

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Budget estimates 2020–21 (Carroll)

Melbourne—Thursday, 17 December 2020

MEMBERS

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Richard Riordan—Deputy Chair

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Gary Maas

Mr Danny O’Brien

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Nina Taylor

Ms Bridget Vallenge

WITNESSES

Mr Ben Carroll, MP, Minister for Roads and Road Safety,

Mr Paul Younis, Secretary, and

Mr Nicholas Foa, Deputy Secretary, Transport Services, Department of Transport; and

Ms Santhi Sinniah, Public Accounts and Estimates Committee Adviser.

The CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

I welcome back Minister Carroll, this time for consideration of the roads and road safety portfolio. Minister, we invite you to make a 10-minute presentation. This will be followed again by questions from the committee. Thank you.

Visual presentation.

Mr CARROLL: Thank you, Chair. It is a pleasure to be here this afternoon with you and the members of the committee. The Victorian budget 2020–21 makes a significant investment of \$1.6 billion to improve Victoria's roads, and this will keep Victorians moving, provide jobs and support our economic recovery; \$411 million in a road maintenance blitz that builds on the record investment the Andrews Labor government has made into road maintenance; and \$255 million will enable a five-year program of upgrades to the iconic Great Ocean Road—this is Victoria's number one tourist route and supports thousands of jobs, including our important local dairy industry. The \$388 million Keeping Victorians Moving initiative is delivering technology upgrades and additional resources to reduce congestion and improve travel times on the metropolitan road network. The budget also contains \$117 million to fund metropolitan road and intersection upgrades across metropolitan Melbourne, and an additional \$63 million will deliver a school and community safety program, with funding to increase road safety around schools with new and upgraded pedestrian crossings, regional intersection upgrades and temporary walking and cycling infrastructure.

As you can see, Chair and members, in the graph, this year has seen unprecedented disruption to Victorian travel patterns due to the pandemic. Traffic volumes are currently shy of their pre-pandemic levels, and this recovery has been quicker than expected, particularly when you compare the road network to the public transport network, reflecting a shift in modes due to the pandemic. During the early lockdown period and again during the second major lockdown, road usage was 40 per cent and 44 per cent of pre-COVID-19 levels. Modelling by the Department of Transport suggests that once restrictions are fully eased road usage may increase beyond pre-COVID-19 levels, resulting in lower levels of public transport use because of public health concerns. This is likely to cause a significant increase in delays and reduce the reliability of our road network, even if people continue to work from home. As I said in my presentation on public transport, the government has taken action, including enhanced sanitisation measures to ensure confidence in the public transport system. That said, though, we also believe action is required to address the likely demand that we will experience on the road network.

Our \$388 million we are investing in the Keeping Victorians Moving initiative is a key part of this work. We have identified three key traffic hotspots in the western, eastern and south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne that we will blanket with new technology and resources to help keep traffic moving, reduce delays and provide drivers with better access to traffic information. Across the three areas you can see on the screen now, we will install almost 700 CCTV cameras, more than 200 wireless travel time sensors and 40 new virtual message boards.

This technology will put live traffic data in the hands of our traffic management centre as well as the drivers who use our network. The timing of hundreds of traffic lights along with traffic patterns and crash data will be analysed and resequenced to maximise traffic flow along some of our busiest routes in targeted areas. Six extra incident response crews and dozens more specialist traffic engineers will also be hired. As of 1 December we have already converted 217 existing clearways into tow-away zones, something that has been very much welcomed by our travelling public. This does mean that clearways on arterial roads within a 20-kilometre radius of the CBD are now what they should be—clearways—and they have become tow-away zones. Any

vehicle illegally parked in one of these clearways will be fined \$165 and will be towed, with a \$361 charge required to get your vehicle released.

The Keeping Victorians Moving initiative and our wider investment in major road upgrades will be complemented by a \$116 million package of road and intersection upgrades across the metropolitan region. Targeting suburban bottlenecks, the improvements will help drivers get to their destination sooner and safer. These projects will create 350 local jobs within local communities across our state but also too support our economic recovery as we come through the pandemic.

We also recognise the vital role that the road network does play for our economy—particularly in regional Victoria, supporting primary producers and our important and iconic tourism industry. I am pleased that the budget invests \$255 million in a five-year program to upgrade the iconic Great Ocean Road in Victoria. This program of works will not only fund more pavement and bridge work on the Great Ocean Road itself; it will also upgrade connections between the Princes Highway west and the Great Ocean Road. Tourism in the Great Ocean Road region provides an estimated \$1.5 billion annually to the state's economy. Before COVID-19 the Great Ocean Road generated more than 11 000 jobs in the tourism industry and attracted 6.6 million visitors annually. This investment comes on top of more than \$100 million that has already been committed and invested by the Victorian and Australian governments since 2013. The most recent program of works is coming to a close, which saw the construction of new bridges at Moggs Creek, Grey River, Separation Creek and Boggaley Creek as well as the bridge-strengthening upgrades at Smythe Creek.

Maintenance is essential to keep our network running smoothly. A well-functioning and maintained network is vital to connecting all Victorians to their communities, employment and services. The 2020–21 budget includes a further \$411 million in funding for the statewide road maintenance program. It builds on the \$124 million that was allocated to the road maintenance program as part of the Victorian building works package that was announced earlier this year. Spending on road maintenance by this Victorian government has really ramped up in the last four years, as you can see by the graph. The graph shows actual spending in each period, so as we are talking about a real increase in the number of kilometres of roads that money has been spent on, it is undergoing maintenance each year under the Andrews Labor government.

As Minister for Road Safety I am committed to driving down trauma on our roads. Work is underway and we will shortly finalise a new road safety strategy that will follow *Towards Zero*. In the meantime, this budget does deliver a \$63 million package to improve safety for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians on local and arterial roads around Victorian schools. This includes new and enhanced pedestrian crossings, funding for school crossing supervisors and temporary walking and cycling infrastructure. We are rolling out 100 kilometres of new and upgraded cycling routes across inner Melbourne. This \$15 million project will build pop-up lanes in suburbs like Footscray, Northcote and St Kilda, which we think will go a long way to alleviating pressure not only on our road network but also some very important and popular public transport corridors as well.

The budget funds a number of key initiatives to help registration and licensing get back to normal. We know it is an important milestone getting your learners or your full licence. In regional Victoria VicRoads began drive tests in September to begin rebooking of 5000 previously submitted tests and the booking of appointments of the pent-up demand of some 25 000 tests. In the metropolitan area we commenced drive tests in October and began taking new bookings in November to tackle a backlog of 80 000 previously suspended tests and pent-up demand of 380 000 tests. To help Victorians get licensed more quickly we are funding temporary expansion of testing and assessment services and we are also expanding our online offering, including driver history and demerit point checks, learner and hazard perception testing and licence renewals. We will also waive appointment fees for learner permit, hazard perception and driving test customers who have been affected by the suspension of their appointment and the longer wait times. We are also extending our service hours and adding another seven locations to assist with the high demand that we know we have before us.

Chair, if I can conclude, 2020 has been a challenging year for Victorians. We do believe these measures we are investing in through this budget will make it easier and safer for Victorians to get where they need to get to and to get them moving again, but it is also important to get our state's economy moving again too. That is the conclusion of my opening remarks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The Deputy Chair, Mr Richard Riordan.

