn't the only area of growth and the only area of change in our province, and I would suggest that there are other communities in our province that are growing every bit as quickly as the communities around Saskatoon.

Having said that, I think we'll be in a position to share more detail as we develop this program. Some of this is new territory for us, and some of it is moving away from traditional jurisdiction, and some of it requires away partnerships and discussions to be had with urban and rural municipalities in

terms of the makeup of the program. And in order to explain what I mean, I'll take you back to discussion I just had with Mr. Chisholm on the heavy-haul resource program.

It's new money. It's never been spent in that way before, and it's spent directly on municipal roads. And so obviously we need to work with municipalities to determine how they would like to see us work with them to invest this money in economic development. And I think the same process needs to take place as it relates to social development in other areas of the Transportation for Economic Advantage program. I don't know, John, if you want to add more to that, if you do. . .

Mr. Law: — I just maybe . . . perhaps a brief comment with respect to your question on timing, and I would expect that . . . We have developed some criteria. We haven't finalized the process that we'll use in terms of making determinations for future investments, but we will have something before the end of the fiscal year that we can share that will give you a sense of when we should expect to get to the roads in your community as well as others.

So our current time frame will have that process complete in the current fiscal year in terms of doing the termination, the prioritization. And we have established some criteria that we're using. We have to figure out, in terms of consultation and other steps in the process, how quickly we think we can get to those discussions along with others that we're having. But we will have something this year that we would be in a position to share with you before the end of the fiscal year.

Ms. Heppner: — And I appreciate that. I'm wondering — and I'm not sure if you can answer this — that at the end of those discussions, by the end of the fiscal year, will there then be a list of roads that are priorities, like primary highways that are a priority — like highway X will be in year one, year two, year three and then secondary highways . . . Like will there be a list at the end of that, so that communities throughout the province will know where they sit on that list? Is that . . .

Mr. Law: — My comments were specifically in relation to the access roads you were talking about. And hopefully we will have some sense of prioritization that will include a program workflow over the period of time.

What we have done in other areas that we will probably try to replicate with this program is establish an initial plan of where we think the criteria would suggest we should be making investments in access roads. And typically what we've been trying to do in areas like the primary weight advisory committee work that we're doing is we've then gone out and done some consultation with communities to try and gain some perspective locally and with our area transportation planning committees.

Some of the access roads you mentioned are in a category we've been talking about along with some others, and so our expectation is we'll have some sense of a plan that we could use for purposes of communication prior to the end of the fiscal year.

The Chair: — Ms. Harpauer.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you very much. I want to make a comment, and then for the sake of time, I'm just going to comment on the answers to the last previous questions and then have a specific question.

I'm very glad to hear the minister say that he wants to work with community groups. And I know that he met with a community group that I met with on the same day, which was March 1, and that was the municipal leaders of both towns and rural municipalities as well as representatives from different businesses along Highway No. 27.

Highway 27 is a relatively short highway feeding into Saskatoon, so we're looking at businesses that are selling goods through Saskatoon distribution as well as workers coming out of to the manufacturers along Highway No. 27 and workers going from the communities of Highway 27 into Saskatoon to work.

They are, I believe, working on an economic impact for that particular highway. I'm not sure if that submission has been made yet. I know they haven't shared it with myself, and I hope that the minister and the officials will take a good serious look at the economic impact that this particular little stretch of highway has when they are planning, you know, the strategy going forward. And I look forward to it being in the plan when that's announced.

However, having said all that and encouraging the minister to give Highway 27 serious consideration in the long-term plan, we have some immediate very, very serious concerns. People are getting stuck on the highway as we speak. The school buses got stuck. Some commuters have got stuck. Small cars can't travel this highway. It is seriously a danger and needs to be addressed as of tomorrow morning. So what is the short-term plan for Highway 27 because it's unacceptably unsafe?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — I'll ask Mr. Schmidt to respond to that or Mr. Law, but Highway 27 is one of the TMS roads that we have identified as a priority for upgrade, a priority candidate for upgrade. As I said to some of your colleagues, it's not possible to do it all, and I think we've identified in the near term something just under 200 kilometres of TMS roads that are candidate for that kind of upgrading, remembering we've got 60-some hundred kilometres of this around the province. But I would think sooner rather than later would be my answer, and maybe Terry would like to respond.

