

# **PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE**

## **2021–22 Budget Estimates**

Melbourne—Thursday, 17 June 2021

### **MEMBERS**

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Richard Riordan—Deputy Chair

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Gary Maas

Mr James Newbury

Mr Danny O’Brien

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Nina Taylor

**WITNESSES**

Mr Ben Carroll, MP, Minister for Public Transport,

Mr Paul Younis, Secretary, and

Mr William Tieppo, Deputy Secretary, Network Design and Integration, Department of Transport.

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

I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to them, their culture, their elders past, present and future and elders from other communities who may be here today.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2021–22 Budget Estimates. Its aim is to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for the Victorian community.

Please note that witnesses and members may remove their masks when speaking to the committee but must replace them afterwards.

Mobile telephones and computers should also be turned to silent.

All evidence taken by this committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. Comments repeated outside this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check. Verified transcripts, presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website as soon as possible.

We welcome Minister Carroll in the first instance for consideration of your public transport portfolio. We invite you to make a 10-minute opening statement, and this will be followed by questions from the committee. Thanks, Minister.

**Visual presentation.**

**Mr CARROLL:** Thank you, Chair and PAEC members. It is a pleasure to be here this morning with you and to be here with the Secretary, Paul Younis, as well as Will Tieppo, the head of network design and integration. The 2021–22 Victorian budget does continue the Andrews government's record of investing to transform Victoria's public transport system. In doing so it delivers a double benefit of supporting jobs, particularly in our advanced manufacturing rolling industry. The \$80 billion Big Build is transforming how Victorians move around our state, with new railway lines, level crossing removals and upgrades being delivered. We are seizing the benefits of the Big Build by delivering additional services and more modern, spacious and accessible trains and trams. The 2021 budget includes a \$1.5 billion investment in more rolling stock to make public transport journeys more comfortable, safe and reliable, as well as supporting thousands of Victorians in jobs where they need it, from metropolitan Melbourne right through to regional Victoria.

\$986 million will be invested to fund 25 brand-new X'Trapolis 2.0 trains and supporting infrastructure to modernise our train fleet. \$367.5 million will be invested in our dedicated tram maintenance facility that will support the rollout of next-generation trams. \$159 million will be delivered to critical maintenance works to extend the life of Victoria's oldest rolling stock, keeping them servicing some of our busiest routes while new trains and trams are being built. We are also ensuring that regional Victoria is positioned to capitalise on the \$4 billion worth of investment through the Regional Rail Revival. This will capitalise on the investments we have made in V/Line, including \$613 million for regional rail improvements. \$74 million will be invested in new bus services to areas where they are most needed, and I know members of this committee are aware of this, as well as planning for the future of our bus network. And because living with a disability should not be an impediment or a barrier to anyone, particularly when you are wanting to get access to public transport, \$25.4 million will be invested to boost accessibility and amenity right across our stations and stops across the network.

Chair, the pandemic has caused a once-in-a-century disruption to public transport both here in Victoria, around Australia and indeed around the world. As you will see in the graph, there has been a dramatic drop in the passenger levels during periods of restrictions, followed by recovery. Throughout the past year we have continued to run a full public transport service to support essential workers, particularly also to support jobs as well as thousands of our transport workers that are on the front line every day supporting Victorians to get to work, school or TAFE. The 2021–22 budget does invest \$296.2 million to address the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on the public transport network. This funding will help operators to continue delivering services during a period of reduced patronage. It also includes funding for additional cleaning to support public health as well as to make sure that users feel comfortable and safe on the public transport network.

As patronage has begun to return to our public transport system we have implemented a range of measures to build customer confidence in public transport. On 31 January we delivered 450 additional weekly services. This is the most significant upgrade to our timetable since the opening of the city loop. These extra services help passengers maintain physical distancing when travelling on the network. A temporary 30 per cent off-peak discount also commenced on public transport from 31 January. This is designed to encourage and incentivise the return of passengers to public transport.

We are also developing new technology uplifts. We have developed a new crowding capacity indicator to give passengers more real-time information on how busy their train, platform or station is on the metropolitan train network to allow them to make an informed choice on when they get to work, school or university. This is funded with \$9.4 million in the 2021–22 budget.

The Andrews Labor government does believe in our rolling stock, including trains, trams and buses. We want them to be made for Victoria by Victorians in Victoria. We are proud of our \$7.5 billion investment in rolling stock since we came to office. This is delivering hundreds of new trains and trams and also supporting thousands of Victorians in a vital manufacturing industry across our state. The 2021 budget continues this by investing \$986 million for a new fleet of 25 X'Trapolis 2.0 trains and upgrades to the Craigieburn train maintenance facility. The X'Trapolis 2.0 trains will be bigger, more reliable and more accessible for people with disabilities. They will run on some of Melbourne's busiest routes, including the fast-growing suburbs around Craigieburn, Upfield and Frankston. This will also replace some of our oldest trains on the network as they come to the end of their life. This investment will also support 750 jobs across Victoria, particularly in our advanced manufacturing and supply chains. Chair, this will include 150 jobs at Alstom in Ballarat, with the future of train manufacturing in Ballarat now secured.

This significant investment builds on the \$1.48 billion rolling stock investment made in the last budget, with a commitment to design, build and maintain 100 next-generation trams. And as you would appreciate, Melbourne has the biggest tram network in the world. This year's budget also provides \$367 million to construct a new maintenance facility for these trams in Melbourne's north-west. The design, engineering and construction of the next-generation tram will support up to 1900 jobs.

Chair, V/Line is the fastest growing regional railway in Australia. Prior to COVID regional patronage grew from 13 million boardings in 2014 to around 22.9 million boardings. That is a 63 per cent increase in V/Line patronage. More tracks and stations are being added through the \$4 billion investment in the Regional Rail Revival program, and we are realising the benefit of these investments, with more than 700 new V/Line services added since we came to office in 2014.

Chair, to maintain high levels of customer service and safety, we need to continually maintain and upgrade 3500 kilometres of track and hundreds of signalling systems and stations right across our V/Line network. The 2021 budget invests \$613.1 million for this purpose. This includes a longer term funding commitment that will allow V/Line to plan a program of major periodic maintenance right across our network to guarantee a safer, more reliable service for passengers right across Victoria.

Our bus network continues to connect Victorians to work, education and other modes of transport. Buses provide a critical social support to many people who rely on access to shops, medical appointments and social activities. The indispensable role of the bus network was highlighted through the COVID-19 pandemic. Bus patronage exceeded other forms of public transport during the pandemic and experienced a more rapid increase in patronage numbers once restrictions were eased. The 2021–22 Victorian budget continues to build on the Andrews Labor government's record of investing in the state bus network by funding a \$74.3 million package

of improvements. We are planning for the future of the bus network, including more options to improve existing services while also embracing emerging technology like zero-emissions buses and on-demand bus trials. We are delivering new infrastructure as well, to support students in regional Victoria. This will ensure schools in Shepparton and Horsham are well serviced by buses as well. We will extend routes in busy, growing suburbs, including Clyde and Clyde North as well as other growth areas, to ensure they meet train stations, education and shopping centres as well. We will also add new bus routes to services in Tarneit North, as well as making sure that public transport connections are there between the bus and the train for the very first time. And university students at Parkville will also be catered for with additional services as well between Moonee Ponds and Melbourne University. I am incredibly excited about our investment in buses and making sure that they are not perceived as the poor cousin in our public transport network and continue to thrive and support Victorians wherever they need to get to.