Mr RIORDAN: Thanks, Chair. Welcome, Minister. Minister, a summary of capital projects has been printed on page 102 of budget paper 2. A project previously listed under the Department of Transport was the suburban roads upgrade, northern and south-eastern. Minister, can you provide an update, including updated total cost and completion date for this project, please?

Mr CARROLL: I thank the Deputy Chair for his question. Suburban road upgrades, including the maintenance funding, are about \$411 million just to deal with the maintenance funding. It builds on the \$124 million that was allocated to our road maintenance program as part of our building works project. Importantly, this will support 2000 jobs. You are asking about the time line, I understand, Mr Riordan?

Mr RIORDAN: Yes.

Mr CARROLL: I will have to take that on notice on the conclusion of the time line. But as we approach the summer period, we are now using this as an important opportunity for hazard reduction of vegetation but also an important opportunity to get much of our road service and maintenance projects underway. In the last financial year we completed some 197 projects. We are envisaging, with what you have highlighted, some 200 projects we believe we can get underway with this unprecedented investment in road funding, whether it is maintenance in metro or regional Victoria. But I am happy to come back to you on the time line.

Mr RIORDAN: So the question is: thousands of hours and millions of dollars were spent by consortiums preparing for these projects, but in June the public-private partnership tender process was abruptly cancelled. Why was that?

Mr CARROLL: Thanks, Mr Riordan, for your question. I think you are dealing specifically with the suburban upgrade package, which is under the transport infrastructure minister.

Mr RIORDAN: So you are not dealing with that?

Mr CARROLL: No.

Mr RIORDAN: Okay. Minister, on page 344 of budget paper 3, only one regional bridge strengthening and replacement project out of seven was completed during the 2019–20 financial year ‘due to unforeseen complexities with a number of projects’. Minister, which projects were impacted, and what exactly were the complexities?

Mr CARROLL: Look, you are right, Mr Riordan, to identify the complexities along our bridge strengthening program. We wish we did have more completed. Essentially by nature bridges—and we are talking about bridges that are 100 years old, historical, with heritage components, fabric and containments that require specialist skills. Essentially, to answer your question, the complex nature of them does require a dedicated workforce, a lot more planning and a lot more dealing with different government agencies as well, and there are also with our bridges a lot more interested parties on the ground and community stakeholders that we do need to communicate with and consult. You are right, though, to identify the lack of bridges that essentially have been—

Mr RIORDAN: So there was a lack of scoping in the works, was there?

Mr CARROLL: No, not so much—the scoping takes time. It is more the timely issue. We would love to get them completed more quickly, but with our bridge strengthening and the bridges right across our state, some of them are in very unique situations, very unique materials and complexities. They do require a lot larger scoping and a lot more work with our community partners. But if I can, I might ask Nick Foa or the Secretary if they want to just supplement my answer.

Mr FOA: The two that were specifically in the budget papers to upgrade were Pranjip Creek and Nine Mile Creek on the Hume Highway to increase their capacity. And you are right; some of those are very old, complex, keystone-type bluestone constructions.

Mr RIORDAN: Thank you. While we are on the subject of not-yet-complete projects, page 345 of budget paper 3, only 60 per cent of road projects in metropolitan Melbourne and 78 per cent of projects in regional Victoria were completed within the agreed scope and standards. Minister, do you agree that these are not brilliant results in a year when you would have thought, from a construction point of view, you know, road

conditions were pretty favourable? If so, what will you be demanding of the department to ensure that is not repeated?

Mr CARROLL: Look, one of the big issues, Mr Riordan, essentially was the pandemic, and that has had a major impact on some of our roadworks and some of the work we did want to get undertaken. We have a multiple range of project partners when it comes to our regional road network and our metropolitan network that we work with, and we are continually investing in them. I know the Department of Transport have a body of work underway at the moment on how we can really strengthen our partnerships on the ground with our project partners. I know many of my colleagues are wanting to see more environmental angles as part of our asphaltting and road network and things like that, so we are having a very big look at how we can get a more responsive time, knowing as well the importance of jobs that it supports but also too a range of communities as well, but the pandemic has impacted on those delivery times.

Mr RIORDAN: So on a project, for example, like Princes Highway between Geelong and Colac, which has now been open for two years but is still not complete, and there are six landowners who have now for two years been getting absolutely nowhere with rural roads Victoria, what explanation would there be for why we just cannot give six farming families six safe accesses onto a road like they had before we spent \$500 million upgrading the road?

Mr CARROLL: I would have to have a good look at that specific—

Mr RIORDAN: Take that on notice?

Mr CARROLL: Yes, I am happy to take that on notice. But if I can just add to that, one of the issues, as you would appreciate, with the Princes Highway and the inland routes—and from the department you may know Mr Paul Northey, who is doing a power of work with those regional communities, a power of work with industry and the private sector and the landowners—

Mr RIORDAN: In this particular case I am specifically referring to the Princes Highway upgrade, which has functionally been opened but is still not complete because you cannot get accesses to the six properties. Just finally, with the seconds we have left, there has been much announced about the Great Ocean Road's \$255 million. Can you supply the exact projects that that is going to, particularly the roads between the Great Ocean Road and the Princes Highway?

Mr CARROLL: We are working through that at the moment. It is a very important investment, and you are right to identify, Mr Riordan, the inland routes. You would appreciate particularly the dairy industry down there; they have been consulted extensively on this. We believe this investment will not only support the Great Ocean Road and the iconic nature of it for the next 100 years, but we are working through those particular inland routes and the supporting of industry.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Mr Gary Maas, MP.

Mr MAAS: Thanks, Chair. Minister, if I could take you to the topic of active transport and specifically budget paper 3 at page 134, where it talks to temporary walking and cycling infrastructure, would you be able to elaborate on what the temporary walking and cycling infrastructure will include?

Mr CARROLL: Thanks, Mr Maas. We all know that COVID-19 has certainly dramatically changed the way Victorians, community members, are getting around. If anyone is trying to buy a bicycle for Christmas, there may be one in stock now, but they have been out of stock for a long time. Indeed I heard Dr Ben Rossiter from Victoria Walks on the radio during the week talking about the uptake in walking and paths and people discovering their local neighbourhoods like never before. We are wanting to tap into that, and we are really wanting—and I know the Secretary is—to strengthen and support active transport. It is a green alternative, a sustainable alternative to the motor vehicle—and indeed public transport, to an extent—but we also know that Victorians want to be able to do it safely.

So essentially by providing pop-up lane infrastructure for cycling it allows us to work with some important partners, like Bicycle Victoria, some of our bicycle user groups and local government, to basically do the trial and get the data—actually interestingly I saw some data counters the other day up on Exhibition Street for the cycling corridor there—and then, as we expect and as has been experienced overseas, the data will inform us on

the uptake. We believe you then transition those temporary lanes to more permanent cycling infrastructure, and we do believe that that will be a really important benefit.

All in all our investment will see about 100 kilometres of key inner-Melbourne suburbs getting the cycling infrastructure they need, but we have also targeted it to try to alleviate busy public transport corridors. If you are accessible to a good cycling path or a pop-up lane that is coming online, please use it. Please give cycling a try. If you have shifted to cycling just for recreational benefit, try even just once a week using it as a commute to work. You know, the data speaks for itself in what it does for the environment but also your own mental health and physical health as well.