Mr. Schmidt: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Yes, as you mentioned we're pleased that the local communities and the local industry have come and are willing to work with us on completing an economic analysis to determine the economic activity and what level of investment then is warranted in this corridor, so we're very pleased of that work, and we thank them for that. And as you mentioned too we are very too concerned with the immediate condition of that road.

As you know in that area there, that Wakaw country and down through Aberdeen, excessive moisture this year and it has just soaked the sub-grade up on those TMSs and there has been some heavy truck traffic on there, I think. Even though we had spring road bans that it just takes one or two heavy trucks to totally, you know, destroy that type of surface. So what we have

done in the interim is we've — even though the road bans are up — I believe we've instigated a 8,000 kilogram weight restriction on that road because just the trucks just cannot handle that.

So the problem we have now is the frost is still coming out of the ground, and it's very muddy. So what we are doing now on the interim is we are blading and putting in gravel material as best we can to get the light traffic through until such time as the road bed will dry out, and then we will be assessing and probably there are going to have to be sections that we at least temporarily revert to gravel because that is really the only way we can accommodate traffic on those sections until it dries out. To start putting seal coats or dust resurfaces back on that wet, muddy material, it just won't last.

So the plan is to revert those sections as quickly as we can, to stabilize them with gravel material or aggregate material to get the traffic over, to blade them regularly, to gravel them as we need it, and then as soon as conditions dry up, we will be looking to restore that to a dust resurface because we appreciate and understand the activity along that road — the commuter traffic and things like that. I mean the intent is to get that dust resurface restored as soon as conditions will allow, then to continue to work with the local communities and industry in developing what level of investment we can make there. And then as the minister mentioned, programming that as part of our plan to upgrades through the strategy.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you for that answer. I am extremely pleased and excited to hear that it will be a priority in the long-term strategy that your department is working on. I think it's so very, very important. And I know the community members are willing to wait for a decent highway.

However it still needs to be passable. We can't have school kids stuck on a highway, literally stuck. So that in the interim, we need to at the very least make this safe. And if it is a year one or a year two, if they're in the planning for an upgrade, they're going to be very excited and I'm sure they're going to be very tolerant to waiting for that upgrade. But we have to be safe in the meanwhile. Like we cannot, we can't just have the dangers that are there. So I'd appreciate if, you know, the department is watching that very closely, to keep it safe for the people in that area. Thank you.

The Chair: — Mr. Duncan.

Mr. Duncan: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good evening. Mr. Minister, and to your officials, I got two or three issues that I would like to raise with you, ask some questions. I would begin this evening with . . . And actually you, Mr. Minister, in one of your previous answers, you kind of jogged my memory as to some of the questions I have. And that was when you mentioned Highway 13 and the plan to move it into primary status. I'm wondering, my recollection is that it was, I guess, classified as a phase 2, as the next go-round. Is that correct, and when would that be going ahead?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — I think the long-term vision is for an east-west corridor in the southern part of the province. And if you look at the logistics, I mean, obviously across the bottom of our province, we have not got a highway that will travel

east-west. And so that is part of why we have defined that as being a road that we would see as being an economic corridor and then, with that, hooking some of the north-south roads with it.

I will ask Mr. Schmidt maybe to give us — or Mr. Law or Mr. Stamatinos — an update of the work that has been taking place on Highway 13. But I can tell you that it's the long-term policy of this government to include that in the corridor system. George.

Mr. Stamatinos: — Yes, Mr. Chairman, just to follow-up on the minister's comments about the plan for the inclusion of Highway 13 into the rural economic corridor system, with the announcement last year of phase 1 primary weights, we were able to designate a portion of Highway 13 from Weyburn to Highway No. 6 for a nine-month primary weights, which provided some expanded access to primary weights along that corridor.

With some planned work at Verwood on Highway 13, we will be able to do two things. One is, first of all, to expand that corridor, under phase 2, up to the junction of Highway No. 2 at Assiniboia. And then we will have an opportunity to assess future progress and our ability to deliver projects on Highway 13 going further west. Ultimately our plan would be to complete that corridor — hopefully within a 10-year time frame — right up to the junction of Highway No. 4. So we have a very long, continuous corridor that would basically run from Weyburn all the way to just south of Swift Current.

