

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 Roads and Road Safety,

Mr Paul Younis, Secretary, and

Mr Paul Northey, Chief, Regional Surface Transport, Department of Transport; and

Mr Joe Calafiore, Chief Executive Officer, Transport Accident Commission.

The CHAIR: We declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and welcome back Minister Carroll, this time for the consideration of your roads and road safety portfolio. Welcome to your officials also. We invite you to make a 10-minute presentation again, and this will be followed by questions from the committee.

Visual presentation.

Mr CARROLL: Thank you, Chair. Can I just begin my remarks by also acknowledging the recent weather events, and I know this is close to particularly Mr Riordan and Mr O'Brien. There is work we are doing to try and support your communities—I know it is a very challenging and difficult time—in road safety, clearing the trees and supporting the utility providers as well. So I just wanted to say that at the outset.

Chair, I am joined again by Secretary Younis as well as Paul Northey, the chief regional roads officer, and Joe Calafiore, Chief Executive of the Transport Accident Commission.

Chair, the 2021 budget for roads and road safety does continue our investment in a strong pipeline of road projects and upgrades right across our state. In doing so it provides improved safety for motorists and road users as well as supporting important and vital economic activity through a more productive and cleaner road network. These investments we are making will create jobs and support local businesses and boost our state's economy when and where it is needed most. We know the vast majority of deaths on Victorian roads are preventable, and the Victorian government is taking action to end the heartbreak that too many families experience all too often. That is why we will be investing \$386 million over four years to implement initial actions under the very first action plan of our new statewide road safety strategy.

We are delivering the most significant action by any government in Australia to reduce transport emissions, with a \$100 million package of initiatives, including the very first subsidy for zero-emission vehicles in Australia.

This budget will make local roads that motorists use every day safer and more efficient with a \$95 million investment in new funding for road upgrades and project development across the state. This package will be supplemented by a \$41.6 million investment and initiatives to make the road network more productive for heavy vehicles, including bridge upgrades and reforms to improve access for heavy vehicles, and will continue our pipeline investments in active transport, with \$21 million for a number of new projects.

Chair, the coronavirus pandemic has dramatically altered the way Melburnians move around our city, with current data indicating that the increase in traffic on our roads has significantly surpassed in relation to the return to public transport. This will put added pressure on our road network, particularly in metropolitan Melbourne. Thankfully, the Andrews Labor government is making unprecedented investments in access for roads across our metropolitan area. This will make it easier for people and goods to get around.

As part of the \$80 billion Big Build initiative we are delivering a number of major road projects across the metropolitan area that I know Minister Allan will update the committee on later today. These Big Build projects are complemented by a pipeline of local and suburban intersection and road upgrades. The 2021 budget invests a further \$51.4 million in these projects, including intersection upgrades in places like Springvale, Heathmont and Tarneit. We are also making a number of investments in our bridge network to make sure that it is safe and that our road network and bridges operate more efficiently for freight as well.

To support people that cycle to work and use active transport or even just people that walk to work we are investing and continuing to invest \$21 million in active transport projects.

We are also looking to how we can more effectively manage the existing road network. At the heart of this is a substantial \$340 million Keeping Victorians Moving initiative that is currently being delivered. As of the end of last month I can report to the committee that we have installed 520 CCTV cameras, 193 bluetooth detectors, 26 permanent visual message boards, 27 dynamic pedestrian detectors and two vehicle detectors. We have also made an appointment for Melbourne's first ever dedicated congestion management team, which comprises six expert traffic managers who have been tasked with responding to real-time bottlenecks as well as incidents and breakdowns in these areas to get more information into the hands of people in their motor vehicles. That team is on top of the 12 incident response service officers and the six new response vans and 14 traffic signal engineer cadets that have also commenced their two-year training program. We are also investing in new innovative pedestrian crossing technology and electronic speed signs. At 75 new pedestrian crossings across Melbourne we are using sensors and high-definition cameras to make sure that people waiting to cross can cross more efficiently, safely and in a timely manner. In this way we can ensure schoolkids and those with less mobility can cross safely as well as cut motorists' idle times when crossings are quiet.

Chair, roads are vital economic arterials for communities—indeed they are the backbone of regional communities. They support primary producers and manufacturers across every corner of our state. Since November 2014 the Andrews Labor government has invested more than \$4.5 billion in Victoria's regional road network. As you will see from the presentation, we have an enormous pipeline of investment currently underway in regional Victoria. In recent months I have seen this in action, including our record maintenance effort that has occurred right across this state, and I was very pleased to see it occurring in Daylesford more recently as well as on the Great Ocean Road, where a substantial investment in renewal is underway. These investments will improve the quality, productivity and safety of our regional roads as well as ensuring Victorians are able to get to where they need to get to safely.

The 2021 budget adds to the pipeline with a series of investments to further improve our regional road network. We are complementing our major upgrades with \$27.7 million in targeted improvements to important intersections and busy roads, including the Macedon–Woodend road. We will also upgrade the Western Freeway–Learmonth Road intersection as well as freeway intersects at Ballarat and Maryborough. We are delivering a number of bridge upgrades in regional Victoria also, including the Rushworth Road bridge over the Waranga Western Channel, the bridge for the Maryborough-Dunolly Road over linear rail reserve and the bridge that takes the Princes Highway over Emu Creek flood plain. \$15.9 million will also be invested in renewing bridges and crossings along our very iconic Murray River.

Victoria is a leader in road safety and has a track record in leading the introduction of life-saving measures, right back to the 1970s with our leading seatbelts campaign, followed by random breath-testing in the mid-1970s and speed cameras in the mid-1980s. Tragically, as I speak today 98 Victorians have been killed on our roads. We know every life lost is one too many and every life lost on our roads is preventable. Our government is investing in road safety at record levels to ensure Victorians are safe as they move across our state. Last year I announced the *Victorian Road Safety Strategy*. Our strategy commits to an ambitious target of eliminating deaths on our roads by 2050, with a first step of halving road deaths by 2030. The strategy will be complemented by three action plans, the first of which I announced just last week. The Victorian budget has also allocated \$385.8 million over four years in this Victorian-first road action plan to drive down road trauma by focusing on the groups we know are over-represented in road trauma and deaths in the statistics that we get every year. These initiatives will focus on key cohorts that use our roads and make up a significant portion of those Victorians who die or face trauma or are injured on Victorian roads each year. It will focus on particular cohorts, including the unprotected and vulnerable cohorts of road users and those that are also travelling in older vehicles that do not have that 5-star ANCAP rating.

People also use roads for work. We are seeing that one of the great levellers coming out of COVID has been the growth of the gig economy, and we know, whether it is an e-bike or another mode of transport, more and more now the road network is a workplace for so many Victorians. We want those Victorians to go to work safely and to come home safely as well. But we also know we need to focus on many Victorians that still engage in high-risk behaviours—those who drink and drug drive, repeat offenders and those who speed. We will continue to work with the Monash University Accident Research Centre and Victoria Police on measures to target those particular Victorians.