So we do believe, to go back to where I started, that COVID-19 has certainly, Mr Maas, changed how Victorians are moving around. I know the department are working very closely with local government. We do have also on our departmental website a new interactive website component where you can look at what is happening in your local community and you can see and provide feedback on the pop-up cycling infrastructure. But we do expect that this initiative will be very important in terms of creating more road space, but also more access and more space on our public transport network as well.

Mr MAAS: Thank you. You made reference to inner-city communities. Are you able to elaborate on when and where we can expect these pop-up bike lanes to be rolled out?

Mr CARROLL: Yes, certainly, Mr Maas, and I want to make it clear that we have sort of begun. The idea is you sort of look at those busy corridors in the inner-city and hopefully grow it and embed it and build on what you are doing. Maribyrnong, Moonee Valley, Moreland, Melbourne, Darebin, Yarra, Stonnington and Port Phillip have been identified. Heidelberg Road is literally the first cab off the rank. If you go out there right now you will see the work underway there—see the pop-up lanes and the safe cycling infrastructure—which will fix an important gap in the Merri Creek Trail, also making it safer for those local communities, and the Members for Northcote and Ivanhoe were very important advocates for this. We are hoping that this project will be completed very early and also that any learnings we get from it—any education we get from it, the benefits—we can spread more broadly across Melbourne and across the state.

But it is very important that we get on with doing this, and again it goes back to those local jobs and that local infrastructure. It is not easy doing this sort of work. You do need to really work with the local community, because you have got people that will support it. You have got to work with your local traders. You have got to work with your motorists as well. You have really got to signpost it, advertise it. The department are doing a tremendous job in terms of social media and departmental website outreach as well, and we are doing everything we can to make sure that everyone feels that we are moving in the right direction down this track.

Mr MAAS: You mentioned the potential benefits. What might the benefits be that this initiative would have on, say, the train network and traffic congestion overall?

Mr CARROLL: Look, there are multiple benefits. We know, when you get to the purer side of it, active transport is probably the purest way to support the environment; there is that component of it. But coming out of COVID as well, we are wanting to alleviate the number of people that are not only on our road network but on our public transport system too. So we have identified these cycling routes, and Robyn Seymour, in the department, with Nick Foa and everyone else, has done a tremendous job working with inner-city councils to identify the routes but also to identify the places with some really good wide road space that we think will not impact traders and that will be welcomed by motorists and the community members alike. We have tried to be as strategic as possible. A lot of work has gone into it over a number of years, and this investment in this budget will ensure we can make a really sizable leap forward. But if I get to the specifics, the Sunbury, Craigieburn, Upfield, South Morang, Hurstbridge, Glen Waverley, Lilydale and Sandringham lines are all expected to hopefully see some real benefits from important infrastructure, and I think it will be a game changer.

Mr MAAS: What is the 1-metre rule for cyclists that the government has announced?

Mr CARROLL: The 1-metre rule is essentially a mandatory minimum passing distance rule, which we are the last jurisdiction to implement. We are celebrating 30 years of the bicycle helmet this year; I think in 30 years time we will celebrate the introduction of the 1-metre rule. I know members of this committee have also been advocates for it. If I am wearing my road safety portfolio hat, Mr Maas, we have an over-representation of cyclists in our trauma data but also in our deaths, and we do need to separate vehicles and

cars. It is in more than 50 per cent of US states, it is in most European jurisdictions and it is in every other state and territory. We will do it here in Victoria. One of the benefits we have here in Victoria is that the Transport Accident Commission have already done a lot of work and a lot of education and advertising. You might even remember some of the ads they had around ‘Separate 1 metre between you and a vehicle’. So it is very important. And, look, the RACV have probably one of the strongest advocates for this rule change, which I think is really good too.

Mr MAAS: Terrific. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Mr David Limbrick, MLC.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister and team, again. In slide 4 of your presentation you talked about the large-scale rollout of CCTV cameras. What sort of capabilities do these cameras have, what will the data from these cameras be used for and what sort of analysis will be done with it?

Mr CARROLL: Thanks, Mr Limbrick. It is a good point. On our road network a lot of it is essentially dark; we do not have eyes on it. So to get to the crux of your question, the purpose of the cameras is to filter back to the Department of Transport what is happening on the road network, to get more informed and better and then to pass that information back out to the travelling public. But beyond that, too, the CCTV cameras are part of a broader what we call ‘moving Victoria’ package, where we are also putting a lot more essential technology around tram stops and train stations to basically uplift our data and find out what is happening on the network. Coming out of COVID—and I think you may have alluded to this in the earlier session—a lot of people were wanting to work out what form of transport they should take. When you leave your front door, do you want to get in the car, do you want to take the bus or do you want to take the tram or take the train—if you have got those alternative modes? This data will go a long way to making a more informed public as to what is going on, but it will also help us work with our road safety partners and our other partners at VicRoads, if there is a crash, to support getting the traffic moving a lot more quickly. It also is an important component of our tow-away zones. Essentially if a car is parked in a clearing zone—what is called a tow-away zone—it has got to be moved, so we will get somebody out there ASAP and get the traffic moving again.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you. I have asked this in a different inquiry about some of the technology that Victoria Police was using. Will you rule out this type of CCTV system being integrated with facial recognition technology?

Mr CARROLL: That has not come up as part of the rollout, but if I can take that on notice. It is a departmental, transport-led project, and the Secretary might want to add to my comments. But that has certainly not come up. It is not envisaged to have anything to do with an individual or impinge on any liberties; it is really to support Victorians getting to where they need to go. I might ask Nick Foa to supplement that.

Mr LIMBRICK: Or numberplate recognition technology as well, I imagine.

Mr FOA: Yes. From the general theme of your questions, Mr Limbrick, we have been working very closely with the Victorian privacy commissioner on the rollout of our technology and indeed have made sure we have got sign-offs at every step of the way in the use of that.

Mr LIMBRICK: Okay. That is good to know. Thank you. Another thing in the presentation on the third slide, where we are talking about the traffic volumes—are we seeing a different mix of traffic volumes? Because I note that we are saying that the traffic volume is coming back up to 100 per cent of what it was. One thing that I have noticed—I have not done any data analysis on this—is that peak hour seems to have been completely different to normal and during the day there is more traffic. So are we actually seeing less congestion even though there is a similar level of traffic?

Mr CARROLL: It is an interesting analogy, what we are seeing.

Mr LIMBRICK: Yes.

Mr CARROLL: More and more now—again putting my road safety hat on—we are seeing on our roads more e-bikes. We are seeing a lot more Uber-type home deliveries, and we think they are forecast to continue their growth coming out of COVID. So you are seeing, Mr Limbrick, a different traffic mix. And without a

doubt, freight trucks—we are seeing through our heavy vehicle licensing regime a massive uptake in heavy vehicle registrations.

Mr LIMBRICK: A lot more deliveries, yes.

Mr CARROLL: All that. But again that is also something we need to look at—how do we manage it? I might ask if the Secretary would like to say a couple of words.

