

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into 2020–21 Financial and Performance Outcomes

Melbourne—Wednesday, 10 November 2021

MEMBERS

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Danny O’Brien—Deputy Chair

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Gary Maas

Mrs Beverley McArthur

Mr James Newbury

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Nina Taylor

WITNESSES

Mr Paul Younis, Secretary,

Mr Nicholas Foa, Head of Transport Services,

Mr William Tieppo, Deputy Secretary, Network Design and Integration, and

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

Mr Corey Hannett, Director-General, Major Transport Infrastructure Authority;

Mr Frankie Carroll, Chief Executive Officer, Suburban Rail Loop Authority;

Ms Angela Skandarajah, Chief Executive, Development Victoria;

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

Ms Tammy O'Connor, Chief Executive Officer, Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria;

Mr Evan Tattersall, Chief Executive Officer, Rail Projects Victoria;

Mr Kevin Devlin, Chief Executive Officer, Level Crossing Removal Project;

Mr Duncan Elliott, Chief Executive Officer, North East Link Project; and

Mr Travis Dowling, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Fisheries Authority.

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 2020–21 Financial and Performance Outcomes. Its aim is to gauge what the government achieved in 2020–21 compared to what the government planned to achieve.

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

All mobile telephones should now 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 the Secretary of the Department of Transport and associated officers and invite you to make a 10-minute presentation. This will be followed by questions from the committee. Thank you.

Visual presentation.

Mr YOUNIS: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the committee. I am here supported by a range of people from our transport portfolio. I thought I would start by just giving a bit of an overdue of the scope of our transport portfolio because it has changed in the last couple of years and we have made some further changes and additions to it over the past financial year. I remind the committee, and I think I said this before, that we have been through quite significant change. We have incorporated PTV in particular and VicRoads into the department—one of the most significant changes to the structure and management of the transport portfolio and operations ever seen in this state. We have also during that time, in the last 12 months, welcomed Development

Victoria into our portfolio as well. That has been an important part, particularly since precincts and precinct development around our transport hubs will become such a feature of how we provide our transport task. It is not just about shifting people, it is building spaces and building communities. Inviting and welcoming Development Victoria into our portfolio is particularly important, especially with the development of the Suburban Rail Loop, and precinct development will be central to that process.

It is worth also noting that we do not deliver our transport task and the state does not develop our transport task just through the department, we have a range of partners to do that. Our major transport infrastructure alliance projects are run by Corey and his team—a really important part of our team. We have a range of private sector partners as well—Metro Trains and Yarra Trams and a range of bus operators across the state—that we work in partnership with to deliver our transport portfolio. Importantly I think, an Act of Parliament was passed quite a few years ago, 10 to 12 years ago—the *Transport Integration Act*. The bringing together of all of the parts of transport really realises the *Transport Integration Act*, which has as its focus an integrated transport task.

So what do we do? Importantly and I think central to where we are heading into the future is our Big Build program. It is a significant program. It is the most significant investment in transport that the state has ever seen, one of the most significant that Australia has seen and one of the largest infrastructure builds across the world at the moment—so it is no mean task that we have in front of us. On top of that, we sometimes forget that there is an entire network that we are also managing: \$100 billion worth of assets and services that carry millions of people every year. Now, that has been a challenge of course over COVID, but we are tasked every minute of every day to provide the task of not only shifting people but making sure goods get to their destinations. And of course with that comes the maintenance of a significant network of infrastructure—a really important part of what we do. I think the other element of that is: how do we bring that together? Now, the department have a strategic plan, and that strategic plan has at its core connecting people seamlessly. It is about simple, safe, connected journeys, and when we talk about journeys, as I said, it is not just about people, it is about freight, it is about goods, it is about all of those elements connecting people and space.

We are supported through our strategic plan. We have what we call our living transport framework, and that really provides that framework that links the *Transport Integration Act*; other really important documents, like *Plan Melbourne*; and other government policies. That describes how we move from our strategy, our planning, into delivery and providing the services that we need to do every single day.

Over the past 18 months now, of course like every sector transport has been significantly challenged, particularly through COVID. If you just take our public transport patronage rates from the start of COVID, they have dropped significantly. In the most recent period they were down around that 12 to 15 per cent of normal patronage. That has gone up, and Mr Foa has just given me the figures for yesterday. Public transport was up around 36 per cent of normal patronage yesterday. Interestingly, roads dropped quite a bit over the last period of the pandemic to around 85 per cent of normal usage. They were back yesterday up to about 92 per cent, and we expect the roads to recover much more quickly in that space. But it has been certainly a challenging time for us. Importantly through this period we have been able to continue to provide public transport services. We have been able to continue to make sure the freight was delivered to its destination, that the ports were open, and we continued, importantly, with our Big Build program, although that was challenged in certain ways. Our public transport: there were a range of measures we put in place to ensure that that continued as well as being a safe form of transport. It provided options for all of those people that still needed to get to their destinations.