But also, Chair, I just want to touch on accessibility. We know with accessibility and people with disabilities we need to really work hard on our tram, train and bus networks for longer term planning, and this budget does invest \$25.4 million in relation to disability access. We are designing and planning tram stops linked to the Metro Tunnel stations to cater for increased patronage as well as support for all Victorians with disabilities. Around 1200 existing tram stops will get Braille plates and tactile ground surfacing as well as better lighting, weather protection and road markings. Various upgrades will be undertaken at train stations in Aspendale, Burnley and North Richmond to improve the customer service as well as increase satisfaction and patronage.

We are also installing bike infrastructure and storage across our stations so more passengers can cycle to stations as well. This program of works builds on the \$20.3 million program of upgrades across stations as part of the May 2020 budget.

Chair, the 2021 budget supports our response to the once-in-a-century pandemic as well as continuing to transform our public transport network for all Victorians. In doing so it is also delivering vital jobs and economic activity right across our state. I am happy now, Chair, to take any questions on this presentation as it relates to public transport. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Can I also just say that I should have noted at the opening of proceedings that Mr Limbrick is an apology. He is unwell today. I will pass the first call to Mr O'Brien.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Thank you, Chair. Good morning, Minister and team. Minister, budget paper 3, page 337, outlines the minor public transport network improvements for trains. The V/Line tracks between Craigieburn and Seymour are still being operated using a manual signalling system from the 1800s. This absolute double-block system technology is not used anywhere else in Australia. Why should passengers travelling this stretch of line believe it is safe?

**Mr CARROLL:** I thank Mr O'Brien for the question. I have actually visited in person the exact area that you are talking about. I was recently there in Wallan. As you would appreciate, the north-east line that you are referring to was actually the first line I travelled on as public transport minister. In partnership with the Australian Rail Track Corporation it is going through a major, major investment. Indeed, we have also committed \$235 million to the north-east line. So the issue you highlight about the century-old infrastructure, Mr O'Brien, is being upgraded, in combination though with new rolling stock VLocity to go on the north-east line. The Border Rail Action Group have written to me about some of these issues. We are intent on addressing them with the commonwealth. You would also appreciate that just last week the ATSB did hand down a report in relation to the Wallan incident that we are working through. So we are committed to making sure that the north-east line, which is also I must say a shared freight line—

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Yes, sorry. I was just really talking about the Seymour line, the Victorian-owned line, not the ATSB—

**Mr CARROLL:** No, but it is connected to the north-east line, the Seymour line, and they do go up through Seymour as well as divert to Shepparton.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Okay. So you said there is investment to remove that old signalling system. When will that be completed?

**Mr CARROLL:** Well, this is part of our Regional Rail Revival, and we are hoping to have works completed along that line by the end of this year. In addition to that, the way it sort of works in transport issues is you complete the works, then you add the new services and you add the new rolling stock.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Okay. I am talking about the Victorian-owned V/Line tracks here, Minister. So by the end of this year that old double-block system will be gone?

**Mr CARROLL:** We are working through a range of issues, Mr O'Brien. There is the double blocking, there is the additional widening of the stations that is also required for the new—

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** No, I am just talking about the double blocking. That will be gone by the end of this year?

**Mr CARROLL:** We are working towards a range of investments across that, including the double blocking that has served that local community for many years safely. I have inspected it myself personally and seen it, and we are continuing to make a range of investments along that line.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Are you aware of an incident between two V/Line trains that occurred on the Melbourne–Seymour line on 14 May?

**Mr CARROLL:** I am aware of every incident I get notified of across the network. Whether it is trespassing or whether it is some of the incidents you are referring to at the moment, Mr O'Brien, for every incident I get notified essentially automatically, and we address it. We put out the bus replacement program, we have our frontline staff, our V/Line, and we make sure we have strong community members and representations to the union members. We also work very closely with the Australian Transport Safety Bureau, so we make sure the Department of Transport—

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Again, I am talking specifically about the Victorian-owned part of the line.

**Mr CARROLL:** Yes.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** On 14 May I understand a V/Line train travelling from Melbourne to Seymour ran through two failed or extinguished signals and narrowly avoided a major head-on collision with a passenger train coming from Seymour to Melbourne. Can you confirm this incident is under investigation by the Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator?

**Mr CARROLL:** With all of these incidents, Mr O'Brien, it is a multi-agency approach. As you would appreciate, a lot of the rail—

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Sorry, can I just get an answer to the question. Are you aware of this particular incident?

**Mr CARROLL:** Yes, we are aware of that incident—not only me but the department. Above and beyond your question about the Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator you also missing out on some other vital rail safety components, including the Australian Transport Safety Bureau as well as other key elements of safety. At the end of the day the first priority of our public transport system is safety. Every incident—whether it is trespassing, whether it is trains, whether it is going through a level crossing or whether it is signalling—has to be investigated. We work very closely with our road safety partners, we have dialogue with them regularly, and we are about improvement.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** On the day of that particular event passengers were simply told that there were 'unrelated and unforeseen signalling issues impacting the Shepparton and Seymour lines' which delayed the service. Why weren't passengers told the truth about a near miss?

**Mr CARROLL:** Passengers are always told the truth, and we always communicate openly with dialogue. We always try to get information quickly via the PTV app and the VicTraffic app. We are always communicating with passengers. The good thing about V/Line is the conductors and the staff know their passengers back to front, and we are always working with our passengers. Whether it is the Border Rail Action Group—we are always talking to our local communities. I go out there regularly to talk to local communities and the V/Line staff—

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Thank you, Minister. Can I move on in the same area. Budget paper 4, pages 197–199, shows the cost blowouts in the Regional Rail Revival project. But specifically, on 4 October 2018 the *Shepparton News* reported on the government's plans for nine return services a day for the Shepparton line by mid-2021. Given it is now June 2021, when will the Shepparton line have nine additional return services a day?

**Mr CARROLL:** Thank you, Mr O'Brien, for the question. I will do my best to give you some sort of clarity and some context to the answer, but the Regional Rail Revival program does come under Minister Allan as the transport infrastructure minister.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** I am talking about specifically the additional services, which are your portfolio responsibility.

**Mr CARROLL:** Yes, but you have put the cart before the horse.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** All right. It is a simple question. I am sure you talk to Minister Allan. She should be able to tell you when that project will be finished and when you will be able to put extra services on the line, so could you just give me even a ballpark?

**Mr CARROLL:** It is more sophisticated than a ballpark answer, and I can—

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** In 2018, just before an election, it was not sophisticated. It was, 'We're going to do nine extra services', so where are they?

**Mr CARROLL:** Nine extra services, and we will deliver our services. But what happens is you do the infrastructure upgrade, so the Regional Rail Revival—probably the best example more recently is the \$600 million upgrade of the Ballarat line—and then we work with Metro Trains as well as V/Line and then the bus operators to work out the additional services to make sure you have all the connecting parts to the public transport system.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Minister, I asked you what the time is, not how the clock works.

**The CHAIR:** Mr O'Brien, could you allow the minister to answer.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** No, Chair. I am asking a simple question, and I am asking the minister to come back to when we will have the additional services on the Shepparton line. I am going to run out of time, so I will throw in: when will the additional services on the Echuca line, the Warrnambool line and the Gippsland line be delivered, as promised by this government?

**Mr CARROLL:** With all of those transport infrastructure upgrades, Mr O'Brien, I have visited and seen the action on the ground and the first-rate construction of building a modern, sophisticated public transport network—

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Yes. When?