Mr YOUNIS: Mr Limbrick, I think you are right that the mix is changing. It has been changing right throughout the COVID period. The drop in our passenger vehicles was significantly more than the drop in our commercial vehicles. The average was about 50 per cent or something, but passenger vehicles dropped significantly. I cannot remember what the exact figure was. What we are seeing now in the comeback is our commercial vehicles are staying high, but there is a spread throughout the day, so our 8.00 am to 3.00 pm volumes were back more quickly than the peak volumes. Now, I have not seen the figures, or I have not looked at the detail of the figures in the last couple of weeks, but that was definitely the trend. We are finding the same with public transport, where the off-peak usage is higher—recovery is higher than it was in the peak. Now, that stands to reason, because you have not got people coming to work in the city as much, and we have got a lot of data across every suburb to understand what that looks like.

The challenge for us going forward in this is: is this a permanent trend, and what does it look like in six months time or 12 months time? We are running a number of scenarios so that we can respond to that. The Keeping Victorians Moving package, which the minister was talking about, is really targeted at making sure that we can keep our freight moving around the network. It is such an important part of the economic stimulus and making sure that we can continue that economic recovery to keep our freight moving. We have got a lot of interactive elements of that program which monitors and allows us to in real time change the network function so that we can keep that moving.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you. And one final question: on slide 9 there is something, and I must have missed it in the budget papers, that is mentioned—traffic management support to reduce the cost of organising public events across Victoria. What is all that about? I did not really get that.

Mr CARROLL: I think, Mr Limbrick, you are referring to the Summer Streets program.

Mr LIMBRICK: Okay.

Mr CARROLL: Yes. So essentially coming out of COVID we are wanting to support local communities. Obviously I think about 83 per cent of the road network is predominantly local government run, but there are some very important state road arterials that have very important active live music restaurant scenes. And that is about working with our department and capability to engage with the local government sector not only to support essentially Victorians through summer but also to support any infrastructure we may need to put in place as well. But also too we believe outdoor dining is probably going to be here to stay. That was the experience in New York. Even through winter they used their heating and gas cylinders and things like that. We think there is probably going to be a similar experience in Melbourne. So that necessitates the transport department working with the local government authorities as well as other departments.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Mr Danny O'Brien, MP.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thanks, Chair. Minister, can I just ask about the 'Road operations' output on BP3, page 339, and specifically ask about wire rope barriers. We heard last year that funding for maintenance of wire rope barriers is a combination of both VicRoads funding and TAC. I am wondering if you can tell me how much in dollar terms is spent on maintenance, let us say this year.

Mr CARROLL: Thanks, Mr O'Brien, for your question. You are right to identify wire rope barriers. You would be familiar with the Auditor-General's report as well as I am.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Extremely.

Mr CARROLL: That was an important report. It identified that these barriers do save lives, but it did also identify and make a series of recommendations on how we can get better at our governance around them and how we can get better at some of the auditing, maintenance and things like that that we need to do.

Mr D O'BRIEN: I am just after a figure on maintenance.

Mr CARROLL: Yes. So in the budget, through our safer systems program—and I will get to exactly the figure you are after—essentially \$1.4 billion has been invested in terms of supporting safe infrastructure. One of the issues we have identified and one of the issues as the road safety minister—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Sorry, Minister. I have got limited time. I just would like to get, if I can, the figure for this year and also the breakdown between TAC and VicRoads. TAC will be the program you are talking presumably.

Mr CARROLL: Look, I will take that on notice and give you the specific figures.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. For 2020–21, that would be fantastic. If you do not have it, because it depends on accidents and things, for 2019–20 would be appreciated. That leads to the next question: what length of barrier do you anticipate needs repairing each year, and if you have it, what is the current length?

Mr CARROLL: Mr O'Brien, VicRoads and the department are constantly monitoring—and I have asked this question myself—the maintenance and the ongoing vigilance around our safety barriers, particularly in regional Victoria. So obviously if there is an incident, it is something we identify that needs to be repaired as soon as possible. But often, as you would appreciate, there can be incidents that we are unaware of if there has not been a call-out, and that has also necessitated—and this came up as part of our governance report and the VAGO report. While we have had to improve, we do do the traffic patrols. Often VicRoads and the Department of Transport will go and inspect our wire rope barriers to ensure that the layout has been done, that they are still in the condition that they should be in. There is nothing worse than if you have got a wire rope barrier that has been broken or damaged and not repaired, because essentially its safety mechanism, the reason it is there, has basically become a virus, so we have to fix it. But I might ask Mr Foa. He might want to just add—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Minister, unless the officials have actually got the information, perhaps we could take it on notice, unless you do.

Mr CARROLL: No, we have got targets. So we are looking at 165 kilometres of wire rope barriers next financial year.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Of repair?

Mr CARROLL: No. This is the target of the rollout. So in relation to the specific question of repair—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes. What do you expect to repair?

Mr YOUNIS: We do an average about how many times they are hit every year. Something like the Hume Freeway I think it was hit around 230 times last year. So we will put an average across all of those and monitor every year and put a budget figure—allow a budget figure—through the TAC for that. What that indicates is that clearly it is much cheaper to repair those safety barriers than repair lives, I suppose.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes. That is the data I am after, Secretary, if you are able to provide that to me on a statewide basis.

Mr YOUNIS: We have got the statewide figures of what we allow for.

Mr D O'BRIEN: That would be great. Thank you. Likewise, as the minister said, if you are tracking the number of incidents, how many incidents you are getting. Can I just go to page 127 of BP3. It lists 'Road maintenance blitz'. Can you perhaps tell me whether there are specific projects being undertaken through that blitz, and if so what data was used to identify them or prioritise them.

Mr CARROLL: So with our project partners, Mr O'Brien, we have identified across the state, we are hoping, about 1800 kilometres of roads that need to be resurfaced and rebuilt, and we are continuing to work

with Regional Roads Victoria as well as our metropolitan partners, including the local government sector. This will ensure, whether it is potholes or resurfacing, that the transport network that the Department of Transport oversees will make sure that the investment is going to where it needs to go.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay, so you are using basically the department, Regional Roads Victoria and local councils for the sources of the priorities?

Mr CARROLL: No, no, it is well and truly beyond that. There is a full asset maintenance program that we have underway, but I might ask the Secretary if he wants to add to that.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Sorry, I am running out of time. I am just specifically after: are there specific projects, and what data did you use to identify those projects?

Mr YOUNIS: So the data we used—primarily we have an asset management system across all of our road network, and we measure the rutting, the roughness and the cracking across our network. We have combined those and we have got deterioration modelling for all of the roads so we can understand where you are best to put the investment across the network. So that is combined. That analytical data and testing of the network is combined with local knowledge and particularly some of the changes we may see—for instance, if there is a quarry opening or an increase in traffic from some freight task, you would provide it. So we combine all of that data to then prioritise where you get the best value out of that investment, and it is a full asset management process.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay, so there is not a specific external list—for example, from RACV or the Australian Road Research Board—that says, 'These are the ones that should be done'?