Mr. Duncan: — Thank you for that answer. And I'm glad that you mentioned Verwood. I understand there's been concern. I've had conversations with the local RMs regarding the Verwood area, particularly the underpass at that area. I'm wondering if you could update us as to what the plans are as you get to . . . What's going to happen with the underpass?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Actually I believe that question's been asked previously, but I would ask Mr. Schmidt to respond one more time.

Mr. Schmidt: — Yes. Thank you, Mr. Minister. As you mentioned, that project has gone to tender, and the tender has closed and been awarded. Due to contractor capacity, I don't believe they'll be moving out until 2008. So I don't think there'll be roadwork this year, but the tender has closed and the contractor been secured.

Part of the design was significant consultation with the area transportation planning committee and the RM into what the plans would be to accommodate overdimensional vehicles underneath the Verwood railway overpass. So we looked at several options there at the advice of the RM and the ATPC, one of looking at either lowering the highway so that you would have more vertical clearance, which was an option that could be looked at; however that would not increase the horizontal clearance there. So it would only help with some of the vertical clearance.

What was identified there was, there are significant concerns — geotechnical concerns — when you start lowering a highway there with . . . You can get into groundwater. You can get into

slope stability. There's all kinds of risks associated with that, especially when you're working around a bridge near footings and abutments. And you know, we wouldn't want to put the bridge at risk. So that option was discounted for those reasons.

We then looked at the option of actually raising the grade to the same height as the railway. And I'm sure you're familiar with that area. And that is a significant amount of earthwork to be undertaken, and it is in excess of \$1 million to do that. Even if you could do that . . . And then there's all kinds of risks associated with that height of a highway and people leaving the highway and going down the side slope and in slippery roads and things like that. Even such, the issue or the concern we have then too is there's quite a vertical incline, a gradient going up that hill. And so when you have large trucks coming down the hill and the flashing lights going for the railway, there's real concerns with them stopping in time. So based on costs and some safety aspects, that option was discounted as well.

And so what we've agreed to do is to continue to operate a route around on an RM road. And I think it's the Verwood access road. And that would be the signed, overdimensional route. And so that is how the tender has been let, and the project will proceed.

Mr. Duncan: — Thank you for that answer. Mr. Minister, is there going to be any . . . Due to the fact that oversized trucks are going to have to continue to divert through the Verwood access — which is, in my understanding, is maintained by the RM — in lieu of spending the million dollars to do the options that were identified, is there going to be any support to the RM, because they're ultimately the ones that have to maintain the access road? And if it's the feeling of your department that that is the best course of action, shouldn't the RM then have some sort of assistance in maintaining that access road?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — I'm told by the officials that we haven't yet quantified what the incremental costs might be. They're uncertain as to how much the traffic flow would be. But I think it's fair to say that it's something that we would entertain. We would enter into discussions with the RM once we've put that kind of an analysis together.

Mr. Duncan: — Thank you for that. Another issue that I wanted to raise — and just in looking at the transportation for economic advantage program that's being out laid by yourself and your department — is the issue around international gateways and corridors. And I am curious as to, in your short-term and long-term plans, where Highway 35 leading into the Port of Oungré fits into your plans.

Mr. Stamatinos: — Mr. Chairman, perhaps it would be helpful if we provide some clarity around what we meant in this strategy with regard to international gateways and corridors. That particular pillar was constructed on basis of the work that's been done nationally on the national highway system. And the context for the development of that particular pillar was to advance the completion of what we thought to be the significant economic corridors that connect our regional economies to national trade corridors and ultimately to our gateways, whether they be in Vancouver or the Port of Thunder Bay and also the main portals into the United States.

So that system right now on the national highway system is comprised of Highway No. 1, Highway No. 16, Highway No. 11, Highway No. 7, Highway 39, Highway No. 10 from Highway No. 1 to Yorkton, and Highway No. 2 between Moose Jaw and Chamberlain and then from Prince Albert all the way up to La Ronge.

Because of the activity that's occurring in our North, our emphasis certainly is going to be — in the near term — the completion of Highway No. 11 between Saskatoon and Prince Albert as opening up our gateway connection, so we can move some of the commerce and products that are produced in our North to those connections whether they be by rail or by road, that go east-west as well as ultimately north-south into the United States. So that is our emphasis under that particular pillar, not to say that the other more minor border crossings aren't important. But certainly that would be the emphasis that we have put into our document.