I think another part of our program in the past 12 months, which we sometimes overlook—but it is a significant part, and I think it will be really significant coming out of COVID—is our manufacturing and rolling stock. Over the past 12 months we have introduced the high-capacity metro trains onto the network. Last financial year there were 10 running across the network, and we have introduced almost one a month since then onto our network, running live and carrying passengers.

We have shortlisted our manufacturers for the next-generation tram, and that will be the next phase. We have rolled out the last of the E-class trams in the last couple of months. The next phase of that is our next-generation tram. We have purchased a site at Maidstone for the construction and maintenance facility of that. Importantly, that will support over 1900 jobs, that next-generation tram, through the construction and development phase—so a really important part of developing those skills and keeping those skills in Victoria.

Also this year's budget included the development of the next generation of metropolitan trains, the X'Trapolis 2.0. The importance of this, particularly out of the pandemic, is not just that we are replacing old and ageing rolling stock and it assists in a range of other elements of the transport tasks, but there are significant jobs that are created through the manufacturing industry and supply chains that provide jobs right across Victoria. So we have supply chains in Gippsland, in Ballarat, in Bendigo and right across Victoria that supply parts and services to our manufacturing and tram, train and bus network.

Importantly, of course, the major projects continue, and they were challenged during this COVID period. There were certain elements of that that we were able to continue. Importantly, we do know that with the major projects, and when we are making such a such a change to our network, it causes disruption. The disruptions during this period, like patronage, were much easier to manage, so there is a positive out of that—but of course making sure we were building and constructing in a COVID-safe manner, as with all industries. During the 12 months of the financial year we completed 16 projects with an investment of \$10 million or greater, and 12 further projects reached financial completion. Of all of those 28 projects across the Big Build program, that represented over \$4.3 billion of government investment that reached completion and practical completion stage, ready for our operation in our network. A few of those: the Geelong fast rail is being developed, the Echuca-Moama bridge—125 concrete beams were put in the Echuca-Moama bridge. We have begun the last stage of the Princess Highway East upgrade. Upgrades on the north-east line, the Geelong line and Waurn Ponds station were important parts of that program, and of course we completed the Ballarat line upgrade, which introduced a number of additional services.

I see I have only got 40 seconds left, so I might move very quickly. There was a range of milestones met in our metropolitan network as well, particularly the completion of the tunnel, and the airport rail EOI was released. Finally, and I did not want to spend just a few seconds on this: the Suburban Rail Loop, which is the next really significant investment that we are making, which will connect communities, connect education facilities, connect our health and connect jobs across and really respond to some of the changes in travel patterns that we expect to see over the coming decade. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Secretary. Deputy Chair.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thank you, Chair. Good morning, Secretary and team. You mentioned rolling stock there, Secretary, and I just want to talk about country rolling stock, V/Line in particular. The budget papers show a line item for the additional VLocity trains—regional various. There was \$127 million spent on that project up until 30 June 2021. Is the department still on track to deliver 54 new VLocity carriages, including six standard-gauge units and 12 broad-gauge units?

Mr YOUNIS: Yes, I might call on Mr Tieppo to come forward. He is in charge of our rolling stock program and will be able to give you a far more fulsome answer than I can. But certainly we have rolled out a number of the VLocity trains out of that 54. I actually have not got the number in front of me, and I am sure he will, if he is ready. I will go to Mr Tieppo to answer that question.

Mr TIEPPO: G'day, Mr O'Brien. In terms of the VLocity program, we have currently got 32 manufactured and 19 still in the process—sorry, 19 out on the network and 32 still remaining to be delivered.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Sorry, so 32 manufactured?

Mr TIEPPO: Sorry, the other way around—19 fully manufactured with 32 still to go out of that batch. The standard-gauge train that will be running on the north-east line has just finished its testing for the north-east line. That will be ready for service before the end of the year. So everything is on track for the full completion of that by the end of next year.

Mr D O'BRIEN: End of next year.

Mr TIEPPO: Yes.

Mr D O'BRIEN: So when you say the standard-gauge train, there were meant to be six standard-gauge units?

Mr TIEPPO: Twelve.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Twelve units or 12—

Mr TIEPPO: Twelve three-car sets.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Twelve three-car sets in total.

Mr TIEPPO: In total, yes.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Hang on. I thought it was six standard-gauge units and 12 broad-gauge units.

Mr TIEPPO: There were 12 for the north-east line.

Mr D O'BRIEN: So 12 sets.