Mr YOUNIS: No. We do the asset management inspections and review of those conditions on a regular basis, so it is continually updated, and that also informs some of the deterioration modelling, which may vary in parts of the state. For example, the south-west of the state, Gippsland as well, with higher rains and expansive clays and higher dairy traffic will have a different deterioration modelling than will, say, the north-east of the state.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Likewise, on page 132 of BP3 there is a package for road and intersection upgrades. For the two of those, the road maintenance blitz and the road and intersection upgrades, are there specific projects identified? Perhaps could we have a list of those on notice?

Mr YOUNIS: So it goes back to the original. We have a whole range of data that we use to inform the priority. Intersections in particular are informed by crash data and risk elements, so there is a lot of work that informs those.

Mr D O'BRIEN: I am just wondering, Secretary, whether I can get the list of those projects that will be funded under this, on notice?

Mr YOUNIS: We will be working through—now we have got the exact funding level we will identify that across all of those and allocate it where it is most efficiently applied.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay, thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr O'Brien. Ms Pauline Richards.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister and officials. Speaking of roads, I would like to refer you to budget paper 3, pages 21, 127 and 132 and the announcements made in the state budget on road upgrades. I am interested in the committee getting some evidence on what the total new investment in roads projects in the budget is and what the details are of this.

Mr CARROLL: Thanks very much, Ms Richards. The Victorian budget does make a significant investment to improve our roads, most importantly to keep Victorians moving but also too to keep them moving safely and put Victorians back to work. As identified, \$272.4 million will go to improvements to the Great Ocean Road—most importantly too this will deliver a pipeline of 390 local jobs; \$48 million will go to our strengthening bridges program—but also too it will help us with our bridges in getting better technology and intelligence around our strengthening of bridges; \$31.4 million will go on our freight routes, to

improvements, particularly for our farming community and the vital south-west dairy supply chain—critical. We do know when it comes to dairy Victoria is the global or essentially the Asia-Pacific home for dairy, and we know that this is vital. That is a lot of the feedback we have had from industry. Also too \$411 million will be to resurface, rebuild and maintain some 1800 kilometres of roads right across the network.

We are wanting to make sure, though—as I sort of alluded to in my presentation—of those wider economic benefits that we can hopefully get through our road projects. As identified by the transport infrastructure minister, you have got the North East Link and the West Gate Tunnel, but we do know equally those smaller important local connecting roads are vitally important. We know, particularly as members of Parliament, the advocacy we get from local community members that know their local streets better than anyone. It is very important that we support our metropolitan road system but also too work with VicRoads, our road safety partners as well, because we do know the role of local government as well in terms of over 80 per cent of the local road network.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you, Minister, and again if you could provide some insights about the benefits of that \$117 million in the budget for local road and intersection upgrades, I know there are a lot of people close to my part of the world in Cranny who care a lot about some of these projects.

Mr CARROLL: You are certainly right, Ms Richards, and it is very important when you consider how important the south-east is. If I go to Cardinia Road and Henry Road in Pakenham and the additional right-turn lanes at this intersection, you know, other members of the committee know, Cardinia Road is a major arterial road carrying a large amount of traffic but also, as you know, is prone to congestion. So we do need to put the intersection investments in there to get Victorians, to get your local community members, where they need to go. We are also mindful, though, that there has been a 20 per cent increase in second-hand car sales, which does mean that potentially people are getting back on the road network. So we do need to do our intersection upgrades. But I am also very pleased, though, that the intersection of Henry Road that was identified, where there is only one single right-turn lane, which of course has the largest volume of motorists turning right, we will really be able to fix that and we will be able to make sure that the intersections with the Princes Freeway really support your local community members to get to where they need to go.

But I am also pleased out my way and out in the north-west there are also important upgrades, whether it be in Melton or whether it be Mickleham Road in Greenvale. These are growing populations. Schoolkids have got to get to school, mums and dads have got to get to work; we need to support them as much as we can.

Ms RICHARDS: Terrific. I am interested in again having some more insight into how this investment has benefited Victorians and what works have been completed.

Mr CARROLL: Thanks again, Ms Richards. Look, the pipeline of work really does build on and in some respects you could say build around our sort of Big Build agenda in metropolitan Melbourne. In 2019–20 we delivered an important investment and reform for drivers and pedestrians to really make them move around the state and the city and the suburbs a lot more easily and a lot more frequently. A total of 72 metro road construction projects were successfully delivered across the state—not a bad effort when you consider some of the challenges we have had. It is really important that we get these projects underway. There are many examples, but a great example is the intersection at Horne Street and Vineyard Road in Sunbury, where the new traffic lights are synchronised with the train line. I know Mr Bull, a very passionate local member, is very pleased to see that intersection upgrade, and the way it has been able to interface with the public transport system has really been very important. I could also talk about the projects we have along the Burwood Highway to really support people in the Burwood Village shopping area and things like that—Carrum Downs, Canterbury Road.

The pipeline, I should say, though, Ms Richards, is equally impressive. I talked about the projects we got delivered, but the projects we have forthcoming, 196 projects, are very significant to support commuters but also to support local jobs as well.

Ms RICHARDS: My 88-year-old mother is very pleased with the Burwood Village upgrade.

Mr CARROLL: Good stuff.

Ms RICHARDS: Just one of the discussions you have actually had with Mr Limbrick that I am interested in exploring a little bit more is the obvious effect of the pandemic on roads, including the change in volumes and that pattern of road usage, that I think was discussed before. So we have got in table 1.21, page 127 of budget paper 3, 'Keeping Victorians moving'. Can you outline how this investment assisted the road network to respond to these challenges?

Mr CARROLL: Yes, certainly, Ms Richards, because that is a \$340 million investment—the Keeping Victorians Moving initiative—and I got to go out on site last week and see the work that is being done. But essentially, to have better traffic information going back to people in their motor vehicles or through their ear pods, wherever they may be, to support them to choose their mode of transport is critically important. And the minister coming after me in charge of freight—this is very important for her as well. So we have identified—in the west, from Werribee, Laverton, Point Cook, Altona and Williamstown; in the south-east, Oakleigh, Dandenong, Berwick, Cranbourne and Mordialloc; and in the east, Wantirna, Rowville, Glen Waverley, Ferntree Gully and Bayswater—very important traffic zones that have been selected by a range of criteria and factors, considering freight movement but also congestion, that we believe we can get the most bang for our buck in this investment. We do believe, as Mr Limbrick said, the combination of CCTV, wireless travel sensors and better message boards coming back to the Department of Transport, then that information digested and extracted out to Victorian community members, will help them get where they need to be, reduce congestion and make the journey a lot more pleasant, hopefully.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you, Minister.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Sam Hibbins, MP.

Mr HIBBINS: Thanks, Chair. Thank you, Minister and team, for appearing this afternoon. I do want to ask about the pop-up bike lanes. You would know that Melbourne City Council have identified St Kilda Road as part of their plans for fast-tracking bike infrastructure, but that is obviously a state government road. Are you working with Melbourne City Council to fast-track St Kilda Road bike lanes?

Mr CARROLL: Look, the short answer is yes, Mr Hibbins. This project, essentially, currently sits with the transport infrastructure minister. But, yes, the answer is we are certainly working. I have sat down with not only the City of Melbourne but all inner-city councils to discuss bike lane infrastructure, and we are continuing to have a dialogue with them. To be frank, I think local government needs to be a leader and help lead the discussion around much of this. If it is too top heavy, we sort of go nowhere. So it does need that partnership approach as much as possible.