**Mr CARROLL:** that will service communities such as your own. So when those upgrades are completed we will then work and put these services in in a timely manner—

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** So is it the never-never?

**Mr CARROLL:** and work with the community, including bus operators as well.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr O'Brien. I will pass the call to Mr Maas.

**Mr MAAS:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister and departmental team, for your appearance today. And thank you for the very informative presentation as well, Minister. If I can take you to the topic of the government's response to COVID on our public transport network, I was hoping you would be able to explain for the committee the impact coronavirus has had on the public transport network and what initiatives the government has taken to respond.

**Mr CARROLL:** Thank you, Mr Maas. We cannot underestimate how the pandemic has affected public transport. I have got to say I am very proud of how the Victorian government has supported our public transport

operators. I spend a lot of my time sort of looking overseas—what is happening, what they are doing—and I think the way the Andrews Labor government has continued to invest in public transport through the pandemic to get us inching closer and closer to a turn-up-and-go system but to also support frontline workers is commendable. And to think that during a pandemic we added the most significant upgrade to train services since the opening of the city loop in the early 80s I think speaks for itself. But we must recognise too that patronage has dipped significantly and has also recovered too, and that graph I showed you showed the ups and downs of patronage with the people doing the right thing—staying at home and only going out for work and essential services.

We have also seen different variances in how different modes of public transport have been affected in the pandemic, and I touched on a bit of this in my opening. Essentially metropolitan buses and regional buses were hovering around 70 per cent, metropolitan trains at 60 per cent and trams at 53 per cent. So most Victorians did the right thing, but as we saw, a lot of activity in our outer suburbs and in regional Victoria saw people returning to buses and bus patronage really increasing, which is why I was pleased to recently release a bus plan to really try and capitalise on some momentum around buses and make sure that Victorians feel that they are a first choice of travel, not a distant second or third.

We are seeing more and more on public transport that people continue to come back. We cannot underestimate that there has been a flight back to the motor vehicle—that many Victorians have chosen to go back to the motor vehicle—but we have tried to offset that as much as possible with the 30 per cent off-peak discount and the above-and-beyond cleaning, including the deep cleaning that occurs overnight on our public transport system, as well as trying to make sure that key people, including myself, are out there on public transport to really demonstrate to the public that it is safe, it is accessible. It has got more investment and more services than ever before. Please return to public transport. It is actually good for you too and also good for the environment as well.

We are very proud also that, in addition to the overnight cleaning, if you walk down Bourke Street at the moment, you will actually hear Professor Sutton talking about the importance of social distancing, wearing a mask and using the hand sanitising stations as well. So we are very committed, Mr Maas, to supporting our Victorian public transport sector right through the pandemic and beyond.

**Mr MAAS:** Thank you. Budget paper 3, page 107, makes reference to the RideSpace initiative. How will that help restore confidence in the public transport network?

**Mr CARROLL:** This is a very important piece of work that the Department of Transport have undertaken. RideSpace essentially puts the informed choice back in the passenger's hand. So you can literally go through the PTV app to the PTV website and see what density levels your public transport mode of choice will have going to work, for example, and that will give you the informed choice: 'Do I want to catch the train or the tram?'. Through a range of digital incentives, the Myki touch-on, tactile markings at stations, we are now getting a very clear picture on how busy different stations are and how busy different lines are. So you then have the informed choice: 'I might choose to try and use the bus today or the tram', and it will give you an indicator on how busy the station is or how busy that route is likely to be.

It is very important too I think going forward that we do continue to invest in the technological uplift to give more choice to consumers. I am also very proud—many people around here will be aware of the popularity of Google Maps, and we have been able to basically integrate Google Maps, which is one of the most used journey planners in the world, with the Department of Transport data. So we are really including cutting-edge, up-to-date information, up-to-date data, and I know that we are seeing more and more Victorians look at the crowding information to really support them with the informed choice on what sort of journey they wish to take going to work, to university or to TAFE. So thanks, Mr Maas. It is a pertinent question about looking to the future and the role of technology in public transport. We have all got the iPhone, and we all need to use it and make an informed choice on how we want to get to work.

**Mr MAAS:** A great initiative; thank you, Minister. In the time I have remaining I might refer to two parts that you have already spoken about—namely, the off-peak discount as well as deep cleaning of our trains. Can you perhaps do a deeper dive and take us through how that is actually helping restore confidence in the public transport network?

**Mr CARROLL:** It certainly is, Mr Maas. If I just go to some of the statistics that prove the point that the off-peak discount is working and more and more Victorians are using it, in February 2021, 535 000 Victorians pocketed the discount; in March 2021, 716 000 Victorians pocketed the discount; and in April 2021 about 790 000 Victorians pocketed the discount. There is a lot of commentary—it is on the front page of the *Age*, I noticed, today—on what will the working week be like when we come through the pandemic, and public transport needs to respond to what the working week will be like. There will be staggered times for work. This 30 per cent off-peak discount, whether it is morning or evening, is about incentivising Victorians but also too head offices, the private sector to have staggered work times. We know coming out of COVID the traditional 9-to-5, Monday-to-Friday week will not be the same, and that is why that 30 per cent off-peak discount is vitally important. I am proud that we have been able to do this sort of incentivisation through the Department of Transport relatively quickly to try and support both government and private sector workplaces that are wanting to basically manage the different demands and the different criteria that a lot of employees want now coming out of COVID, so it is very important. But at the end of the day the stats speak for themselves. We will continue to track this, Mr Maas—how the 30 per cent off-peak discount is going. It was designed as a temporary trial, so we are going to look at it, make some assessments and see what we need to do going forward into the future.

**Mr MAAS:** Thanks, Minister.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Maas. Mr Hibbins.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister and Secretary and your team, for appearing this morning. You mentioned disability access within your presentation, and you would be well aware that Victorians with a disability have been asking for accessible public transport for over 40 years, and in fact the Auditor-General's report found that 75 per cent of our tram network is inaccessible to people with mobility issues. Given that, how is only four level-access tram stops in this budget acceptable?

**Mr CARROLL:** Thanks, Mr Hibbins, for your question. I meet with the disability sector regularly as part of my public transport portfolio; indeed I met with them just in this room during one of the recent sittings. You are correct and right to identify the Victorian Auditor-General's report that did find only 27 per cent of tram stops and 38 per cent of our tram fleet complied with the current disability standards. There are, Mr Hibbins, two parts to this equation: there is the tram stop essentially out in the network—and I know your electorate has this as well as my electorate of Niddrie—that is not disability compliant, and then there is the other component, which is the rolling stock element, essentially the high-floor trams, so you cannot underestimate how that \$1.5 billion investment in 100 next-generation trams will support the disability sector. This will help us retire many of the old high-floor trams as well as bring in the new low-floor trams.

I do not argue with you that we need to do more in this space. We are committed to doing more. We are committed to making sure that we work with local government on this very issue. We do have money in the budget, and we are very intent on rolling out not only more, better informed and better choices for the disability sector with rolling stock—we have had great feedback on the HCMTs from the disability sector, using that sort of intel and know-how with the next-generation tram—but also working with local councils and local government to also support modernisation of tram stops out in the community. It is a massive feat and a massive agenda for the biggest tram network in the world that essentially, as you would know, was built pre Federation, but it is a combination of continuing to work with Yarra Trams, work with the local government sector to really make sure that it is complete.