Chair, I know you are very much aware of our climate change strategy and our pledge to reduce transport emissions by 2030 as well, as are all committee members. We will move quickly to set a target of 50 per cent of

new light vehicle sales to be zero-emissions vehicles by 2030. A \$46 million zero-emissions vehicle subsidy scheme will also be implemented—the first of its type in Australia. We are also implementing \$19 million in public fast-charging infrastructure to support vehicles and individuals in these vehicles to get to where they need to get to, making sure that the vehicle does have the charging infrastructure at the destination they choose. Ten million dollars will also be invested to ensure 400 zero-emissions vehicles as part of the government fleet are transitioned over the next few years. Five million dollars will also be established for a zero emissions Victoria innovation fund to encourage the uptake of zero-emissions commercial vehicles—that is your taxi industry—making sure more and more of them are switched over to zero emissions to give everyday consumers the opportunity to see what a zero-emissions vehicle is like and particularly influence their own purchasing when it comes to them.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. I will pass to the Deputy Chair, Mr Riordan.

Mr RIORDAN: Thank you, Chair. Wow, a country member's favourite topic: regional roads. Welcome.

Mr RICHARDSON: Do you want an hour?

Mr RIORDAN: Yes, we need an hour, not 8 minutes. And my two favourite people, Mr Northey and Mr Younis there—regular correspondents.

Mr CARROLL: Where do I fit in there?

Mr RIORDAN: We know they help you.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Depends on your answers, Minister.

Mr RIORDAN: So the first question, and I get two—hopefully Mr Northey will be well aware of this—in the past week in my electorate alone we have had a bridge collapse with a truck on it, a young woman sadly washed to her death on a road that has been identified as problematic for quite some time, and the famous Colac East roundabout has had its 14th vehicle drive through the middle of it and take a light pole out—all in the last week. Do you think this is a satisfactory situation on rural and regional roads at the moment? When I look at this budget, we are looking at a 23.6 per cent cut to road asset management, from \$823 million down to \$616 million. Is this budget doing anything for regional roads?

Mr CARROLL: I might if I can, Mr Riordan, Deputy Chair, just make some opening remarks. And you are right to identify Mr Northey, essentially our chief regional roads officer, as someone who is well versed and an expert in this field, but we have more than doubled investment in our regional road network. We know we have always got more to do and that safety needs to be the number one priority.

Mr RIORDAN: This is telling us you are cutting it by 23 per cent.

Mr CARROLL: No. So if you look at the budget papers, we have always substantially committed to record funding in our regional road network. The previous budget, the COVID budget, did have a massive investment above and beyond what we have ever seen in regional roads. But this budget also, whether it is supporting the freight industry, our iconic—I know your community—south-west dairy industry, continues to invest in that, and it was good to see the commonwealth government follow our lead and invest in that as well.

Mr RIORDAN: I do note with interest as well you have not named what roads that iconic sort of funding that you are going to put in—I mean, no-one knows where that is going.

Mr CARROLL: No, but as you would appreciate, if we are going to talk about the dairy supply chain industry, that is a major, major piece of work that commenced several years ago that is coming to fruition and has also been roundly endorsed by the commonwealth government, in terms of Minister McCormack also funding it.

But I just want to say I am very pleased about the 5500 kilometres of regional roads and roads right across this state that we are resurfacing and fixing. I do know and I appreciate, right as I speak today at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, it is a difficult time for our regional communities, particularly with the storms and the trees and the power, and we are working with our internal support, our geotechnical engineers, to support Victorians to open more roads.

I might ask Paul Northey to supplement my answer, except to say we are making substantial investment in this budget. And we also I should say, when it comes to regional road maintenance, try to basically do 1600 kilometres, and now we are at 1800 kilometres. We are above and beyond our targets, but we have got more to do.

Mr RIORDAN: But I specifically referred to the budget where on page 329 it clearly shows \$823 million down to \$616 million. You cannot possibly be telling regional Victorians they are getting a better deal on their roads with basically a 25 per cent cut in asset management.

Mr CARROLL: No. So you have got the budget, and there is a range of measures across the budget paper in terms of the asset management as well, and regional roads and the funding in the budget paper is across, you know, different lines in the budget papers. So it is still very much a substantial investment in regional roads and—

Mr RIORDAN: Or a substantial de-investment.

Mr CARROLL: 5500 kilometres. But if you look at total spending in road maintenance, and I am happy to go through it, \$754.9 million will go towards regional road maintenance. That is above the three-year average of \$745.25 million. And then you had that one-off stimulus package of funding in that previous budget in 2021 of \$898.84 million. So every year on average we are spending \$590 million on regional roads and roads, and that compares to the former coalition government that was on average spending \$460 million. So every way you cut it, Mr Riordan, we are well and above what we came to office on when it comes to regional roads maintenance.

Mr RIORDAN: Okay. Well, I am just looking at what is getting cut in the budget. Look, I have got 2 minutes. I have got a couple more questions. We talk about increasing the safety on our regional roads. And my question is to Mr Calafiore at TAC, and it is my favourite topic of wire rope barriers, Mr Calafiore. Your agency of course is the major sponsor of this investment in road safety. I note this year a 57 per cent increase in motorcycle deaths, and that is at a time when there are substantially fewer people out on our regional roads because of the last 18 months of COVID. And I also note a 21 per cent increase in rural road deaths. And I note that the road toll, or the road fatalities, have continued to remain higher than what they were in 2018, and we are now coming into our second year of substantially fewer people on the road. What justification can you have for the spend that you are doing with such poor results?

Mr CALAFIORE: Yes. Thank you for the question. The justification is based on significant evidence that the vast majority of road trauma is preventable. The experience in Victoria and Australia is that Victoria on a per-k basis is the sixth leading jurisdiction in the world in road safety. What a lot of jurisdictions have experienced overseas, despite COVID lockdowns, is actually a greater propensity to speed on regional/rural roads. So there are a number of factors in—

Mr RIORDAN: So isn't it true that the bulk of fatalities are on low-volume high-speed roads?

Mr CALAFIORE: A significant proportion of traumas in regional Victoria—that is a fact. I suppose when you—

Mr RIORDAN: So if that is a fact, why then do you continue to spend bucketloads of taxpayers money and funds from your agency on roads that clearly are not the major cause of accidents when, as I highlighted before, we have had a bridge collapse, we have had a person washed away on roads that simply need funding in south-west Victoria, along with Gippsland and other parts of the state?

Mr CALAFIORE: For two clear reasons: the vast majority of trauma is avoidable from a social perspective and from an economic perspective; the TAC is an unusual scheme globally in that it is lifetime uncapped care. So the 19-year-old person that has a really bad accident today, from an economic perspective, would cost the TAC into the tens of millions of dollars. So to your question as to why: because from an economic perspective it makes sense.

Mr RIORDAN: But I am just saying, a 21 per cent increase in rural road deaths, I mean, that matters too. We have got a 57 per cent increase in motorcyclists' deaths, and we know, for example, a spend of \$500 million in south-west Victoria alone would bring the roads up to a reasonable standard.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Riordan. Your time has expired. I will pass the call to Mr Maas.

Mr MAAS: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister and departmental team. If I could take you to road safety strategy, Minister, and I was hoping you would be able to outline for the committee in detail the investments and the strategies that the government is implementing to reduce road trauma in the state.

Mr CARROLL: Thank you, Mr Maas. Essentially the first priority for any government is to keep Victorians safe, and we know every life lost on Victoria's roads is one too many. That is one less person that will be around the dinner table at Christmas, and we need to capitalise on a lot of the investment we have made, right back to the 1970s, to make sure Victoria is a world leader when it comes to road safety. So I was very pleased late last year to launch our statewide Victorian road strategy. It does commit—and it does have targets, and this is important. We have got targets there now that we want to reach. We want to halve deaths by 2030 and essentially eliminate deaths altogether by 2050 on our roads. That is why this budget does invest \$385.8 million over four years in the very first road safety action plan.