Mr. Duncan: — Thank you for that. Okay. In asking that question, perhaps I should have said your rural economic corridor under your six key areas. For a number of years now the . . . and I'm not sure of the distance anymore. I seem to get different reports. But if you say the junction from the Highway 35 and I believe 18, we're talking maybe 16 kilometres. For the last number of years, it's been in pretty poor condition and a mix of broken pavement and gravel. I'm wondering if that is going to be a priority to get that re-surfaced and when we could see that happening.

Mr. Schmidt: — Mr. Chairman, if I could provide maybe a little bit of history to the project and what we have planned for the future. You are right. This is a corridor that was a TMS corridor. And I think in 2004 . . . is with some of the truck traffic, we could just no longer hold it anymore in that condition. So the decision was made at that point in time for the safety to revert it to gravel as part of a multi-year plan. And so what we have done, it's a four-year plan to upgrade that 16 kilometres. You're correct. It's 16 kilometres.

What we did do was we left the TMS portions in front of the farmyards as best we could to keep the dust down from the farmyards, and so what we have done is two years ago we were able to upgrade three and a half kilometres from the US [United States] border north. Last year we did another three and a half kilometres from the junction of Highway 18 south. We've got the aggregate in place already to do another project if not two, and the plan is to do another three to four kilometres this year and then to complete the remaining four or five — what's ever left — in the following year.

The reason we chose that multi-year strategy is for a couple reasons. One is, it was just a lot of funding to undertake in one single year and two, to help manage some of the issues we have with contractor capacity. As I mentioned on Highway 13, for example, now the contractors are full on that type of granular work, and so they won't even get there until 2008.

So what we've done is in the first two years we've undertaken that work with our own crews and our own resources. And so far I believe it's been very successful in the conditions of the road and the roadwork. So that strategy allowed us deliver it in those smaller projects with our own crews and our own

resources. To bring a contractor in for that type of short projects, the mobilization costs are high. But with using our local crews stationed in Bengough, Weyburn, Estevan, it's not very costly to mobilize those crews down there. They can work it in their work plans. They can work together and work efficiently and do it. So that was the strategy, and that's the plan for that corridor.

Mr. Duncan: — I'm glad to hear that there is a timeline for completion and that it's not too far along down the road. I will just relay to the minister calls that I have been receiving from my office. And this has been an issue for a number of years now, and certainly anybody that lives in that area finds it to be very, very tiresome. But also I know that people, community leaders in Weyburn have been concerned for a number of years because it is a direct link into the city of Weyburn from the United States.

One of the issues that has come up recently — and I've had a number of calls and this is more just for your information more than anything — but on the US border crossing on the American side . . . So I guess vehicles leaving Saskatchewan and going into the United States, they've . . . and these are calls that have come to my office. They're actually now turning heavy-haul trucks away from the border because they're saying that they have too much mud and dirt and debris stuck on the vehicle — on the truck and the trailer. And so they're now saying you have to go to Estevan to get through North Portal. And just, you know, I don't have any, I can't show you any documentation that that's actually happened, but it's a couple of calls that have come to my office. So I would just give you that bit of information.

The last point, issue that I did want to raise . . . and I guess in one of your previous answers one of your officials talked about the international gateways and corridors, and one of the issues or one of the highways that is deemed a priority that was mentioned is 39. I guess this is more of a longer term question and maybe more difficult to answer. I don't know if your department is thinking about it yet. But you may know that there is a committee struck in the Southeast that is working with North Dakota officials in lobbying governments on both sides of the borders to twin from Regina through . . . down 6 and 39 to North Portal and beyond into North Dakota. And I'm wondering if that's something that your department is looking at and if that would be looked at as a priority. I understand it would be a long-term priority, but where the department is at on that.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, just a comment. The member will know — I am sure — the difference between the way the American national government funds their road system and the way ours doesn't. You will be well aware of the fact that our national government hasn't assumed very much responsibility for national infrastructure north-south or east-west. We've got 13 border crossings as I understand it here in Saskatchewan. And some of it is gravel. Some of it is TMS, and some of it is of a pretty good standard.