I should say too the Department of Transport are working on this very issue. We did accept in principle all of the recommendations of the VAGO report. I have read the report. I hear firsthand these issues, and we know so many people with disabilities rely on public transport. That is why we are very proud of what we did around more investment too with our commercial passenger vehicles, but I do know we need to do more. That is why we have got money in the budget to do more, and we are committed to working with the sectors to roll out more disability-accessible rolling stock as well as tram stops.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Thanks, Minister. Can you give the locations of the four that are outlined in the budget? Where will they actually be?



**Mr CARROLL:** We are working through that at the moment with the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport. So we have a review underway at the moment on where we need to do them, Mr Hibbins, and we do want to take in the feedback from the disability sector and look at some of those stops that are most used and are high-frequency stops from the disability sector. So we do want to make sure that we have a real prioritisation and, most importantly, that we do establish a clear program, beginning with those stops, Mr Hibbins, but we know there are so many more above and beyond that. So we are very much committed to doing it, but we also want to make sure too we get feedback right across the network, including from the disability sector as well.

The committee should be aware we are committed to reducing it. You have got a range of them around. The Secretary has just given me some of them that we think, so you have got Mills, you have got around Collins—some of the high-frequency ones we are looking at at the moment in terms of targets are route 58 in Collins Street, Mills Street, but also too we are expecting to complete some around South Yarra as well. But we do have a range of programs and a range of measures we want to see through, knowing that four is one number but we have got many, many more of those to do.

And they are also good for local jobs coming out of COVID. These are very good, nimble projects too that make a big difference to people's accessibility right throughout the state.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Thank you. And just further on trams as well, you would be aware of the significant safety issue of cars simply just not stopping at tram stops. Are there any measures within the budget to address that?

**Mr CARROLL:** Look, we have a range of measures on that very issue that have been funded essentially in every budget. So most recently you would be aware of the rollout of essentially the concrete barriers around some of our most heavy tram stops. It is amazing, Mr Hibbins, there was the Rhino campaign around trams, about how heavy they are and, you know, they cannot stop quickly. We will continue to work with Yarra. We are also wanting to make sure that there is also safety on the tram. We are doing a lot more upgrades about the infrastructure inside the tram. Coming out of COVID some people are nervous about holding things and touching things and things like that. But there is a range of programs.

Above and beyond some of the infrastructure, we are also working very closely with Yarra on what some of our modern advertising should be around tram stops to make sure the message is very clear that trams cannot stop quickly; do not overtake in front of them; please also be mindful when you are in the motor vehicle to stop and know what the laws are. I can go into this later today about the online learners and how that addresses some of these issues as well. But we do need to do more. We are committed to making sure, as I have always said, that the tram network in Victoria is not only the oldest and the biggest but the best.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Yes. And just finally in my time, I just noticed in the budget that additional funding for COVID impacts, which included the additional cleaning, is due to end in June this year. Is that going to continue or not?

**Mr CARROLL:** We are working through that at the moment, Mr Hibbins. Look, the short answer is we will continue to fund additional cleaning. We are wanting to work exactly out the scale, and the way we have done it in the past has been through the Jobs for Victoria-type program too to support many people that have been looking for work, because we know the cleaning regime—and I know you catch public transport; I think you would agree with me—it is pretty much as clean as it has ever been. So we are committed to working with both Metro and Yarra on cleaning. It was a substantial investment that we made recently. We also did it across our commercial passenger vehicle industry as well. We are working through those issues as we speak. The cleaning will always be essentially a predominant feature of the public transport system going forward.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Thanks.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Hibbins. Deputy Chair.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Thanks, Chair. Morning, Minister.

**Mr CARROLL:** Morning.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Just quickly, to finish on a regional theme, I refer to page 113 of the department's questionnaire, which shows that the government budgeted to spend \$92 million on new VLocity carriages in 2019–20 but in fact spent only \$8.7 million. Why was this funding deferred—and so much of it deferred?

**Mr CARROLL:** We are continuing to invest in our rolling stock, Deputy Chair. It is an important area of investment, and I might ask Mr Tieppo to supplement my answer. Rolling stock and the rollout of rolling stock does come online when we finish a lot of the Big Build projects, so we are continuing to invest—

**Mr RIORDAN:** So is the Big Build behind schedule? That is why you have got such a delay?

**Mr CARROLL:** No, no. The Big Build is running to schedule. We deliver all of our projects, but we do need to make sure that when the track and the stabling and the power arrangements are all completed as well, then you have the rail safety operators also give things the okay. Then you bring on the rolling stock. Mr Tieppo, do you want to just supplement my answer?

**Mr TIEPPO:** Yes. Mr Riordan, I think with the VLocity program at the moment, that is going pretty well. I think there were some minor delays as a result of COVID in getting parts from Europe and those sorts of things, but in terms of the program itself, the first 54—

**Mr RIORDAN:** It sounds like, based on that figure, there is only 10 per cent of it being delivered, so that does not sound like a minor delay.

**Mr TIEPPO:** No. So in terms of the overall 54 committed additional VLocity carriages, they are on track for full delivery by the end of next year.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Sorry, how many?

**Mr TIEPPO:** Fifty-four velocity carriages as part of the previous commitment. They are currently in manufacturing at the moment.

**Mr RIORDAN:** And how many have we received?

**Mr TIEPPO:** There are already about 18 in service—

**Mr RIORDAN:** Eighteen in service and how many more to be delivered?

**Mr TIEPPO:** And there are 54 to be delivered by the end of next year.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Okay. All right. Thank you. Minister, I refer to the questionnaire, page 17, and the \$296 million coronavirus impacts on the transport network initiative. Minister, we have seen, certainly in the news last night, the ongoing saga with corruption with V/Line, and there have been all sorts of things come out in Operation Esperance about what has gone on there. I think Operation Esperance sort of heard that money was being 'sprinkled'—treated like sprinkles—amongst senior executives and others. Minister, how much hard-earned taxpayers dollars were siphoned from the public purse in sprinkles? And is it true that the figure well exceeded \$20 million?

**Mr CARROLL:** Thank you, Deputy Chair, for your question. It is an important one. Can I say at the outset what was aired through the IBAC inquiry was very concerning, and as minister I took appropriate action as soon as I was made aware of what had occurred. The chief executive officer at V/Line was stood down immediately as well as some of the other individuals that were also part of this. I will not go into details because IBAC, as you would appreciate and you alluded to, is still on foot. Can I also say, though, the language you used, highlighting what was said at the inquiry—the 'sprinkles'—was very disappointing too because, as I alluded to in my previous answer, the cleaning regime is vitally important to getting people and passengers back. So Transclean—

**Mr RIORDAN:** It is obviously vitally important to the executives too.

**Mr CARROLL:** Yes, I agree with you. Transclean, the cleaning contractor, have a lot of frontline staff that we sought to support.

**Mr RIORDAN:** My question is not so much about the cleaning. The question is really: is it true that it was \$20 million-odd worth of sprinkles?

**Mr CARROLL:** I will ask the Secretary to supplement my answer, except to say that IBAC has a very important job to do and we know hearings are continuing into this matter. Just yesterday I announced essentially major, major reform to V/Line—a new CEO, a transformative CEO, for the next 12 months as well as the board will not be in place anymore as well as doing away with their state-owned enterprise status and bringing it closer to the Department of Transport as a statutory authority. We need to capitalise on the investments we are making in regional transport and the regional upgrades. On your specifics around the \$20 million, Mr Riordan, I might ask the Secretary if he wishes to supplement my answer.