What we have done is: you have got your road safety strategy to 2030 and then within 2030 for the very first time we have broken down that strategy into essentially three action plans that will occur year by year. That gives us an opportunity to really drill down to what is happening right now on our Victorian roads. We are very clearly pivoting to a real people focus, and that is on vulnerable cohorts. And Mr Riordan is correct to identify motorcyclists. Just on that subject, we are wanting to make sure that motorcyclists—and I sat down with the motorcycle reference group just recently with the Member for Frankston—have essentially a 5-star ANCAP rating on the gear that they use when they are on a motorcycle. Pretty much, if you go in and buy a car, you look at what the rating is. If you are on a motorcycle, you are a lot more unprotected. You should have a rating on the gear that you are using, knowing that is the best form of preventing you from being in an accident. That is just one highlight of why we are doing these shorter term action plans, to really focus on vulnerable Victorians.

More and more now we have seen the uptake of cycling coming out of COVID. Just recently we introduced the A Metre Matters rule, the last jurisdiction to do so in Australia; we are now Australia wide. You know, cyclists, like motorcyclists, are over-represented. They are a vulnerable cohort that is unprotected on the road network. So we are working very, very hard at making sure that we focus on vulnerable Victorians, including Victorians that live in regional Victoria, updating their vehicles, very much using a safe system approach to make sure that our roads are safe, that vehicles are safe and that Victorians behind the wheel are safe too.

Mr MAAS: Excellent. thank you, Minister. If I could take you to TAC campaigns now, would you be able to inform the committee what work the TAC is doing in promoting road safety in the community?

Mr CARROLL: Yes. Look, the TAC, as Mr Calafiore highlighted, is a world leader when it comes to road safety campaigns. I think we have all got memories and our own visuals of different campaigns. I think of the Katie commercial, of the young girl not wearing a seatbelt and trying to change the tape in her car. Our road safety campaigns are internationally recognised. There is a lot of evidence that goes behind them—the work of the TAC road trauma support services, and more recently we have had this new campaign, the Lucky Ones Get Caught, which shows a young couple driving in regional Victoria, kids in the back seat, mobile phone distraction. But they were lucky. The police picked them up. If they had not been so lucky, they might not have got to that destination because they might have gone on still doing the behaviour that we know is distracted driving on a high-risk, high-speed road in regional Victoria. So the Lucky Ones Get Caught campaign is just another example of ensuring that we continue to campaign.

You will also see the Transport Accident Commission, as I saw on a tram just recently, on the 1-metre rule, very much supporting the Amy Gillett Foundation in making sure you give cyclists the distance—up to 60 kilometres an hour, a metre distance; above 60, 1.5 metres.

So they are world leading, the TAC, and I should say too they do a lot of good work behind the scenes with community organisations. They have just recently been rolling out 10 hours of night-time driving with grants to local netball and football clubs. So when the young person finishes netball training or football, mum or dad or whoever is picking them up lets them drive home at night. The value of that as part of their 120 hours is very, very important. So there are a range of campaigns. I am very proud of what the TAC does, Mr Maas. They are a global leader. Mr Calafiore has been the head of the TAC for a number of years and is doing an excellent job.

We have got to remember too that the TAC—this does not often get highlighted—everyday has 40 to 60 new clients that they are having to see through road trauma. So they are a vital part of our road safety campaigns.

Mr MAAS: Thanks, Minister. In the time I have remaining I might take you to vulnerable cohorts already spoken about—motorcyclists, young people, pedestrians and the like. You mentioned that they are a priority under the road safety action plan. I was hoping you would be able to detail the initiatives the government is focusing on at this time.

Mr CARROLL: Sure, Mr Maas. We are very proud of building the Education State in Victoria, and I am very proud as the road safety minister to have just recently participated in the Walk to School program and supported that, because we do know the school crossing supervisor program is, again, a very substantial safety component of our road safety campaign and our road safety strategy. It is embedded as part of our road safety strategy. The 2020–21 budget does invest \$41.1 million to continue the safety of young schoolchildren around schools.

But also too we are seeing more and more now coming out of the gig economy more and more people on bikes, on e-bikes, delivering food, delivering other parcels, books. COVID has laid bare some of the inequalities in the gig economy. This is a bit of a joint thing on workplace safety with Minister Stitt, where we were having a very good, hard look at the road network being a place of work for more and more Victorians. So we are making investments to support more and more people as part of the gig economy and doing some very valid research with workplace safety on how we can support them and get some messaging out as well. That is vitally important as well. So it is really making sure—whether it is for a motorcyclist, a cyclist, a young school student, Mr Maas, someone working in the gig economy or someone in an older vehicle—that we really have a focus on what we need to invest in and what we need to focus on to make sure they are safe either getting to work or just getting home.

Mr MAAS: Thank you, Minister.

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

Mr HIBBINS: Thanks, Chair. Thank you, Minister and team, for appearing this morning. I want to ask about the progress of the 100 kilometres of pop-up bike lanes. Now, originally my understanding was that the time line for that was due to be at the end of the financial year. Can I get an update in terms of how many kilometres of pop-up bike lanes will be rolled out by the end of the financial year?

Mr CARROLL: Yes. Certainly, Mr Hibbins. I see there is a bit of discussion too at the City of Melbourne on this very subject today as well. This budget does continue our investment in active transport. You would appreciate the \$30.9 million investment in previous budgets. This budget invests \$21 million. And you are right to identify we have 100 kilometres of new and improved pop-up cycling routes that we want to do. Now, Heidelberg Road has been the first one—a resounding success, Mr Hibbins. About 3000 Victorians put their names to a petition, making sure that that goes from temporary to permanent, which is very good to see. We are continuing to roll them out, but we have made some tweaks in relation to consultation. We had a lot of learnings out of Heidelberg Road, and the Chair will be fully aware of her own community, where we are doing pop-up bicycle lanes, and that strong consultation with the local traders, with the local councils—sometimes it is the bicycle user group or it might be Bicycle Network Victoria as well. So we are continuing to roll them out.

As I speak, Mr Hibbins, a lot of engagement is happening with the local government sector on those priority routes we have identified around the inner city to also alleviate density levels on the public transport network. I hope to have more to say on this in the very near future, except to say we are very committed to it, and I want to see more and more of these coming online. They are a great measure and a great investment to support Victorians (a) to be healthy, but to also make sure that they are safe too.

At the moment we have got a range of business cases occurring. I know St Kilda Road is quite close to your heart, and that is progressing through a business case. Minister Allan may also touch on this, but I know through Footscray, the City of Moonee Valley and other identified areas we are working behind the scenes very hard—the Department of Transport—to work with traders, to work with local councils to make sure we can get on and deliver more of these pop-up bicycle lanes.

Mr HIBBINS: In terms of the time line, my understanding now is it has been extended out to the end of the calendar year. And in terms of the reasons for the change in the time lines, is that because of consultation?