It's important I think to determine utilization traffic count because in all likelihood we're not going to get the support from the national government, and we're not sure what their international corridors program is going to mean for

Saskatchewan at this point. I wish we did but we don't. So it's going to . . . a lot's going to determine on what kind of support this province gets from the federal government because we probably won't be able to do them all and it will be multi-year.

I want to just speak to a multi-year program. It would be . . . and I think I'm getting a sense that the Saskatchewan Party is asking for a specific list of projects over a number of years. That's what I believe you're asking because that's where your questions are heading, my thought pattern here is what you're asking. And one of the difficulties with that is, and I think it's evidenced by the conversations we've been having tonight, there's contractor capacity but also there's weather conditions, and some of those are regional. And then we'll make some, hopefully, some partnership again such as the PGRP with the federal government. And if the programs are designed from their perspective the way they have been in the past, inflation won't be counted in. And we'll end up carrying the bag for a lot of that on our own in the out-years of the programs. That's how it is. You either take the money or you don't. They're pretty much known for delivering that kind of a program here to us in Saskatchewan.

So part of it is that there are so many variables that . . . Oh and then again of course you've got to go to the Department of Finance on an annual basis. And depending on your resource revenue, depending on what kind of revenue is generated from income tax which our economy is, the rate of your economic growth and economy, there's lots of different variables.

So I think it's fair to say that the most appropriate way is to make a global commitment. And within the confines of that global commitment, you need to know that you've made to the people of Saskatchewan a commitment so they can understand roughly — although it won't be this year, it was 434 million; it wasn't 500 million, fair enough — but over the period of 10 years you're going to work towards that as being your target. And the ability to put out a detailed capital project plan is, I think, pretty difficult, and I think that's one of the reasons it hasn't been done. And it's not because anyone in Regina doesn't want anyone in Weyburn to understand what's in the out-years. We try and share as much information as we can based on, you know, what knowledge we have.

I just think what's important for people to understand is what we have done, is that we've put what we believe to be the roads that are going to carry our economy into the future, and we've identified those. And we've discussed with local politicians, local communities, and we're asking for feedback.

And I think what we believe to be the appropriate economic corridors today probably won't look that way five years from now. And that was also evidenced by some of the questions that were asked here tonight. What if an ethanol plant springs up in Pilger? Are we going to be able to provide support to that industry in that area? Well we're going to have to have, I think, some kind of flexibility to look at it.

We've got two canola crushing plants now scheduled for Yorkton. And I was out there post-budget, and I was talking to people from the chamber of commerce — and some of your colleagues were there — and one of their concerns was infrastructure. It was also housing and how you handle 150 new

families or 250 new families. And I don't think that was a concern of theirs two years ago, but it is now. And the economy is driving some change in the thought process and probably making some of the contractors out there rethink their investment plans to suggest they might want to build some houses on spec if they're not or they might want to, you know, build some for the marketplace.

But my point is there are things that will happen in this economy that we can't foresee, so what we need to do is put the overall programs in place, which we have done, support urban and rural communities through the different pillars within TEA [Transportation for Economic Advantage]. And it gives guidelines to all of us. And it gives an understanding of what we're thinking in terms of longer term public policy. And that I think is important.

And it's more important than just saying, well we're going to expand and accelerate the twinning of Highway 1. We've already done that, and we did that with provincial money — no federal money in the end of it. But I mean they helped with the acceleration, and that we are thankful for. But we're going to finish it off on our own.

And we need to impose ourselves upon the 12 people who we elected to represent us in Ottawa because, frankly, they're not pulling their load. And so I think that's something that we can all do, both on the government side and on the opposition side. As a matter of fact I think we have a responsibility to do that. And I'm not sure that anyone's been successful in that particular endeavour.

And I think the people of Saskatchewan want to know what your plans are as a political party. And I think it's not going to be good enough . . . And I appreciate you're doing casework, and you're asking these questions, and you can mail *Hansard* back to your constituents and that, that's a good thing. All of this could be done spending a lot less time in this legislature, but anyway you've chosen that path, so we'll come in here and do casework.

But I think it would be really important for us to sit down and have a public policy discussion, and have a frank exchange of views — your view about how we develop a highway policy and what you would do and what we would do because, you see, I think that is the discussion that the people of Saskatchewan want us to have. They're interested in all of these highways specifically. And we can . . . if we had more people here, we could probably give you a lot more answers tonight than we have, but we'll get them to you. And the questions you've answered tonight that we couldn't answer, will be answered at a subsequent time when the work is done.