**Mr YOUNIS:** Thanks, Minister. Mr Riordan, there are a few measures we put in place to make sure we get value for money in relation to all of our contracts, and the cleaning contract is one of those. Particularly with the COVID response and the cleaning there, we had inspections done daily in relation to—

**Mr RIORDAN:** Sorry, the specific question was: can you confirm it was \$20 million worth of sprinkles?

**Mr YOUNIS:** Well, that is a subject for IBAC investigation. I am not privy to—and we cannot be privy to—the details of payments that were allegedly made between the contractor and individuals. What I can say in relation to the cleaning contract that we have in for—

**Mr RIORDAN:** Yes, I am not asking—

**The CHAIR:** Mr Riordan, could you allow the Secretary to complete his answer, please?

**Mr YOUNIS:** We make sure that the services we paid for are delivered, that the services that we paid for are value for money for the community, and we put in place inspection regimes to ensure that happened.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Okay, just to you again, Secretary: you cannot verify the \$20 million, but can you tell us if there has been an independent audit or investigation by your department, and I guess you, into these systematic failings? Have you done something internally yourself?

**Mr YOUNIS:** Minister Carroll just spoke about what we had put in place in relation to the alleged fraud and corruption that is under investigation by IBAC now. That is subject to an IBAC investigation, which has significant powers in relation to that. I think what we have done as a department on the contract and what the community are getting as far as value for money is ensuring that. So we have inspected and we do regular inspections of the work that is carried out under those contracts. And we did, during the last year—

**Mr RIORDAN:** So you have done no independent audit yourself?

**Mr YOUNIS:** Sorry, on cleaning?

**Mr RIORDAN:** No, no, no—just on this corruption. You cannot verify whether it was \$20 million or even more, so have you not done any review yourselves into what has gone on in V/Line? I ask that question in light of the fact that you have just announced the sacking of the board. That has been in train now for six or seven months. People have been asking why that has not happened. So I am wondering if you have done an audit and have then decided to sack the board.

**Mr YOUNIS:** In relation to an audit, we have audited the contract that we are doing. Remember, I think what the IBAC investigation is showing is that that is a payment between the contractor, Transclean, which was not employed by the Department of Transport but employed by MTM, and that contractual arrangement. So that was a payment between Transclean and allegedly the CEO.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Riordan. Ms Richards.

**Ms RICHARDS:** Thank you, Minister and officials. It is a good opportunity to thank the hardworking people who have been keeping us all moving, whether it is the drivers or the other people who have supported our network at a difficult time.

**Ms RICHARDS:** I am going to explore a little bit perhaps where the Deputy Chair started, and that is around rolling stock and new trains. I will refer you to budget paper 3, pages 107 and 114, and ask if you could explain for the committee how the new trains initiative as outlined in table 1.22 will deliver jobs for regional Victoria and improve our rail network.

**Mr CARROLL:** Thanks very much, Ms Richards, and, look, it was a thrill to be with the Acting Premier recently and essentially the whole Ballarat community at Alstom in Ballarat. Alstom has had literally mums, dads, sons, cousins, daughters—multigenerational—working alongside each other building trains for Victorians' everyday needs. This \$986 million investment for 25 new X'Trapolis 2.0 trains to be manufactured in Ballarat with also 60 per cent local content is a really important measure. We are very proud that they will go—I have got the Craigieburn line out where I am. For the Upfield and Frankston lines, where we have the Comeng trains running at the moment, we are going to have sort of brand new, cutting-edge, bigger, more powerful but better for the environment as well, more storage, better working conditions for people and passengers that want to use it. So it will be a modern train that will hold about 1200 passengers seated and standing.

There will also be—and I know Mr Hibbins loves bikes—capacity for bikes on the trains, as well as to that earlier subject of more disability and wheelchair access. So we are very proud of this investment. It is called the X'Trapolis 2.0 because it follows a previous version of the X'Trapolis. Alstom have a long proud history in building this train. Mr Tieppo is well versed in it. It has been stress tested. We are really looking forward to this, but most importantly too to think that they will be made in Ballarat really secures the Ballarat facility. I just have a quote here by the managing director of the Ballarat facility, Mark Coxon, who said it was a 'great opportunity to create the next generation of skilled workers' right here in Ballarat.

So we are very proud of it. Since the Andrews Labor government came to office—and you have other states who are now looking to us—whether it is buses, trams or trains, they are all being built here in Victoria by Victorians for Victorians, and we need to keep this up when you also consider the downturn and closure of car manufacturing while rolling stock investment and advanced manufacturing is still vitally important.

**Ms RICHARDS:** Terrific. I would like to follow on from that answer and refer you to budget paper 4. Can you update the committee and provide some evidence on the delivery of the government's rolling stock pipeline?

**Mr CARROLL:** I can, Ms Richards, and you are right to highlight that \$7.5 billion since we came to office across different modes of transport. So you have already got 24 X'Trapolis trains built that have been fully delivered, followed by that most recent announcement of the X'Trapolis 2.0. We are now seeing more and more of the HCMTs, 65 committed and being built, now entering service. You have got the 25 2.0s—a \$986 million investment in the budget that will see new trains with more power, more space for disability access but also having those modern features that we know passengers want. So it is very, very important.

I am very proud too of the investment that we are making in the tram network. My electorate is a tram and bus electorate, and I know that the next-generation tram is going to be a real game changer. I am very excited. We have had some industry meetings already, and, you know, Dandenong to Ballarat, we are very proud of our manufacturing.

**Ms RICHARDS:** Terrific. Great. Thank you so much. I am interested in understanding a little bit more and perhaps your insights on the investments the government is making in the maintenance facilities.

**Mr CARROLL:** Certainly, Ms Richards. And this is the issue—so while you invest substantially in a new modern train or tram, they then, as you highlight, need to be maintained. Within the maintenance facility it has to have a certain set-up so your engineers, your mechanics, can work underneath the train and on top of it. They are quite something to behold. So we will invest for the X'Trapolis 2.0 in a new maintenance facility in Craigieburn, and this will help us manage the new fleet. It will also ensure ongoing work, investment, apprenticeships. And you know, I see more and more people wanting to work on rolling stock and advanced manufacturing. There are some great partnerships with the tertiary sector as well.

So a new maintenance facility in Craigieburn, a new tram maintenance facility in the north-west, and we are very proud of that. We are working through that as we speak. But this new facility—we are going through a

sort of planning and procurement process—will add direct construction jobs as well as additional supply chain jobs, and we know it will make a very big difference to many Victorians that want to work on our trams.

I was recently with member Scott, recently, just looking at the depot he has in his electorate, the Preston depot, and the amount of women that are wanting to work in rolling stock is really humbling to see. And I want to see if I can replicate what member Scott has in Preston out in the north-west. Because you have got Victoria University, you have got some really important partnerships, and I think it is going to be a real boon going forward. Thank you.

**Ms RICHARDS:** The future is bright. Can you explain a little bit more on the funding on the rolling stock life extension?

**Mr CARROLL:** Yes—actually a good lead on from what I was talking about. So out in Preston we are continuing to invest in extending the life of some of our oldest trains, as well as trams, because while we are doing the new rolling stock to be built, it does take time to get the maintenance facility up and running. So we want new, modern, air conditioning, more modern handrails, buzzers, boards—all of the modern features that we can get—by essentially doing a renovation on an older tram. So that is what that is about, the life extension. We have a very big tram network that is literally thousands of kilometres right from the CBD to the outer suburbs. But also, coming out of COVID we have had a lot of feedback too on how people want to move around indoors on a tram or a train and that they do want to make sure that they are standing, keeping their distance, that the surfaces are safe and that the cleaning continues, but also too that windows are wide open—all of that access that we know to make them feel comfortable.