Mr HIBBINS: Great. Terrific. Thank you. I want to ask now about the proposed electric vehicle tax. Now, the Treasurer has indicated that that would be administered by VicRoads. I presume that comes under your portfolio responsibilities. How will the administration of that tax actually work?

Mr CARROLL: Look, thanks for your question, Mr Hibbins. It is an important one, and as you have rightly identified, one led by the Treasurer and the Department of Treasury and Finance. But administration-wise, DOT do have very much a leading role. At the end of the day, you are probably aware the genesis behind this is to really get equity for the road network, but to actually then support the money collected—and other states are doing this—to come back into potentially the infrastructure to support electric vehicles. I do not know if the Secretary or Mr Foa want to specifically talk about the role of VicRoads.

Mr FOA: Obviously that is still in design in terms of the actual mechanism, other than the fact that VicRoads as an entity collects a significant amount of the government's revenue across a range of different mechanisms at the moment. We are still in design about what the actual scheme looks like.

Mr HIBBINS: So we do not know whether EV drivers are going to be reporting annually, how they are going to verify their odometer readings—those sorts of questions—if they drive interstate.

Mr YOUNIS: Mr Hibbins, that is the detail in the project we are working through now. We do know, I think the Treasurer announced, that it is a 2-cents-a-kilometre charge. I think that is what was announced. The mechanism and the process for applying that is a project that we are working through with DTF at the moment.

Mr HIBBINS: My understanding is that VicRoads is due to be folded as a statutory authority into DOT, but there was recently legislation where that was delayed by a year. What is the reasoning behind that?

Mr CARROLL: I will get the Secretary to supplement, but essentially what I understand is that the delay was to just get a lot of the administrative functions in order, and it did require a legislative mechanism just to extend the date for the rollout—for the roll-in, I should say—of VicRoads to DOT. But I will ask the Secretary to supplement.

Mr YOUNIS: Yes, that is right. The mechanism of integrating the entire department has occurred. We have left the entity of VicRoads intact to allow it to continue the transactional arrangements under registration and licensing because there are quite detailed interfaces with other entities in relation to registration and licensing. So that entity as VicRoads is still there. We decided that because there is no particular reason to change it straight away and we wanted to just have time to work through all of the details to make sure that the contractual arrangements between other entities, including VicPol and others, are in place before we bring that into the Department of Transport.

Mr HIBBINS: Is one of the reasons waiting until the Treasurer's scoping study into—he says partnerships with the private sector; I say privatisation. But the scoping study that the government is undertaking to privatise VicRoads licence and registration functions—is that one of the reasons for the delay?

Mr CARROLL: Purely administrative.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. I want to ask about the arterial roads project and the public-private partnership nature of those projects. Is it still the arrangement that the maintenance of those roads will be undertaken as part of the PPP?

Mr CARROLL: It comes under Minister Allan as the suburban roads package, Mr Hibbins, so I do not know.

Mr YOUNIS: Well, it is being managed and run by Major Projects Victoria as a part of that—

Mr HIBBINS: So, for example, you gave us the roads maintenance graph. Will those payments come under, for example, part of the disclosure of that graph?

Mr CARROLL: There are a range of project partners we work with, and I take your point about public-private partnerships. We are actually looking now at how we can get best value for our dollars. There are a range of partners in metropolitan Melbourne and there are a range of partners in regional Victoria. Indeed the state government has a project partner that we essentially own. What is it called?

Mr FOA: SprayLine Services.

Mr CARROLL: SprayLine Services—that is right. We are looking at how we can get best value for our dollar. I think your question, Mr Hibbins, is essentially: are we going to use PPPs and are we looking at this? And the answer is: we are having a look at how we can get better value for our dollar outside of PPPs.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. Great. Thank you. I will go back to my question regarding the performance measures and both the cycling projects completed and the pedestrian projects completed. In the time remaining I will ask if those itemised projects could be given on notice, but also just ask: why is there a significant drop both in pedestrian projects from 43 to two over four years and cycling projects from 12 to seven over three years?

Mr CARROLL: Thank you, Mr Hibbins. We have managed during the two sessions to get some information for you, so I will ask if I can ask Nick Foa to—

Mr HIBBINS: Great. Thank you.

Mr FOA: Just really quickly, Box Hill to Ashburton is one. Chirnside Park to Mordialloc is another. Geelong to Herne Hill is the third one. There was a crossing upgrade on the Upfield bike path, and then Dynon Road to Hopkins Street, Kensington to Footscray, was the fifth one.

Mr HIBBINS: And the reasoning for the reduction?

Mr FOA: Well, if you tally up the bike and active transport projects that have been delivered through the program under Minister Carroll's purview as well as those through the Big Build, it is significantly more than that.

The CHAIR: Thank you. The call is with Mr Tim Richardson, MP.

Mr RICHARDSON: Thank you, Chair. Thank you again, Minister, for joining us this afternoon—and department representatives. I just want to take you back to the Keeping Victorians Moving topic, Minister. Apart from the impact on the health system, one of the significant impacts of the coronavirus pandemic has been the impacts on jobs and job security. I am interested, for the committee's benefit, in the road investment and how this has supported jobs during this time in the road sector.

Mr CARROLL: Yes. Thanks, Mr Richardson. It is critically important, and look, I think everyone has identified the importance of our construction industry coming through the pandemic, so we have invested \$1.6 billion of new road investment in the budget to support employment and economic growth. You would appreciate—with our logistics industry, with our freight industry—the importance of our road network getting goods to where they need to get to on time. Also extending and working through, you know, Coles, Woolworths and all of those operators to get them when they need them—so it has been very important to ensure that of that \$1.6 billion there is an adequate investment in the maintenance and in the upgrade. So \$328 million in transport maintenance and upgrade projects was announced as part of our building works package, and this was part of a \$2.7 billion investment. But we know it is the little things too that can keep a range of individuals in employment, whether it be some in our social enterprise sector, some people with disabilities or things like that.

So \$32.8 million will help prevent landslips in regional communities. We will use rock netting, rockfall catch fencing and a range of mechanisms to support the tourism industry, because we do not believe there is going to be a lot of international travel. We do believe the intrastate travel will be quite popular. Indeed I was proud to bring the Overland service from Melbourne to Adelaide back, because we do believe our train and road network are going to be more and more used by families, Victorians, just wanting to get away. So it is very important to make sure that from a road safety point of view that the road improvements get to where they need to go. But also through our sort of bushfire recovery areas like that, we have been very conscious to really support those communities as quickly as we can.

Mr RICHARDSON: As you mentioned, the Victorian government has announced a significant number of pipeline investments in the state's road network. How has this progressed despite some of the challenges that we have inevitably faced just during the pandemic?

Mr CARROLL: First and foremost it should be said how grateful we are to Victorians for staying at home and staying safe. But we also know this has been an opportune time to get on and do some real heavy lifting. That is why, while Victorians have been at home and the road network during lockdown was not as popular as it may have been, we have used this opportunity to really use that leverage to get as much built and as much resurfaced as we can. For example—particularly, Mr Richardson, out your way—in the south-east corner both Hallam Road and Thompsons Road have been completed. I know you would see that investment, as I know Ms Richards would as well—because that is an important road to get completed. Out closer to myself and the Member for Pascoe Vale, O'Herns Road and Plenty Road are very important projects. But regional communities—Traralgon, Sale—have also seen very important investments on the Princes Highway East get supported and invested in to really help Gippslanders get to where they need to get to with a two-lane highway in both directions.