But I think people really want to see who it is they may be electing — whether it's us or whether the Liberals, whether it's you. But it's become pretty clear that your party doesn't want to have that discussion. Your party doesn't want to talk about what they would do if your minister was sitting here in this chair and what kind of a program we'd be working with. I think people of Saskatchewan want to know if the 434 million isn't enough or isn't enough in terms of your requirements or your perceived requirements for the Highways budget, well how much would it be? And if it would be more, then from where would, where

would you find that money? Would you take it from education or health care?

People are asking those questions as they asked of us before we came to government in 1991. And we had articulated our plan on health care and on education. People knew where we stood on public ownership of Crown corporations. People knew where we stood on health care in terms of our support for medicare and that we were not supportive of privatized medicare.

But when you ask questions here because members of your constituency are asking you questions, I have to tell you that it's incumbent upon me to tell you and your leader that people are asking questions of him. It's where would he take this government if he were Premier? And you see, for me this is not a one-way street.

And I know your members are offended when I ask them questions about what they would do. I understand that. But you know, you can avoid it for a while, but there comes a time between elections when you have to come clean and tell people what you stand for. And you as a party are unwilling to do that. And people won't buy that. And you can't go out there in your 28-day election campaign in this province and hope to sell people about your vision for public policy and highways or anything else. It takes a little longer than that.

And what you're going to find, I think shortly, is that members of the media are going to start taking you on. And they're going to start asking you the questions as I'm asking you the questions, and your constituents are going to ask you those questions as well — if they aren't already. And because I know mine are asking. In Prince Albert Northcote my folks are saying, so what is this candidate about?

And so I think that that's the discussion we need to have, and that's what we need to have in terms of estimates — your vision versus this government's vision. And this is all important, the casework that we're doing in here. But I'll tell you what. It isn't going to take you close enough to be able to convince people to buy you during an election campaign.

So, Mr. Chairman, I'm very thankful of the questions, and I've enjoyed this evening and I'm glad that I've been able to hopefully lead a bit of public policy discussion here and I . . . Obviously members opposite are hesitant to get into that debate, but I thought it was important tonight that I try and flush them out to see if they would respond in terms of what their vision is for this transportation file that I'm presently in charge of.

Mr. Duncan: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. You talk about vision. I asked for your government's vision on the prospects of twinning Highway 39 and Highway 6. And the reason I bring that up, in my short political career, the first person that I ever heard pledge this was your NDP [New Democratic Party] candidate in the by-election that I won. So I'm just wondering if he maybe had a heads-up that the rest of us didn't know if this is something that you're talking about.

But, Mr. Minister, I got another question for you. Your officials that you have here, your deputy minister and your high level officials, how often do you meet? Do you meet once a week to

discuss issues?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — I would say, Mr. Chairman, more often than that. And I would say that my staff — I don't think it's exaggerating to say — my staff would be on the phone more often than once a day, more often than twice a day. It's a regular dialogue that we have with the department.

Members of the legislature contact my office for information, and my staff are there to gather that information for them. Members of the general public will call my office and ask for a response. And we meet with industry on a fairly regular basis, whether it's the Association of Professional Engineers or the road builders or the construction association or whether it's the city of Regina or the city of Saskatoon. Meetings are ongoing on a regular basis, and it's been my opinion that if you have a good working relationship with your deputy and with your department, you can get things done. So we meet often.

Mr. Duncan: — Okay thank you for that. So when you met last week, at any time did you and your officials talk about the prospects of at some point in your government's future twinning Highway 39 and 6? Did you talk about that last week?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — No, I haven't talked with my officials about twinning Highway 39 last week. I think the discussions I have are more in general terms. When we put our capital projects together, it's not done with the deputy in my office. It's done within the department. I can say that I will give suggestions, as you give suggestions to this House and to me if you choose to. I can tell you that we meet regularly with area transportation planning committees and RMs to hear what their priorities are.

And as I indicated to the member for Moosomin, to Mr. Toth, their priorities became our priorities. Highway 8 was their priority, and Highway 48 was their priority, so it became ours. And those were the first two on their list, so they became the first two on our list. Meetings happen regularly, whether it's with industry or whether it's with the department.