**Ms RICHARDS:** Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Richards. Mr Hibbins.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Thank you, Chair. Best wishes to David Limbrick, who is obviously sick today. I will hope for an alignment in terms of the questions that we were going to ask, because I am sure he is very passionate about buses in Brunswick. The 505 Parkville bus was funded for extra services, which my colleague, Tim Read, the Member for Brunswick, was a passionate advocate for. Can you provide any further detail in terms of the extra services there?

**Mr CARROLL:** Yes. You are right to highlight that your colleague Dr Read is very passionate about this, as he is about all modes of public transport. And he has communicated with me about the investment he would like to see in that particular network. So what we have to do is basically work with the local government sector and the incumbent provider as well to see what measures we can do, what is the best route, how do we want to do it, how do we fund it. So I have received communications from Dr Read on this. We are committed to upgrading bus networks right across the state. We have got many bus routes, and that one has been identified too. It has not had a good look for many years, and the bus plan we just released is about having a fresh look at some of these bus routes.

It is amazing. We have bus routes, you could say, that were introduced by many previous governments before Sunday trading, so the bus route might stop on a Saturday, and you might be able to get it to go to the shops on a Saturday but it is not there for the Sunday. So these are the things we are working through with our bus plan, and no matter whether it is Brunswick or Bentleigh or Ballarat, we need to make sure that buses are modern, are convenient and serve the public's needs. So we are very much committed to working through that and with Mr Read.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Terrific. Thank you. In terms of buses and the electric buses, I understand you are funding a trial at the moment.

**Mr CARROLL:** Yes.

**Mr HIBBINS:** All new buses from 2025 are going to be electric, but I have two questions. Number one: in the meantime how many electric buses will be on the road, in addition to the ones currently, between now and 2025? And secondly, is the proposal for all new buses after 2025 a proactive strategy or is that simply, 'As buses retire, we'll replace them with electric'?

**Mr CARROLL:** It is a proactive strategy, Mr Hibbins. Otherwise, to be honest, we will get caught short here as a state, as a jurisdiction, indeed as a country. So right around the world everyone is working towards electric buses, and we have also got, as you would appreciate, Volgren, the Volvo Grenda group, coming together in Dandenong, that makes buses. So it is a proactive strategy in combination too with a whole lot of other measures that we need to do, and you and I have discussed tackling transport emissions. But we are doing a very substantial review too of electric buses, because there is that component of the rolling stock and the actual bus out there in the community, and then there is that question around the charging infrastructure. Where do you place it? Under Minister D'Ambrosio's portfolio there was a substantial commitment for more charging infrastructure too, whether it is at the train stations, at the regional towns or at the shopping centres as well as at the depots. So we are working through that issue. Your specific question around from now until 2025 how many buses will be on the network before essentially this policy comes into place—can you let me take that on notice—

**Mr HIBBINS:** Sure.

**Mr CARROLL:** and get back to you in writing? That is something we will have to work through, and obviously we have got to speak to the manufacturers, Transdev and other components to actually see what is in the pipeline—except to say everyone in the bus industry is talking zero-emissions buses. It has got a real potential for getting more passengers back on buses as well, because they are modern and there will be more rolling stock. Cyclists like them as well because they are not blowing fumes on them when they are riding behind a bus.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Now, in terms of the emissions targets that were announced recently for transport—and there were a range of measures obviously in there, electric buses one of them—is there a specific emissions target for transport—

**Mr CARROLL:** Yes, there is, Mr Hibbins—

**Mr HIBBINS:** and if so, what is that?

**Mr CARROLL:** and I should know it off the top of my head, but I might see if the Secretary can supplement. But look, essentially we have got zero emissions by 2050, and then I think it is halving transport transmissions by 2030. But I might, if I can, come back to you with some more concrete advice. But just to speak more broadly, our \$100 million investment in tackling transport emissions goes to the zero-emissions bus fleet. We are the first state in the country to do subsidies for the private sector to purchase electric vehicles, and you may have seen the commentary. This subsidy, this grant, will see—when you have got your Nissans and your Hyundais bringing out electric vehicles—the cost of an electric vehicle almost become comparable to a normal combustion engine-type vehicle. Add to that, Mr Hibbins—and I know Minister Pearson spoke yesterday—the 400 government fleet vehicles to switch over, and add to that investments in active transport; I think we are well on the way. And I should say too with some of my counterparts around state jurisdictions—the most recent meeting of state and commonwealth transport ministers with the Deputy Prime Minister—we now have with Minister McCormack's support a standing item, an agenda item, on the rollout of EVs across the country. So that is very important going forward. You see what is happening overseas. We have got to do it here in Victoria; we have got to do it here right around Australia, to be frank, and it is so vitally important.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Just in this short time, you gave the graph in terms of public transport patronage. Do you have that by mode, and you are able to provide to that the committee?

**Mr CARROLL:** We do have that by mode, yes. I am happy to furnish that to the committee.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Terrific, thank you. And just finally, in terms of services, particularly train services, you talked a lot about having to have the infrastructure and the extra services. Is the current metropolitan network running at peak-hour capacity at the moment?

**Mr CARROLL:** Yes, essentially it is. We made a conscious and deliberate decision right through COVID to support frontline workers but to also support workers in the transport sector, and Raymond O'Flaherty himself said, as the head of Metro, that the government support and investment have seen them basically keep a full retention of staff. So we were conscious. We know around the world other places were reducing services,

and I am proud that we incrementally kept going through the pandemic, trying to get to essentially that golden moment of a turn-up-and-go system.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Ms Taylor.

**Ms TAYLOR:** Morning, Minister and department officials. There has already been some discussion on the V/Line infrastructure, and I think it would be useful for the committee to explore that a bit further. So I refer you to budget paper 3, pages 107 to 114. Could you please explain the investments and actions the government is taking to improve V/Line performance?

**Mr CARROLL:** Thank you, Ms Taylor, for your question. V/Line is the fastest growing regional train operator in the country. It is phenomenal, its growth, and I am very proud. We have delivered 1400 services since we came to office in our train network, and 700—50 per cent—are on V/Line. We are supporting regional passengers above and beyond as well as at parity with metro passengers, so a substantial investment—the Regional Rail Revival, new rolling stock. And then, Ms Taylor, to go specific to this budget, \$613 million to basically support V/Line, which continues to grow at an exponential pace. You only have to look at the growth suburbs right through—and Geelong is a great example, where it goes through that growth area of Tarneit, Werribee, Wyndham, right down to Geelong. We know not only more and more regional passengers but more and more people that are living in these growth suburbs are hopping on a V/Line train as well—so a \$613 million investment and to support V/Line operations, \$148.5 million.

I should also highlight too: V/Line does have a very important role too with freight, and Minister Horne may touch on this too. But we know more and more there is an insatiable appetite for moving goods around, and that is an important component. As the Minister for Public Transport, the freight network can impact on the passenger network, and that is why we are putting investments in our track upgrades to make sure it is essentially as strong, to hold both passengers and freight, and that it is a heavily used network but it is supported too. So we are constantly working with V/Line to really support it. I think its best days are ahead of it, and I am very proud of the announcement we made this week on its new essential vertical integration with the Department of Transport. So we are very excited about the future of V/Line and building on that \$4.5 billion Regional Rail Revival, additional services, new rolling stock. It is the old cliché: people are voting with their feet. Ten million boardings have been added since we came to office, so it has been a phenomenal turnaround in regional rail. We have gone from closing lines once upon a time to opening more lines and seeing Victorians vote with their feet.