Mr CARROLL: Cutting a long story short, it is the consultation. Look, at the end of the day, with pop-up bicycle lanes and this sort of infrastructure it does need to be very much grassroots led. And a lot of these roads are local government-owned roads, so it is that real partnership with the state government. I think we have shown leadership in this area but then that partnership approach at the local government level. I should say too: there were council elections, which did not help during this process—just in terms of a hold-up—and different impediments with COVID. But needless to say, we are committed to it and we are wanting to make sure that active transport is very much a key feature of our Department of Transport.

Mr HIBBINS: And in terms of specific priority routes, I mean, you would be aware of a number of hotspots within the inner city, and my colleagues would have raised this with you. I mean, Flemington Road and Royal Parade in Melbourne, Sydney Road in Brunswick, and Chapel Street—the section between the Yarra River and Toorak Road—are state government run roads. Do they form part of the priority routes?

Mr CARROLL: We sat down with the inner-city cycling alliance, so I would have to take that specific question on notice—and I did see an opinion piece in the *Age* during the week identifying and talking about Chapel Street—except to say what we looked at when we came up and were working on our pop-up lanes strategy was (a) it was very hard to buy a bike for Christmas last Christmas, because bike sales went through the roof. Pretty much every jurisdiction was investing in cycling infrastructure. Active transport again has basically seen a second coming coming out of COVID, but what we tried to do to support our public transport network and densities was look at some of those inner-city areas that have the big, wide streets that essentially could—say, for example, Kensington station—take someone that would normally just get the train from Kensington station to the CBD, a 2-kilometre, 1.5-kilometre route, and incentivise them to actually get on a bike and ride, because we know that predominantly most people that are going to the CBD—many of them—only live 5 kilometres from it. So we are trying to capitalise but work very much across the transport department on public transport too. So it was a big feeder on trying to alleviate density levels and making sure it was a strategic, informed approach.

But I know just more recently out at Northcote we have made some big investments on working with the local golf range there. Often it does get down to that grassroots level, working with the local community, consulting traders—no-standing zones, all of that sort of stuff—to make sure that it is very much a holistic approach.

Mr HIBBINS: Yes. In terms of the targets announced as part of the active transport targets moving to 25 per cent of all trips up from 18 per cent—and I know there was an opinion piece from Victoria Walks—the current active transport budget still is a very small percentage of the overall transport budget. Do you anticipate that that will need to actually significantly increase in order to meet your active transport mode share target?

Mr CARROLL: Yes. And I thank Dr Ben Rossiter from Victoria Walks for his advocacy. I obviously met with him as well and continue to meet with him. That 25 per cent target is a very important target for meeting our climate change pledge, because if you want to get to the purest, active transport is probably the most pure form of transport that is the most sustainable and green compared to other things where you have to build them in a manufacturing facility and things like that. So we are committed to that target. The Secretary and I do discuss this matter regularly about more investment and resources, and the Secretary himself gets this around active transport, but also too it goes to boosting our bus network as well, and we are seeing we have got a really dedicated, great team of public servants working on active transport, working across the policy frontier of the Department of Transport but really trying to capitalise on those trends that are coming out of COVID and the different modes of transport but also too making sure it is an interconnected mode of transport—so it might be the Parkiteer bike racks at the stations and all of that sort of stuff going into our thinking.

Mr HIBBINS: Yes. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Hibbins. Mr Newbury.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. Minister, can I take you to road safety camera fines and refer to budget paper 5, page 193. There has been an increase of 27 per cent in the last year in fine revenue. Can you explain that?

Mr CARROLL: On that specific question, Mr Newbury, we work with the Monash University Accident Research Centre and there is no doubt when it comes to influencing behaviour that a regulation-type approach, the work of Victoria Police and fines, does influence behaviour, and that is why we continue to invest in it. But we also see a lot of the money raised is essentially going into more and more digital uptake and more and more measures to support the work of Victoria Police. So you would be aware we have a road safety commissioner, Commissioner Leane, that works very closely with the police minister and that oversees a lot of the speed camera enforcement. Obviously I and the TAC are some of the beneficiaries of that funding, but that is why you are seeing—

Mr NEWBURY: The state government certainly is.

Mr CARROLL: those increases. But too, and I have said this a couple of times and I showed it in the graph—and this is a concern, more and more people—we may get to traffic levels above and beyond what they were pre pandemic.

Mr NEWBURY: Just on that point, over that period 36 per cent of that time, 130 days, was during lockdown and there has been a 27 per cent increase in fines. So traffic levels are right down—we all remember the photos of the empty roads—but there is a 27 per cent increase in fines. Some might suggest that we actually have measures that are nothing more than revenue raising. What would you say to that?

Mr CARROLL: No, far from it. If you look at—and it is very sad—sadly, repeat offenders in drink driving, drug taking, speeding, Victoria Police are doing a very important job in making sure that the roads are safe. So they are doing their job, and if you look at the statistics from 1 January 2021 to 31 March, some 750 000 sort of breath tests conducted, 37 140 random drug tests conducted. So, you know, they are achieving and working very hard to make sure that they save lives on the roads. And also, too, look at some of the most risky behaviour. Look, just one drink has an enormous influence on impairment, so if the police are out there doing their job, that is keeping us all safe, and that is a very important job they are charged with.

Mr NEWBURY: So we have got that 27 per cent increase when a third of the roads were empty. On that same table you will see there is a forecast for a 34 per cent increase in road camera safety fines over the next year. So we have got 27 per cent last year and 34 per cent next year. I mean, this is a cash cow. What do you say to that?

Mr CARROLL: Well, I would probably refer you to look at other state jurisdictions to see—

Mr NEWBURY: I will definitely get to that in a tick.

Mr CARROLL: Yes, please do, because you will see that in Victoria at the moment—

I will just go to New South Wales. In New South Wales they have very modern technology that is capturing people on their mobile phones in cars. There is no doubt, when we all probably came to work today, if you looked left or looked right you saw people, sadly, with their heads in their laps. And mobile phone distraction is a major cause of road trauma, and we need to tackle that. So essentially we are doing a trial at the moment, overseen by the police minister and the road safety commissioner as well, on how we can address essentially the illegal use of mobile phones. This will be something that will come online at the appropriate time in Victoria once the trial has been completed, and essentially that will be a new armoury in our suite of initiatives to support Victoria Police to get rid of any illegal driving—mobile phone use that is illegal—and make sure that we have, you know, road cameras out there doing their job.

Mr NEWBURY: So, is that new measure included in the forecasting of the 34 per cent increase over the next year, or would that be on top of the 34 per cent increase?

Mr CARROLL: Look, you would appreciate under the police minister's portfolio, with a lot of those measures a lot of data goes into looking at it. So you have got, as I identified, mobile phone illegal use; you have got Victoria Police doing more and more drug and alcohol detection tests; and then also look, too, you have actually got more and more Victorians in the motor vehicles, so it is actually—

Mr NEWBURY: So that is for that year?

Mr CARROLL: So it is just simple maths, Mr Newbury. I thought you would be across this.

Mr NEWBURY: So that new measure—

Mr CARROLL: Simple maths, like population growth, more people in motor vehicles will see more people—

Mr NEWBURY: We have not had a 34 per cent increase in population over the coming year, but we have got a fine increase.

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury, could you allow the minister to answer the question.