Mr. Duncan: — Well, Mr. Minister, do you recall if at any time — talking with your deputy or anything that came out of the department through your deputy to you — did you talk about this two weeks ago? Did you talk about it three weeks ago? Did you talk about it a month ago?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — I can't suggest to you when we would have talked about it, but I do recall it being brought to my attention, that a candidate in your by-election had indicated that he thought it should be something that should be looked at. And that's fair enough. But it doesn't become public policy because a candidate for an election feels it might be a good idea. It would become public policy if it passed the test of how many cars are travelling over it, what the economic benefits were to it, and are there pressures that are greater in other areas. Those would be the things that the department would be looking at.

Mr. Duncan: — Okay. So it's safe to say that at some point in the past 11 months that it did come up as an item through your office and with that particular candidate. And wherever that came from, if it came from your deputy or up through the . . .

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Oh no. Let me clarify. It came to my office as a result of a newspaper article. I discussed this with my officials, and that's how this came to be.

Mr. Duncan: — Okay. That's fair enough. Just not sure where you're going in your answers, Mr. Minister — you ask about policy and vision. And yes, this is constituent work. I have a group of people that are with the REDA [regional economic development authority] and other communities all along 6 and 39 that are very interested in this topic, and they would like to know where the minister is at. So I've asked the question here this evening. But to make it into this, you know, this game that you want to play this evening, that's fine. I mean that's your prerogative as the minister in the Government of Saskatchewan. And I appreciate your answers, and I thank your officials for their information this evening. Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much. I would just say to the member, it's not a game. It's not a game at all. It's serious business because people need to know the direction that political parties would take their province, whether it's highways or other areas of economic development.

Mr. Schmidt, I can ask to perhaps . . . John, if you would want to give a bit of an update on Highway 39 and where it would stack up in terms of the priorities. Obviously you know, we have some, we have some thoughts on that.

Mr. Stamatinos: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chairman, maybe to give you an update on where our thinking's going with respect to Highway 39, we have been in discussions with a number of groups in Montana as well as North Dakota with regard to their interests in developing corridors up into Saskatchewan, whether it be directly through our province or via Manitoba. There's been at least two groups that have met with us — one from North Dakota, another representing interests to develop that highway link immediately to the south of Highway No. 6.

There seems to be a number of different groups promoting different corridors. The difficulty that we're having with them is that they're all promoting an infrastructure solution to . . . Really a trade-related program has to do more with harmonization of weights and dimensions between commercial vehicles. And until we get past that discussion, it wouldn't be very fruitful to really look at an infrastructure piece.

As you well know, if you look at the connections through North Dakota onto Highway 39, it's a bit of a zigzag. There's certainly no direct interstate connection between the state of North Dakota and our province. So that's a bit of an issue that we'd need to resolve.

And there's a myriad of issues related to commercial vehicles that need to be addressed and discussed in detail, not just at the state level but also at the federal government level of the United States that have to do with some of the mandates and purposes of the interstate system. So the difficulty of course of having a very strong divided highway connection, of course, would be to resolve those issues at a very high level. There's not much point if you can't get past North Dakota or you can't get past Montana.

So they're very aware of that challenge. And they continue to lobby the federal highway administration in Washington to sort through some of those issues because it's preventing us to trade more effectively between whether it be our province, our region, and those bordering states to ourselves, Manitoba, and Alberta.

That being said, we will of course continue to monitor the traffic growth on Highway No. 39. Right now the sections typically average around 2,500 vehicles a day. It varies quite a bit along that whole corridor. Typically we wouldn't really look at a twinning solution until the traffic reaches around 3,500 vehicles a day which is really typical of those sections of the national highways that have already received consideration for twinning, if you look at Highway No. 16 or Highway No. 1, east-west, and now the new piece that we're looking to twin between Saskatoon and Prince Albert.

So certainly we wouldn't rule that out. It's just there's other considerations that have to move forward in terms of trade growth, harmonization between our two countries that would drive that commerce that would generate the kind of traffic volumes that we would need to see for us to really consider it at the next stage.

The Chair: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Minister. I want to thank your officials. The time allotted for this evening's discussions have now exhausted itself. So I want to thank you for being here and thank you to your officials for providing the committee with their insightful information. Thank you. The committee now stands adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 22:32.]