**Ms TAYLOR:** Sounds good. You have also mentioned this morning about the importance of maintenance, and I think that goes without saying. So could you outline the maintenance activities that will be delivered through this investment?

**Mr CARROLL:** Thank you, Ms Taylor, because maintenance is an essential component of a public transport system and particularly for a system like V/Line that does take both freight and passengers. We constantly need to be out there maintaining it, assessing it, trying to minimise disruptions, trying to make sure that trains are running and, if we can foresee any issues around maintenance, that we have the bus replacements and the coaches ready to go—and V/Line does have a solid, strong and well-utilised coach service as well. But when it comes to maintenance we are very pleased to make sure that every regional rail line is continually invested in and maintained. \$148.5 million will maintain both the freight services and the passenger services on V/Line—that was invested in the budget. We know each week nearly 2000 train services and almost 1500 branded coaches with V/Line connect regional passengers coming to Melbourne or going to different parts of Victoria. It is vitally important, and we are very committed to it. And I think V/Line are really going through a really important transition. I got to see for the first time recently down in Gippsland the very first all-female V/Line train drivers coming down, the very first full suite. It is a great job to be in—lots of responsibility—but it is just great to see V/Line leading the charge in terms of reform and gender equity and with a real eye on the future.

**Ms TAYLOR:** Good on them. I just wanted to zone in on this South Dynon maintenance facility, and I can refer you to budget paper 3, pages 107 and 114. Just if you could explain the funding.

**Mr CARROLL:** Yes, certainly. This is an important question because it goes to that new rolling stock that we are bringing on. So the South Dynon train maintenance facility will be upgraded to give additional

maintenance capacity for the regional VLocity fleet. These works will ensure the VLocity trains can be maintained as well as support important service uplifts right through the regional network. At South Dynon you will find the stabling, so that is sort of the works underneath the train and vital maintenance on top where the power supply is, but you will also see fuelling and other facilities put there at South Dynon to make sure it really is a cutting-edge maintenance train depot for the future.

We are also very happy, though, that the refurbishment there and the upgrade at South Dynon will see more improvements in relation to the utilities. As we know with trains, power—whether it is water, whether it is electricity or gas—all of this needs to be very solid, very strong and very secure to make sure that our trains are regularly maintained and updated and that the workers have the work to do every day they get to work. This will really support 100 jobs, and ongoing jobs as well, across our very important supply chains. Thanks, Ms Taylor.

**Ms TAYLOR:** Excellent. Okay. I would just like to zip along to bus improvements. I know we have been talking about it bit, and I love the buses too because they are so nimble. It is great.

**Mr CARROLL:** Yes.

**Ms TAYLOR:** If I could refer you to budget paper 3, page 107, can you please outline what improvements to the bus network Victorians should expect as part of the ‘Bus service improvements and reform’ item. This is provided in table 1.22.

**Mr CARROLL:** Yes. Thanks, Ms Taylor. I will just go very much close to the heart of the question, which is essentially six priorities across network improvements, zero-emissions buses, more technology and more rapid buses as well. We want the bus network to be simpler, faster and more reliable. That will be a key plank of the reform. We also want to make sure the bus fleet is smarter as well, and that will mean a lot more data in the hands of the passengers via their mobile phones: ‘When’s the bus coming? When’s the next one coming?’. It also means thinking outside the box as well. How do we get a turn-up-and-go system for our buses? That is where your BRTs, your bus rapid transit systems, come into place. So it is very exciting what the plan delivers. You know, we spend roughly almost a billion dollars every year on buses. This is, in the budget, over 74 million in new dollars to go towards really looking at, right across the state, how we really make that steep change in bus improvement, so it is very exciting.

**Ms TAYLOR:** It is. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Taylor. Mr Newbury.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Thank you. Before I get to my questions, I have just a very quick question for the Secretary, if you do not mind. Would you mind just confirming—and it is not a reflection—that Commander Jeroen Weimar was chair of the V/Line board when wide-scale, multimillion-dollar corruption was allegedly occurring by the CEO?

**Mr YOUNIS:** Thank you, Mr Newbury. What I can confirm is that Mr Jeroen Weimar was the chair of the board for a period of time—I cannot remember the dates, but there was a period of time when he was on the board.

**Mr NEWBURY:** No, no. Thank you. Thank you for that. Minister, I am getting reports from across the state that there are no QR codes at stations, at train stations. Are there QR codes at train stations, and if not, from what I am hearing, why not?

**Mr CARROLL:** Thanks, Mr Newbury, for your question. As we speak, QR codes—we go off the chief health officer’s advice. At the moment for public transport, as we speak, at this very point in time—this advice may change—we are relying on the Myki data. To be specific, though, there are QR codes at stations. I do not know when you last went to a station, but a lot of our stations—

**Mr NEWBURY:** I go to stations, don’t you worry about that.

**Mr CARROLL:** A lot of our stations have QR codes. You know why?

**Mr NEWBURY:** Can I ask then—



**Mr CARROLL:** Do you know why they have QR codes?

**Mr NEWBURY:** Sorry, say that again?

**Mr CARROLL:** Do you know why our stations have QR codes?

**Mr NEWBURY:** No, no. I am happy to ask the questions. I mean, if you want to jump over here and we'll swap, let's swap.

**Mr CARROLL:** Yes, but they do have QR codes is the answer to your question, because of the record investment. So you can go there with your mobile phone and look at what investment is happening on your line. You can also give feedback to the department on your service. But I think your question went more to COVID than QR codes.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Yes. So what about the stations where people use paper tickets?

**Mr CARROLL:** Yes. We are working through this at the moment, but a paper ticket, if it is bought through V/Line, we still have that record. We are telling all passengers via our messaging on public transport—and we have done so well during the pandemic, when you look at other jurisdictions—to always make a note where you are travelling. Touch on and touch off if you do have a Myki; if you do not, keep your paper ticket. Also socially distance, and above all else, the big thing for public transport is to wear a mask.

**Mr NEWBURY:** So I think—perhaps it is worth noting that it appears that where there are paper tickets, I mean, there is a loophole. There is clearly a loophole in terms of the record keeping, and I think that is absolutely worth noting.

Looking at the punctuality data—and you spoke about that earlier—roughly just over one in 10 trains is late and more buses are late. I mean, roughly one in 10 buses is also late. Last year there were points where 90 per cent of those services had no-one on them. How are trains and buses that are empty late?

**Mr CARROLL:** I will take the buses first. The issue with buses is, you know, the road network is their rails, so—

**Mr NEWBURY:** The roads were empty too.

**Mr CARROLL:** Well, not necessarily.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Newbury, could you allow the minister to complete the answer to the question? As you said yourself: you ask, the minister answers.

**Mr CARROLL:** The data shows that more and more people have gone back to motor vehicles than public transport, and that has had a direct impact on the bus network. Buses go through our suburban streets and they get impacted by traffic. So that is why the plan I announced during the week on buses and BRTs and trialling different technology is what we need to do. Let us be very clear. For the bus network, it is the street that has the biggest impact on it. So if we can get more people—you know, one stat is one bus is the equivalent of taking 50 cars off the street. That is why we are making this record investment and that is why we are doing what we need to do to make sure that the system works as efficiently and as effectively and as speedily as possible.

**Mr NEWBURY:** I appreciate that point, but what the data is showing is that with no-one on them the trains and the buses are late and it is up to one in 10. I am trying to understand when things are empty and the roads—I take your point that sometimes, you know, last year there were cars on roads, but it was significantly down. You would have expected, I would have thought, a significant uptick in the number of services that were on time because people were not getting onto the trains and there were less cars on the roads, and yet one in 10 is late. How does that happen?