Mr CARROLL: It is just simple maths. This is what goes on. Also, the government is continuing to invest in supporting Victoria Police, the rollout of more Victoria Police, the rollout of Victoria Police doing their work out in our suburbs, combined with more and more people getting in motor vehicles. And this is the other issue, too, Mr Newbury: sadly, people have returned to their motor vehicles and—I think it has probably happened to all of us—we are not as fluent in the motor vehicle, you know, just doing little things like driving, parking. When you have been in lockdown and you go back into the motor vehicle for the first time, you will find your behaviour slightly might not be what it was. So we are working very hard with our road safety partners to make sure everyone is conscientious, everyone is mindful. Let us eliminate road rage. The road is for everyone. Let us take that really safe, precautious approach.

Mr NEWBURY: So can I just take you back to the question I just asked? Just can I confirm: the 34 per cent fine increase does not include the new measure that you just outlined in terms of the mobile phone technology. So 34 is an underestimate of what we are going to be revenue raising over the coming year—the cash cow.

Mr CARROLL: I mean, you have sort of answered the question yourself. It is an estimate. I have never heard of an underestimate or an overestimate, but it is an estimate. So it is a figure. It is a figure that takes—

Mr NEWBURY: But it does not include the measure you have just outlined.

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury, if you could allow the minister to answer, please.

Mr CARROLL: It is a figure that takes in a lot of science, a lot of data from the road safety commissioner, the Department of Transport and our road safety partners as well as, you know, the VicPol data as well. A combined approach on road safety looking at what the data tells us is how we do our estimates, and we always—

Mr NEWBURY: But can I put it to you that this is effectively a new Labor tax.

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury, could you—

Mr NEWBURY: I mean, this is clearly a new Labor tax. That is what it is.

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury! Could you please not speak over the minister or the Chair.

Mr CARROLL: You got it out, with 10 seconds to go.

Mr NEWBURY: I mean, that is effectively what it is.

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury!

Mr CARROLL: No, you are wrong. It is a road safety measure.

Mr NEWBURY: 27 per cent, 34 per cent—

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury!

Mr NEWBURY: Labor tax.

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury, you are speaking over the Chair and over the minister—and as your time has expired, I will pass the call to Ms Richards.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you, Minister and officials, again. I would actually like to continue the conversation about enforcement against high-risk drivers and perhaps invite you, Minister, using budget paper 4 and pager 103 as a reference, to perhaps outline some of the initiatives being delivered to better detect and hold to account some of these high-risk drivers who do break the law.

Mr CARROLL: Yes. Thank you very much, Ms Richards. And it does sort of follow that line of questioning on essentially repeat offenders sadly taking drugs, repeat offenders drink driving, repeat offenders that are also just not following the road rules, particularly speeding. So we will continue to support Victoria Police in that endeavour. But also too, when you compare Victoria, Australia, to many European countries, our motor vehicle fleet is a lot older than modern vehicle fleets across Europe in particular and the United States as well. So we are working very much with the Transport Accident Commission. Particularly, too, we are looking at how we can support older Victorians and younger Victorians in regional Victoria to upgrade their motor vehicles. So we are doing a bit of research on that as we speak to try and get more and more people into essentially a 5-star ANCAP rating motor vehicle. So it is very important that we continue to focus on it but also critically important too that we do think outside the square to focus on enforcement, on infrastructure and then on those vulnerable cohorts as well and what might be the incentive for them to obey the law, to drive in a more modern vehicle and to just take their time as well.

Ms RICHARDS: Terrific. And you just mentioned infrastructure then. So referring you to budget paper 3, page 334, I am interested in having you talk through the program of road safety infrastructure upgrades. I am especially interested in the joint initiative between the Victorian government and the commonwealth government.

Mr CARROLL: Yes. Thank you very much, Ms Richards. I think Michael McCormack might be the first federal roads minister in a long time that has actually released and is releasing a national road safety strategy, and we have had a real partnership approach. We have a lot of joint initiatives and joint ventures with the commonwealth. You know, we are seeing some 100 road safety projects being rolled out across Victoria with the support of the commonwealth. We launched a \$245 million road improvement package in partnership with the commonwealth recently, and we are seeing more and more investment, including in safety barriers, line markings, strips—all of that investment that we know saves lives. We have got to do a lot more, and it is great to see the Deputy Prime Minister taking an active interest in road safety, knowing that it saves lives. We both meet with vulnerable cohorts and family members that have lost loved ones to road safety, and a lot of these meetings stay with you. We know every life lost is preventable, but we also know that we need to make sure that our infrastructure, our speed limits, everything is working in tandem to support people getting to where they need to get to—whether it is to school, whether it is the freight network and our truck drivers and occupational workplace safety—and that we are doing everything we can to really have a joint approach. You know, even cycling infrastructure, roundabouts—it is good to see the commonwealth supporting states at this level of investment.

Ms RICHARDS: Thanks, Minister. I have got a bit of time left, so I am going to take a bit of a track change and take you to a topic I know is close to your heart, which is the reduction of emissions—

Mr CARROLL: Yes.

Ms RICHARDS: and refer you to budget paper 3, page 107, and the reference to reducing emissions in the transport sector. Can you please outline for the committee how the government is taking action to reduce greenhouse emissions and accelerate the uptake of zero-emission vehicles?

Mr CARROLL: Thanks very much, Ms Richards, and can I commend the work of Minister D'Ambrosio at the outset too, who has been the real policy leader of this and champion for tackling emissions. I know when it comes to transport it is the fastest growing area of transport emissions, and just this week we have released and announced details of an expert advisory panel that will really be able to give me and the department advice on how we can change behaviour to get that uptake of more electric vehicles. So we are the first jurisdiction to roll out a grant for electric vehicles, but above and beyond that it is about working with the planning industry as well, which I know is very close to your topic. So homes are being built too with the right charging infrastructure, whether it is the three-phase power and things like that.

Ms RICHARDS: Yes, great.

Mr CARROLL: But Mr Barton from the Transport Matters Party is also a strong advocate. The role of commercial passenger vehicles in terms of influencing behaviour—so if you are leaving the CBD in a taxi, you get into an electric vehicle and you can see all the benefits. So it is very important that we continue to incentivise Victorians to purchase electric vehicles, and we know you only have to look overseas to see the uptake of electric vehicles. You also only have to look at the manufacturers themselves now saying, ‘We’re phasing them out’. So they have arrived. Some people might say you cannot pull a caravan with them or you cannot tow a trailer with them or they might even ruin your weekend—nothing could be further from the truth. The car industry will change more in the next five years than it has in the past 50, and Victoria needs to be part of that change. We as a government need to incentivise and support Victorians that want to be part of that change too.

Ms RICHARDS: I would like to actually perhaps unpack that a little bit more in the short amount of time I have got left and perhaps understand the detail about the government’s \$100 million package to support that uptake of the zero-emission vehicles.

Mr CARROLL: Yes, certainly. So there are essentially four key elements to it, Ms Richards. You have got the zero-emission light vehicles—making that sort of 50 per cent by 2030 for all sales. You have got all new public transport bus purchases being zero emissions from 2025. You have got 400 zero-emission vehicles being added to the government fleet very soon, 2023. Minister Pearson and even all of us as members of Parliament—wouldn’t that be great as part of the vehicle fleet? And then you have got the active transport component too to make sure more and more Victorians are cycling or using their own two feet to get to work as well, 25 per cent of that being very much a mode of transport. But all in all, Ms Richards, this is a \$100 million investment that I think can really put Victoria on the fast track to tackling transport emissions and a cleaner transport network and can really show some national leadership in this area.