But we are not done yet. There is a lot more work to do, and we are very mindful to make sure these projects support local communities. They are good jobs. They are secure jobs. They have got good conditions around them. You know, wearing my road safety hat, I am very conscious of the workers. The health and safety of the construction workers remains a key priority for people getting to work but also for those workers that are building that important road infrastructure—that they get to do it safely and securely, that there is all the technology, all the warning hazard lights: slow down, be mindful, there is a road-surfacing project underway. It is important.

Mr RICHARDSON: Minister, I might take you to the issue of registration and licensing. I know this was covered in your presentation and in a bit of discussion before as well. In your presentation you discussed the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact it has had on registration and licensing in Victoria. Are you able to outline for the committee's benefit the government's plan for a full return to service?

Mr CARROLL: Thanks, Mr Richardson. This is an important topic. I know many members of the Parliament who have a son or a daughter doing their learners, doing their hours, want them to get that important identification and reach that important milestone. I think without a doubt the suspension of licence testing had a very big impact in that a big backlog did accumulate. But the way the team at registration and licensing has been able to respond has been superb. I want to give a shout-out to the teams first and foremost in regional Victoria, because as we came through the lockdown, as you would appreciate, regional Victoria returned first, and registration and licensing worked through those backlogs first. We could take a lot of those learnings, apply them to the metropolitan network and do the same. But essentially the suspension of licence testing resulted in a backlog of suspended appointments. There were approximately 80 000—that is approaching almost an MCG—and on top of that there were 125 000 people waiting for driving tests and 255 000 people waiting to book their learner permit and hazard perception tests. Importantly, VicRoads went for an outreach program to email or contact anyone who had made a booking that could not then complete their test so that they could come in first. It was essentially, 'You had your test booked'. But then we also knew that there were a lot of people that could not book a test and were just sitting there because of the backlog. So we invested \$60.1 million, including the \$33.3 million announced in June plus the \$26.8 million in October, to make sure we could really then expand our temporary licence testing sites too. We also added 300 additional staff. And we talk about jobs too—we also hired additional driving instructors and testers as well. So it has been a real holistic program, and the Department of Transport, in particular registration and licensing, are to be congratulated because they have churned through this backlog incredibly. I was getting a lot of emails on it, Mr Richardson, and those emails have well and truly dropped off. It is a credit to the department and the people on the ground and the patience of the mums and dads and the youngsters that have wanted to get their learners or their tests too. We support them getting their licence and doing it safely and securely on our roads.

Mr RICHARDSON: I will leave it there. Thanks very much.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Richardson. Ms Bridget Vallence, MP.

Ms VALLENCE: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister and department, for appearing. First up, Secretary, I will just carry on from where Mr O'Brien left off there, budget paper 3, page 132, in terms of road and intersection upgrades. Will you be duplicating the Maroondah Highway at Killara Road in Coldstream as part of that investment?

Mr YOUNIS: Ms Vallence, I have not got in front of me the list of roads that are being done.

Ms VALLENCE: It is fully funded by the federal government. Will you commit to doing that project?

Mr YOUNIS: I have not got the details of that particular project in front of me. I am sure it is in here somewhere.

Ms VALLENCE: Could you take it on notice?

Mr CARROLL: If I can just comment, Ms Vallence, you are right to identify the commonwealth's investment. Indeed I am actually going to give a shout-out to the Deputy Prime Minister, because probably not since John Anderson have we had a Deputy Prime Minister in the transport portfolio that has taken with gusto road safety. So cutting a long story short, the commonwealth budget, you are right to point out, allocated a range of projects that it wants to fund. So the Deputy Prime Minister has written to all state counterparts, and basically it is—

Ms VALLENCE: This has been funded for some time now, so I am just wanting to know if it is going to feature in this program.

Mr CARROLL: We are working through it with the commonwealth. We received the correspondence from Mr McCormack post the budget, and he has identified a range of projects that he wants pretty much, if I could use the term—

Ms VALLENCE: Well, this was in the 2019–20 budget from the federal government—

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence, could you allow the minister to answer the question. He is offering you an explanation.

Ms VALLENCE: and has actually been answered—

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence, would you like to answer your own question, or would you like the minister to answer your question?

Ms VALLENCE: Well, I am just clarifying. The money has been transferred—so you have got the money?

Mr CARROLL: Yes.

The CHAIR: I do not think the minister misunderstands you; he just has not had an opportunity to answer you.

Mr CARROLL: Although we may have the money, there still are a range of protocols and a range of decisions that need to be made with the commonwealth on how the money is invested and who has different portions and who has all sorts of obligations once the road is done when it comes to maintenance and when it comes to upkeep. But if I go back to where I began, the Deputy Prime Minister has written to us, we are supportive of what he is intending to do, we are thankful, and our department, the Department of Transport, has done a power of work to be cooperative with the commonwealth and to respond—

Ms VALLENCE: Specifically on this one project?

Mr CARROLL: Yes.

Ms VALLENCE: I appreciate that. Thank you.

Mr CARROLL: He has written on a range of projects, and we have also written to him on a range of projects too that we are funding and we would like commonwealth funding for too, so it is a two-way street. But I want to say the relationship with the commonwealth, particularly the Deputy Prime Minister, is a productive one at the moment.

Ms VALLENCE: I think the citizens of Coldstream just know that it has been funded and would like a start date. Minister, page 292 of budget paper 3 shows 151 294 random roadside drug tests were performed in the 2018–19 financial year. This is more than what was conducted in the past year, and we know that that is because of COVID, but the target for 2020–21, the financial year, is only 150 000. Can you describe why there is that drop?

Mr CARROLL: I thank you for your question. You are essentially going to the heart of our road safety, and we are working with Victoria Police, indeed Minister Neville, but also Libby Murphy, the assistant police commissioner in charge of this area, we are working very collaboratively with.

Ms VALLENCE: Obviously Victoria Police is responsible for the enforcement, as you rightly pointed out. Do you endorse the reduction though in the target?

Mr CARROLL: No, quite the opposite. Minister Neville and myself are working very closely, and the current road safety strategy concludes at the end of this year. As you would appreciate, it has had a big emphasis on infrastructure. The government will be releasing, with the support of Minister Neville and the cooperation of Victoria Police, a new road safety strategy, which will go to the heart of your question on enforcement. We have identified—

Ms VALLENCE: The budget paper has got a reduction in the target, so is that a surprise for you? Do you think it should be more? Do you endorse that from a road safety perspective?

Mr CARROLL: So you have got the infrastructure and the use of the drug tests, then you have got the investment VicPol have made to make every vehicle essentially a blood alcohol and drug testing vehicle, and then you have got the rollout of the mobile phone detection cameras that are happening across the network. So

VicPol work with us on their goals and their datasets, and we continue to support them. You will see, Ms Vallence, as part of the work we are doing at the moment some very important targets we are trying to reach. We know drugs and alcohol are major factors in road fatalities—

Ms VALLENCE: It was just whether you endorse the target—but thank you. Following your government’s decision to change the way non-standard numberplates are sold and the tax associated with that, putting a tax on those plates, what is the Victorian public, I guess, going to make of that decision to spend almost \$90 000 in the 2020–21 financial year on custom plate advertising campaigns?