**Mr CARROLL:** We have a substantial investment occurring—it is almost revolutionary what is occurring right across our public transport system. And again it goes to the level crossing removal program, it goes to the Big Build initiative that Minister Allan will touch on, it goes to more and more services, it goes to other things too like testing new rolling stock. Mr Newbury, a lot of this takes time. We work with the community. That is why we do put QR codes up at stations, so we have community members that when they are going—

**Mr NEWBURY:** Except regional.

**Mr CARROLL:** when they are going to touch on, they can also run their phone over the QR code and actually see what it is going to happen on their route. But even more vitally important than that, they can give direct feedback to the Department of Transport, me as minister, the Public Transport Users Association, on what their experience has been on that particular line and how we can improve it. We are always wanting to hear customer feedback. That is why we are rolling out record investments in public transport.

But also too, back to your very original question about QR codes at stations, yes, there are QR codes at stations, and it is because under our government it is a record investment—\$80 billion in a Big Build predominant transport agenda that is going to really reshape our city, and the best is still to come, Mr Newbury. When the Metro Tunnel opens, that I am sure Minister Allan will touch on, that is going to see literally the Melbourne subway system become like Hong Kong. It will be just so, so important for the population growth as we continue to see more and more Victorians wanting to return to public transport, and we continue to support them through it.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Just quickly, when you announced the off-peak fare saving you said:

By staggering travel and commuting outside of peak times, passengers can save money—and most importantly, keep themselves and Victorians safe on our network ...

That discount ends in 15 days. What are you proposing to do? Is that just going to be a cut?

**Mr CARROLL:** No. I went through the data before, Mr Newbury. That program continues to be successful. I think the last month of it was some 790 00 Victorians—

**Mr NEWBURY:** Are you extending it beyond 15 days?

**Mr CARROLL:** I will get to your point—790 000 Victorians had pocketed that discount. We are now working through that, working through it with our partners, including Metro, Yarra and V/Line to make sure that this component, the 30 per cent discount—we are looking at what we do in the future. But what I can say is it is looking very favourable and the trend is going the right way to make this a feature of our public transport system.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Richardson.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister and officials, for joining us this morning. Minister, I want to take you back to budget paper 3, page 107 and table 1.22. Minister, as you would be aware, many of Melbourne's outer suburban areas are experiencing significant population growth that is putting pressure on existing local infrastructure and the public transport network more broadly. Minister, are you able to outline how this investment, outlined in table 1.22, will help improve access to bus services for those Victorians in those growth areas?

**Mr CARROLL:** Yes. Thanks, Mr Richardson, and I know you are a passionate advocate for this very subject matter. So we have sort of touched on this a little bit. Buses go where obviously trains and trams cannot. For every dollar invested in buses, they return about \$5 to the community. One bus is the equivalent of taking 50 cars off the road. So let us put that to one side. Investment in buses speaks for itself. The new investment we are making is going to be really generational reform. We have many bus routes out there that have not been looked at, and I have had it in my own electorate, for literally decades. We want to make sure that we have bus routes that have got good patronage, that are meeting demand and that are taking people where they need to get to—not sort of winding through every suburb, but actually more direct, taking customers whether it is to the chemist, to the doctor, to the shopping centres.

The \$74.3 million investment will make the network simpler, faster and more reliable, but also it is very important that we think outside the square and look at some of those international trends of essentially a turn-up-and-go bus. The bus essentially should be like the tram. If you can make it, and I announced some details about some of the Hoddle Street high-frequency routes—how we can make it. One of the benefits we are seeing with bus patronage, Mr Richardson, is that we have introduced prepaid fares and rear boarding, so

not everyone has to go through the front door, touch on, touch off. It is a lot more seamless. You can go through the back door as well, and that has already seen a marked difference in departure times and arrival times. But we think we can work on that and improve on it, so we are making sure that we do deliver a modern network that will cater for communities like yours, like other members of PAEC—Mr Maas, Ms Taylor and Ms Richards—that really makes sure, whether it is in the north, whether it is in the west or in regional communities like Shepparton that are getting substantial investments under our government, that the modern bus fleet meets it and delivers with it.

I was very pleased. Just this week I sat down with more than 90 industry representatives from the bus industry—I know you have got a strong relationship with the bus industry as well—and they are really pleased to see a government championing their mode of transport, but also too to work with them on some of those routes and how they can make improvements. So I am really excited about it.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** There is nothing more important than the safety of our kids, and our school bus drivers do an extraordinary job in supporting our kids to get to school, particularly during the pandemic. Minister, are you able to outline how the investment in table 1.22 will improve the access for students that rely on their local bus network to get to school?

**Mr CARROLL:** Yes, I can, Mr Richardson. Look, you are right—we have all got our own memories of going to school on the bus. It took me sometimes a couple of buses to get to school, and that is one of the things we are wanting to try and actually iron out and fix if we can. We are providing literally \$8 million to improve services around not only regional Victoria, which is particularly targeted—we have got some big investments under the Minister for Education for some of our bigger schools that are growing—but to really make sure that we support students going forward, that their bus supports them getting to school on time but also getting home on time. Often with the school drop-offs and returning you need multiple buses almost at the one time, so that is what we are working through. It is very much a collaborative relationship with the department of education on our school bus network, really trying to improve it, trying to support the students and making sure too that we capitalise a lot with the interchanges between the school, the level crossings as well and any of our Big Build. One of the great things that has happened in the Department of Transport under Secretary Younis has been that real family of transport modes with intermodal connections all singing from the one hymn sheet, which is vitally important.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** I want to just take you to the issue of new buses and rolling stock, Minister. I am wondering for the committee's benefit if you could outline the investments the government is making to deliver newer and better rolling stock for Victoria's bus network.

**Mr CARROLL:** I certainly can, Mr Richardson. We have invested since 2015 approximately \$170 million in new bus rolling stock. Can I say too, the last time I was at Volgren in Dandenong with the family violence minister, Minister Williams, it was so fascinating to see we actually had Transport for New South Wales buses being built right here in Victoria in the blue-and-white New South Wales colours. That just goes to show that in Victoria we are a leader in rolling stock, not just building for Victoria but indeed Australia-wide. That just goes to show the know-how we have in our industry right down in Dandenong. We all see in our own communities the Mercedes-Benz or the Volvo or whatever the sign may be at the front of the bus. But you also see in pretty much every bus around this state that Volgren branding, that Volvo-Grenda partnership coming together. The Grenda family has been a real cornerstone, and they were on my industry seminar this week, going forward. So we are very proud, and we are working very hard on zero-emissions buses, talking to Volgren on what is the next stage of that rollout.

We are very proud that across Melbourne and regional Victoria some 1400 new buses—on average, 230 buses are replaced every year—are low-floor, cleaner, more comfortable, more accessible and air-conditioned. I go on a bus now and it has just transformed since I was a student. They are automatic with very little noise. They are essentially the modern train on wheels. They are a massive, massive dividend to the Victorian taxpayer for their return on investment and their benefit-cost ratio, and we need to continue to invest in them, so it is a good question. Thanks, Mr Richardson.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** I might leave it there, Minister. I do not think I will sneak in another one, so thanks for your time.

**Mr CARROLL:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Minister. That concludes the time we have set aside for consideration of the public transport portfolio with you and your officials today. 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 15-minute break and resume consideration with you at 10.15 of the roads and road safety portfolio. Thank you.

**Witnesses withdrew.**