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

Mr CARROLL: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Richards. I will pass the call again to Mr Hibbins.

Mr HIBBINS: Thank you, Chair. Can I ask now about a specific budget line item in budget paper 3, page 107, ‘Metropolitan Road Upgrades’. ‘Punt Road, Princes Highway East to Swan Street, Richmond’—could you give some further information in terms of what that funding is for?

Mr CARROLL: Sure. Thank you, Mr Hibbins, for that question, and I might ask Mr Northey to supplement my answer. It was Princes Highway East you referenced, wasn’t it?

Mr HIBBINS: Yes.

Mr CARROLL: Yes, so investigations are underway to determine the safety improvements that can be made on Princes Highway East between Nar Nar Goon and Longwarry.

Mr HIBBINS: Hang on; this was Punt Road from Princes Highway East to Swan Street.

Mr CARROLL: Sorry, Punt Road. I will ask Mr Northey.

Mr NORTHEY: Thanks for the question. So you are talking about between Princes Highway and Swan Street, along Punt Road, correct?

Mr HIBBINS: Yes.

Mr NORTHEY: That is a planning and development project that we have got underway looking at potential solutions for congestion and also to just improve travel along the road. One of the things that we will be looking at doing is in terms of any planning overlays or requirements that will be necessary to put in place as part of those works. So it is early days on that study, but basically it is a planning study at this stage in terms of, as I said, getting the right planning processes in place to allow further upgrade.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. All right. Thank you. Is that the only current planning on that Punt Road section at the moment? Because I understand from previous discussions with previous ministers the follow-up action

following the decisions around the Punt Road acquisition overlay was then to do a study on Punt Road, a further corridor study. Is this the corridor study?

Mr NORTHEY: This one is more related to the public acquisition overlay.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay, this one is specifically. So it is related to the—

Mr NORTHEY: Yes.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay, and what is the time line for that?

Mr NORTHEY: I have not got that with me. It is just underway now, so I will have to take that one on notice and get back to you.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. Terrific. Thank you. I want to ask now about the status of the City of Melbourne's proposal where the management of Spencer Street between Dryburgh and La Trobe streets would be transferred to the City of Melbourne and funding from the West Gate Tunnel traffic mitigation fund to upgrade that street to align with the West Melbourne structure plan. Can we have an update in terms of that proposal?

Mr CARROLL: If it is okay with you, Mr Hibbins, the Secretary might want to answer—

Mr YOUNIS: Yes. Mr Hibbins, I might have to take that on notice. It is related to that whole package of works from the West Gate Tunnel works, so I will have to take that one on notice.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. Terrific. Thank you. Another specific issue has been in Brunswick around Nicholson Street and Albion Street—that is, the Nicholson Street 'bends'; I think it is near a primary school there in Brunswick East—where there have been I think 28 crashes over the past five years, including one particular house that I think has been run into to seven times in five years. Is there any funding in this year's budget to address those issues?

Mr CARROLL: Thank you, Mr Hibbins. I will take the specific of that on notice, but there is substantial funding in the budget for those types of issues. On those suburban traffic high-crash points we work with VicRoads and get the data. Again, we will take that on notice and come back to you.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. Thank you. Another specific road in my electorate is around Queens Way. You would be aware of the residents' concerns there about the finishing treatments in Queens Way and the graffiti and the noise from the concreting works that have gone on there. Is there any funding in this year's budget for finishing works for Queens Way?

Mr CARROLL: Again—and I should acknowledge too, apart from yourself, Ms Taylor has also been a big advocate for this particular stretch and she has even taken me past it, I think, as the minister, and I have seen what you are referring to firsthand—if I can take it on notice and give you some better detail. That is except to say broadly in metro Melbourne the 2021 budget does invest \$265 million in different projects. A lot of that funding we work through our road safety partners and also work through with local government to see how we do it and how we structure it. So I will take that one on notice and come back to you and Ms Taylor jointly if that is okay.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay, great. Thank you. I want to ask now: a number of councils, to my understanding, have made applications to lower the speed limits on some of their local roads to 30 kilometres per hour. Can I ask for an update in terms of how many applications are currently before you, and when will they be resolved?

Mr CARROLL: Sure. That is a good question because we do get a high volume of requests, Mr Hibbins, and again I am going to take it on notice, except to say it is essentially down at the departmental level to be responsive to that. We have made some changes since I have been minister, in conjunction with the Secretary, to try and be a lot more responsive to local councils on speed restrictions to make sure that they meet the needs of residents, the needs of local schools and school students and safety as well, and so we are trying to be a lot quicker in our turnaround and a lot more nimble in the paperwork and getting on with it. So we will, again, take that on notice, except to say we will be able to provide you an update.

Mr HIBBINS: Just in terms of the issues that you raise, is it an administrative issue or is it a policy issue in terms of lowering the speed limit to 30 kilometres or assessing those applications?

Mr CARROLL: I dare say it is a combination in the sense that the policy is to save lives and the administration is, ‘What does the data say, and what have the consultations shown?’, and making sure you get it right and making sure that essentially it is evidence led, so it is high on the consultation. I was recently with the Chair, looking at this very issue in her electorate. We try and do our best to make it a quick turnaround to make sure we are saving lives, but also with a lot of these changes in local suburban streets you do have to do the heavy consultation because sometimes it can be a surprise to someone, and you have often got to bring the community on the journey too. I have had it in my own electorate too, and that is why it is vitally important again that we go heavy on the consultation and make sure that the council is onside, the school is onside and local residents are onside before we make the change.

Mr HIBBINS: Terrific. Thanks, Minister. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Hibbins, and I will pass to Ms Taylor.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you. I was just wanting to explore a bit more about the freight initiative, so I refer you to budget paper 3, page 107. You mentioned in your presentation \$41.6 million to deliver a more productive road network for freight, but can you outline for the committee what this investment actually means?

Mr CARROLL: I certainly can, and I might ask Mr Northey to supplement my answer, Ms Taylor, too. But we do know under our government more and more investment has occurred—not only through Big Build. I spoke with the dairy supply chain coming out of COVID, with more freight moving around. We are trying to really speed up the application process for those high-productivity vehicles to get around our state a lot more effectively and a lot more efficiently, so our investment is essentially identifying and prioritising high-productivity routes that can then support those vehicles getting to where they need to go. A lot of work over multiple years goes through this, Ms Taylor, and I know Mr Northey himself has very much been at the table driving this agenda. So I might ask Mr Northey if he would like to touch on this, and he might even want to just touch on the dairy supply chain as well.

Mr NORTHEY: Thanks, Minister. So we have got quite a number of different packages of work happening at the moment to help support the freight network and to help high-productivity freight vehicles move around the state. That could include things like the \$4 million that the government is going to invest in terms of upgrades to the Henty Highway between Horsham and Lascelles which will enable really important grain freight to travel from the Mallee down to Portland. We have a number of different bridge projects that we are also investing in, and they are largely to be able to take that additional weight of those high-productivity freight vehicles that I referred to. Also what we have done is highlight and, I guess, clearly ascertain the key routes for freight vehicles right across the state. We have a number of really important routes, particularly in the north-west as well. As I said, there have been some really important and really great grain crops in the last few years, so it is really important that we have those really strong routes that can take the freight, particularly north-south, really, to the port of Portland, which is a really important freight corridor for us.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you. I was also interested in, and I think it would be good for the committee to understand a bit more about, what is being done to reduce red tape for the freight industry.