Mr CARROLL: Look, I think the Victorian community, like the New South Wales community, will embrace this change. This has been in New South Wales for over a decade, and this will just provide a lot more certainty and a lot more flexibility for the state when it comes to custom plates. If you have got a custom plate at the moment and you want to leave it or bequeath it to a family member, there is no change. This is just—

Ms VALLENCE: Is it just that you are advertising for people—

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence—

Ms VALLENCE: to take up custom plates that you have also just put a tax on to generate more revenue?

Mr CARROLL: Look, I reject the premise of the question that it is a tax. If anything we provided more flexibility for people not only to purchase a custom plate outright but to actually rent a custom plate and also have a lot more influence over the ownership. This is about registration and licensing and the Victorian government looking at best practice in New South Wales and adopting it here. We would not have adopted it if it had not been a success there. This will be an important opportunity. I know people love their custom plates. I know individuals are very proud of them. I know some families want to make sure that nothing changes, and that is fair enough too. This legislation does not change anything for them if they want to keep it. If they want to sell it, they can. If they want to leave it in their will, they can. This is just providing some more flexibility: rather than having to purchase a custom plate and sitting on it and owning it, you will then have the opportunity to go via a rental system.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Nina Taylor, MLC.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you. Coming back to that very important topic of registration and licensing, how is the government going to bring the licence testing online?

Mr CARROLL: Thank you for that question—a question that comes up very often, I must say, Ms Taylor. Look, one of the learnings—and I did my learners many decades ago—

Mr D O’BRIEN: How many?

Mr CARROLL: Nearly three. One of the learnings I have seen is that learners permit testing has not changed a lot, and we do need to bring it into the 21st century. Again, the many emails I got during the height of the pandemic about ‘Why can’t we just do our learners from home? Surely you’ve got the technology and the resources to do that’ were heard. Essentially that was heard loud and clear. So I am very proud that this budget does invest \$7 million in bringing licence testing into the 21st century. We are, as we speak, exploring options to increase access to online testing. We are hopeful that the learner and hazard perception test will be delivered early in 2021, and I think this will be a real, important milestone for learners and young people. We also believe, though, we can make some important arrangements to support young people getting better prepared for their L-plate on our roads as well. We have been leaders in this reform in terms of clocking up your so many hours, but without a doubt now there should be the opportunity to do your licence test at home, and that is what we are working towards. Other states are doing it at the moment, Ms Taylor, so there is a lot of practice for us to learn from. I think it is going to be a real, key milestone, and I cannot wait, because we are working with the relevant bodies, whether it be VicRoads, whether it be our tertiary partners, our education institutions, and I think this will be fantastic when it rolls out early next year.

Ms TAYLOR: Great. You mentioned earlier the significant interruption caused by COVID to registration and licensing. I am just interested to know what relief was provided to Victorians who were affected by the COVID pandemic?

Mr CARROLL: You are right to identify the impact in terms of: you had a booking, it has been cancelled, circumstances have changed, you cannot do your testing, you cannot clock up your hours. So what we have done as part of the budget is invest, and we have essentially frozen all vehicle registration fees so they do not increase at the start of this financial year. This was part of a \$491 million investment. Essentially we put it under the banner of what we would term family relief, because we believe it is important to support every member of the family. Our government introduced the quarterly payments for car registration. We do know what an incredibly big increase that is, and we do want to make sure that all vehicle registration fees are frozen—a \$491 million investment—but also too there have been a lot of changes to support many concession card holders as well, and people on youth allowance, carer allowance. We have worked with a range of commonwealth departments and agencies to support where we can put relief and freeze fees where we can. There have been a lot of changes in that area, and I think it is going to be welcome. It is that little bit of help for Victorians that have done it pretty tough in the past 12 months.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you. And what has been the uptake of short-term registration?

Mr CARROLL: It has had a very steady uptake, in fact, with a rolling average of around 34 per cent of all eligible light vehicles now on three- or six-month registration. This is approximately 1.66 million vehicles. I think it is one of the key reforms of the Andrews Labor government, introducing the short-term registration payment system. My wife got hers at home just recently. She did hand it over to me, but it is a big financial cost, and you think of that sizeable cost to families that have come through the pandemic. We do need to do whatever we can to support them and help them wherever we can—so a massive uptake in short-term registration. I think it will continue to grow beyond that 1.66 million vehicles and it is, I think, a very worthy investment that the Andrews Labor government has done. I think it also leads the way in other areas we can look at and support, whether it be freezing of fees or how we can support Victorians. Registration and licensing—and Nick Foa knows this very well—have a very big interaction for the Victorian community with online services, and we want to make it as simple and easy as possible. I do not know if you want to say anything, Nick?

Mr FOA: Yes, and they have done an amazing job about keeping their services going through a pandemic, so a shout-out to all the staff that have had to put in social distancing measures in customer service centres. Of course hardship tests were completed all the way through the pandemic, so for essential workers that needed a licence or if you needed your licence upgraded to a different category, all of that was supported all the way through the pandemic as well, which has led to the overall bringing down of the backlog. It is a pretty impressive number of tests that have been booked between now and, say, February.

Ms TAYLOR: Very good. I would just like to explore road maintenance. We have had a little bit of discussion here today about that. If I can refer you to budget paper 3, tables 1.21 and 1.22; in both tables the 2020–21 budget allocated a significant amount of funding for road maintenance activities. Are you able to outline what this funding will deliver for Victorians?

Mr CARROLL: I certainly can, Ms Taylor. It is quite incredible when you go through the stats, but the \$411 million in funding for a statewide road maintenance program will include \$380 million for pavement resurfacing and rebuilding right across the state. It will invest and support some 2000 jobs. It will see some 1800 kilometres of roads resurfaced or rebuilt—some 1600 kilometres of roads in regional Victoria and over 330 kilometres of roads in metropolitan Melbourne. We all know about potholes, and we all have our constituents talk to us about them, but it will fill in some 220 000 potholes—200 000 in regional Victoria, 20 000 in metro; repair or replace some 33 000 signs—20 000 in regional, 13 000 in metro; and more than 60 000 kilometres of roadside grass—50 000 in regional and 13 000 in metro—will be mowed, making it safer.

We are mindful as we head towards the bushfire season of the important work of our frontline workforce, our CFA, our fire brigade, working very closely with VicRoads as we go ahead, but it is quite remarkable how far and how wide the road maintenance program goes. I am told it could fill the MCG's surface over 720 times, so it is quite a lot of asphalt, and we do know it is important for local jobs too.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. That concludes the time we have set aside for consideration of the roads and road safety portfolio with you today. We thank you and we also thank you, Secretary and

Deputy Secretary. You have been with us all day. Thank you very much for spending that time with us. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses will be required within 10 working days of the committee's request.

The committee will now take a short break before moving to consideration of its next portfolios, but we declare this hearing adjourned and thank you for your time.

Witnesses withdrew.