Mr CARROLL: It is a very good question, Ms Taylor, and it is something that comes up regularly with our freight industry, about reducing red tape and the application process for them to essentially use a high-productivity vehicle on the road network. You would appreciate often the big trucks and vehicles, compared to the little passenger vehicles, do the most damage, so it is a process that we need to go through. But to support the industry we are making sure that for more of those high-productivity freight vehicles, those larger trucks, we do make sure that we have the industry-led drivers to really support them. So I am very pleased to say that we are making sure that the high-productivity freight vehicles right across the network have a lot quicker application process when they might need to shift freight.

We also know with a lot of these vehicles, because the wind farm industry we know is growing, that often they need the application for the building of wind farms to use our road network to shift the diameters and things like that too. But to be specific we have added 3000 kilometres of preapproved routes for high-productivity freight networks. This means that vehicles can now easily access more than a quarter—some 27 per cent—of

the road network. These routes include key corridors through the Murray Valley Highway, Sunraysia Highway, South Gippsland Highway. We have also, though, added new maps that will support the 26-metre and the 30-metre B-double tankers—what they can operate on. There would be nothing worse, I think, behind the wheel of one of those to realise you have gone too far, so that is very important to give them, again, the knowledge and the power of the information in their hands of where they need to go. I should say too that a lot of this does occur in a real partnership approach with local communities that want to support their local industry, support their local community and jobs and really support this sector going forward. Do you want to add anything, Secretary?

Mr YOUNIS: Thanks, Minister. I think it is a really important question, because it has been a real challenge for us with the growth in freight. Road freight caters for about 30 per cent of the entire freight around the nation, and there has been a huge growth in our road freight over the last few years. Our general road freight has grown over about 2.6 per cent. But particularly the heavy vehicle access, we have had about a 400 per cent increase in applications for heavy vehicle access, primarily driven by the huge infrastructure program—not only the state, but that we have had in programs—so it has been a real challenge for us to keep up with that.

So what we are doing is, as the minister said, increasing the heavy vehicle types that can go on to those routes, doing a lot of structural assessments—and there is that funding that is in the budget; that \$41 million goes towards further structural assessments of bridges, and that will improve some of the routes—and mapping those routes so we can get more routes that are preapproved so there is no application process required. But also, because there will always be loads that are outside the normal load on a bridge structure, we are automating the road assessment process so that it becomes a much faster process than we have now. Quite frankly it was a clunky system that we had internally a few years ago, and we are working very hard to improve that process. Of course we have got to be really conscious that our bridges are a lifeline for many communities, and we have to be really conscious of the safety issues of allowing heavy vehicles and making sure that that can be done in a really safe manner. So it is an important issue to keep our construction industry moving, and a challenge for us because of the growth that has occurred over the last few years.

Ms TAYLOR: All right, very good. Could you also unpack a bit more about the benefits of the online application for permits that has been funded? I think that would be useful.

Mr CARROLL: Thank you. Again, it is a critical point, because at the end of the day, as a minister that is trying to support goods getting to where they need to get to and to support people in jobs, the process needs to be simple and it must allow businesses to access the transport services and get where they need to go. So we are building on this by developing a new bridge assessment processing system to really try and automate and simplify and make a lot more transparent the department's heavy vehicle impact assessment process. Constantly we are out there trying to assess and support our freight industry with better routes and better access, knowing that they have assurance and support from government. We have already seen, though, too, a 400 per cent increase in heavy vehicle permit applications requiring structural assessments since 2015. So what you have seen with the Andrews Labor government is not only more freight moving around but the Big Build contributing also to more and more high-productivity vehicles wanting permits and getting around our state as well.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you.

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

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thank you, Chair. Minister, can I just continue on where Mr Newbury left off. The *Australian Financial Review* reported some data recently from Saul Eslake that said that Victoria has raised an average of \$117 per person from fines over the past five years, more than double all the other states. In New South Wales it is \$76 per person. Over the past three years to the end of April 2021 New South Wales road fatality rates have declined by 12 per cent, 11 per cent and 8 per cent respectively. Victoria's actually increased by 2 per cent and 3 per cent and declined by 18 per cent last year, when hardly anyone was on the roads. How is it not that you are simply using road fine revenue as a revenue-raising measure?

Mr CARROLL: Thank you, Mr O'Brien, for your question. Look, that Saul Eslake piece, as you would appreciate, went across a range. It was not just about road safety or road fines, it was across a whole domain of essentially Department of Treasury and Finance—

Mr D O'BRIEN: I am getting to a question here of the broader picture of the whole state government and following up on the questions asked by Mr Newbury about road fines. We are actually seeing that massive increase in fines being paid by Victorians and actually a worse outcome in terms of road statistics.

Mr CARROLL: No, look, you identified the 18 per cent drop, and yes, you are right to identify that there were less people in their vehicles. But also too there was a substantial increase in cyclists dying, and that is why we introduced, with the support of the Amy Gillett Foundation—and I must say I think Kevin Andrews has written on this very subject matter himself, supporting the 1-metre rule. So we need to be nimble, and that is why as part of our road safety strategy to 2030 we are now rolling out 2- to 3-year road action plans. So that is focusing on safety. But to go to your point again, with our work—and we work very closely with the Monash University Accident Research Centre—there is a role for regulation and law enforcement when it comes to road safety. It can lead to changing behaviour. You look at some of the statistics that police are doing—

Mr D O'BRIEN: The statistics show it is not.

Mr CARROLL: and whether it is random drug tests or breath tests, they do an incredible amount of work. And they are also trying to be proactive around fatigue as well, which is another important thing that we need to focus on. So—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Can I move on to another issue related to road safety, and that is the actual standard of the roads themselves. In your own budget papers, on page 343 of budget paper 3, when you look at the performance measures for regional roads, for road area treated your target is down from last year, for meeting the cracking standard in regional areas your target is down from the previous targets, likewise the roughness standard. You have also, as Mr Riordan said earlier, cut the budget by 23 per cent for road asset management. How are you actually claiming that you are doing better when your own standards in the budget papers are going backwards?

Mr CARROLL: I might ask Mr Northey, the chief regional roads officer, to address that one. Thank you.

Mr NORTHEY: Thanks, Minister. So the first thing is, in terms of the investment this year, we have had \$120-odd million invested through the stimulus package that the minister referred to previously. Some of that work actually goes through to the end of this calendar year. However, that program is not continuing, which might explain the difference in the figures. We have had a great result this year in terms of all the resurfacing work that we have done right across regional Victoria. Our efficiency, or the area that we have covered, has actually improved by around 10 per cent in terms of what we originally aimed to do. Because of that, because we have been more efficient, the target that we are setting ourselves next year is actually higher per dollar spent. In terms of the overall figures in terms of cracking I think you referred to, certainly the resurfacing goes to that cracking figure. We did have some corrections, or correlation, that we needed to make between the figures over the last couple of years based on the monitoring that was carried out by a different service provider. We have now put that in place to correct that. And, actually, in the budget we have got dollars to do the next range of monitoring of the entire network.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay, thank you. Minister, can I just move on. You talked at the start about the devastating storms and the damage around our region. It is being reported this morning that the federal government has ADF staff on stand-by, but so far the state government has only asked for five Australian Defence Force planners to assist with the clean-up. From a roads perspective in particular, are you going to be seeking more assistance either from other departments or from the ADF?

Mr CARROLL: It is a pertinent question, Mr O'Brien, and the Secretary, Mr Northey and I have obviously been talking about supporting regional communities and particularly roads as we speak. One of the big issues has been the amount of damage done to local government roads—you would appreciate this—so we are working very much with regional councils, local councils. I feel very confident with our road safety partners and our regional alliances that once a lot of the work of emergency services is completed we can then get in and do the repair works that we will need. We do need to, though, be very mindful of just the structural engineering and the geotechnical engineering—the Department of Transport does have a very important internal resource when it comes to structural and engineering and assessments. We also know that a lot of the—

Mr D O'BRIEN: While that is important, the immediate issue I think is once you have got trees pushed aside and you can get through the road, you have then got enormous amounts of material on the sides of the

roads. I am concerned, my community is concerned and many communities are concerned that that is just going to sit there and not be removed, and that is a huge job on both local council and VicRoads roads. Will you be seeking assistance either from other departments or from the commonwealth to actually help deal with that issue?

Mr CARROLL: On that specific question around assistance from the commonwealth, you would appreciate, under these types of rare events and events that occur, that a lot of powers essentially get authorised through the emergency management commissioner.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes.

Mr CARROLL: And I know the emergency management commissioner, obviously with the Acting Premier, is having a lot of dialogue with Canberra as we speak.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes. But are you feeding into that? Are you saying that we need assistance?

Mr CARROLL: No, no, no. That is not what I am saying. I am feeding into that in terms of updates on the road network. I am also feeding into the issues we have around some of our high-productivity and priority roads as well as the issues I identified before about the local government sector and councils needing a lot more support going forward. We will continue to work through this, Mr O'Brien, but, as I said at the outset, I am always contactable and we are there to try and support these local communities and get through this. You are on the ground; you have seen it. I have had reports of it and seen things before my desk. It is a big issue we need to address, and I know from the Acting Premier down, Mr Pearson—we are all focused on it.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Richardson.

Mr RICHARDSON: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister, again, for your presentation and for answering questions from the committee. I want to refer you to your presentation and to budget paper 3, page 334, in relation to VicRoads's service recovery program. Are you able to outline, please, for the committee's benefit the progress made in recovering registration and licensing services?

Mr CARROLL: I certainly can, Mr Richardson. There is no doubt that at the height of the pandemic by following the chief health officer's advice we have had to make some of those difficult but necessary decisions, including the suspension of licence testing in metro Melbourne and regional Victoria, particularly through those stage 3 and 4 restrictions. There was a backlog that was accumulated through those periods of restrictions, but I can say right from regional Victoria to metropolitan Melbourne we have invested heavily to get through that backlog. Some of the key investments were the pop-up testing centres; literally the hundreds of additional customer service staff, driving instructors; as well as shifting learner permit testing, rather than being inside the VicRoads centre, to being an online test as well. So we have got more work to do, Mr Richardson, but we have got through a power of work, and I really do want to commend the frontline staff at VicRoads and registration and licensing. They have done a tremendous job in getting through the backlog and addressing it. So I am very confident that as these issues arise we have got all the mechanisms in place to manage them.

Mr RICHARDSON: Just going a little bit further into the online Ls testing, I am wondering if you could update the committee on that rollout and its benefits to young people.

Mr CARROLL: I certainly can, Mr Richardson. It was one of the things I identified when I first became minister. I went into the VicRoads centre in Broadmeadows, of all places, and did my learner permit test, and I discovered not a lot had changed in the past 30 years. And COVID also, I think, sped up that appetite and that essential necessity for this test to be shifted online. I sat the test myself, some 30 years later, and I really think it is an outstanding product we have in the online learners. It is more difficult; it takes 4 to 5 hours to complete. It really builds on a lot of the initiatives we have made as a government in terms of the road network, the Big Build, pop-up bike lanes. It is a very modern test. But you do get 12 months to complete it. I have met some of the young people that have completed the test and been successful. Already we are now getting thousands of Victorians choosing to go online and do the test, knowing that they only need to go to the VicRoads office really to do their eyesight and get their photo ID done. So it is a massive change, and I am very pleased to see that, you know, more and more right across the great state are doing it.

We also, I should say, Mr Richardson, started it in regional Victoria, Gippsland, then to different metro areas, and we have now brought forward its rollout across the whole state. So right now, as we speak, it has been rolled out across the whole state, which also is an important measure to support everyone coming through this COVID and the lockdowns and things like that.

Mr RICHARDSON: I just want to take you, Minister, to the issue of registration, and I am wondering, for the committee's benefit, if you could update us on the uptake of short-term registration and how that has proceeded.

Mr CARROLL: Look, short-term registration has been an outstanding success, and I think we all get the feedback from our communities. The ability to pay in three-month instalments rather than that large lump sum has been such a difference for communities right across our great state. And we continue to see the scheme be very popular. To think that a three-month registration in metropolitan Melbourne costs \$211.20, a six-month registration cost \$419, an annual registration just above \$834. You are seeing more and more Victorians take this up, but not just all Victorians, particularly younger Victorians. We are incentivising them. We are supporting them. I got to meet some young tradesmen that knew it and do it—and apprentices. It is a really important measure that I think the government and my predecessors as roads minister should be very proud of, because it is a great investment that really helps Victorians choose between a 12-month, a three-month or a six-month registration.

Mr RICHARDSON: Obviously there have been significant challenges for people during the pandemic and the need to support Victorian motorists. I am wondering, Minister, if you can outline the benefits that have been provided from fee relief during this pandemic period.

Mr CARROLL: Yes. Thanks, Mr Richardson. This was a very important measure to support Victorians right through the pandemic. We know more and more with JobKeeper and JobSeeker and some of those things essentially being taken offline that the state government has had to step up in different ways. I know as a minister the \$19 fee that we had—essentially for Victorians—that integrated with registration and licensing, that appointment fee, as a goodwill gesture we took away. So if you had your appointment and you paid the fee, you either got the refund or, if you were coming in during the lockdown period, you did not have to pay the fee. You know, some 490 000 Victorians that were waiting to get their learners, take their licence test or to have their hazard perception test had that fee waived. So it is a small thing, a small measure, but we know that that money probably went straight back into people putting petrol in their cars and doing those sorts of things, Mr Richardson.

I also want to say it is a great thing for VicRoads registration and licensing how, back of house, they have been able to work, get their IT right and get their payment processing systems right to really make sure they can do what they need to do to support all Victorians and younger apprentices and to make sure that we can support them going forward.

Mr RICHARDSON: I might leave it there, Minister. I will not sneak in another one. Thanks for your time.

Mr CARROLL: Thanks, Mr Richardson.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. That concludes the time we have set aside for consideration with you of your portfolios 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. We thank you and your officers for your time today. The committee will now take a lunch break before beginning consideration with Minister Allan of the transport infrastructure and Suburban Rail Loop portfolios.

Mr RIORDAN: Chair, before we break might we discuss tomorrow's witness list?

The CHAIR: Well, I think, Deputy Chair, we can do that in the break. I think we can adjourn this hearing and have a committee meeting as needed. I declare this hearing adjourned.

Witnesses withdrew.