Mr TIEPPO: Twelve sets for the north-east line are standard gauge, and the remainder are broad gauge, which will be distributed across the rest of the network.

Mr D O'BRIEN: So the remainder are how many?

Mr TIEPPO: The remainder of the 54.

Mr D O'BRIEN: So that is 42.

Mr TIEPPO: Yes.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes. Sorry, just to get this clear in my head, so 19 sets are already out on the network and there are another 32 to go. That does not add up to 54. That is three short.

Mr TIEPPO: The 19 are the ones that are actually out on the network, and then the remainder is the balance of the 54, sorry.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. So there will be another whatever that is—35—to go.

Mr TIEPPO: That is right.

Mr D O'BRIEN: The program had a total \$340 million budget. Was any of that rolled over from previous programs, including the more regional trains Regional Network Development Plan announced in the 2016–17 budget?

Mr TIEPPO: No. We are still on budget in terms of delivering the full suite of the 54 carriages.

Mr D O'BRIEN: But that entire \$340 million was all new money?

Mr TIEPPO: That is right, yes.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. There was provision in that network development plan for a fifth weekday service to Warrnambool. Is that included in this package of rolling stock?

Mr TIEPPO: No, that is not. To run a full suite of VLocity trains on the Warrnambool line will require additional sets for Warrnambool.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Right. Have they been ordered?

Mr TIEPPO: No, they have not been ordered, but that will be something that we will be considering for budget next year.

Mr D O'BRIEN: So is there a time line then for the fifth weekday service to Warrnambool?

Mr TIEPPO: I have not got that information with me at the moment, but I can take that on notice.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Could you take it on notice?

Mr TIEPPO: Yes.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Likewise the government committed to nine return services a day to Shepparton. Is that included in this current rolling stock?

Mr TIEPPO: No, Warrnambool and Shepparton will require additional rolling stock above the 54.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. So when are they going to be available, the initial services?

Mr TIEPPO: Well, I will take that on notice in terms of the services running, but in terms of rolling stock, they will be considered as part of budget next year for Warrnambool and the Shepparton line as well.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. I am not sure what your role is, Mr Tieppo, or whether I need to go back to the Secretary, but as I recall—and I am prepared to stand corrected—there was a commitment by the government, I think in 2018, for the nine services a day to Shepparton. When is that going to be delivered?

Mr YOUNIS: Mr Tieppo, have you got that time frame for the construction of the Shepparton work, or is that Evan?

Mr TIEPPO: I have not got it with me, but—

Mr YOUNIS: Yes, Mr Tattersall will have the Shepparton construction work time frame.

Mr D O'BRIEN: That is Regional Rail Revival?

Mr YOUNIS: Yes, it is part of the Regional Rail Revival program.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. But even if that is done, you will not have the rolling stock for it?

Mr YOUNIS: No, we need to order the rolling stock, but with the rolling stock I think the benefit we have got—and I think it goes back to what I spoke about before—is we have got a rolling program of rolling stock, so if we order we can essentially roll out rolling stock. Now that we have got them manufactured, got a manufacturing pathway, we can roll them out reasonably quickly. There is not a significant development design delay, as you would have—if you were ordering a new train or tram, there are two, three, four years of design development and developing the supply chains. With the VLocity the supply chains are there. It is just a matter of continuing that process, that rolling stock. So we can roll out nearly one a month on those.

Mr D O'BRIEN: But from the time you order—so let us assume for argument's sake that they are ordered in next year's budget, funded in next year's budget—how long would it get them on the track being filled with passengers?

Mr YOUNIS: Well, they would finish. They would complete an order. There are a number of ways to roll them out. The manufacturers can ramp up their current manufacturing rates, or we can add it on to their existing program. I think, Mr O'Brien—and it is an important part—another element of our rolling stock program is to make sure that we retain a really strong manufacturing pipeline and so make sure of those supply lines. It is not just about these services, making sure the train is available on that particular day; it is making sure we provide a really strong jobs pipeline.

Mr D O'BRIEN: But coming back to the question, nine services a day to Shepparton were promised. Can I get a date on when that will be delivered?

Mr YOUNIS: I will have to come back to you on the date for the Shepparton services. I have not got the figure in front of me.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Righto. But it is going to require the upgrade to be finished. Do we have a date on that?

Mr YOUNIS: End of—

Mr TATTERSALL: 2023.

Mr YOUNIS: End of 2023 is when the infrastructure will be completed, I am told by Mr Tattersall—thank you very much.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Righto. And either between then or at that point we will need to order new rolling stock as well—that is right. Okay. Likewise the north-east line, the Albury line—the commitment was three services to five. When is that to be delivered?

Mr YOUNIS: The Albury line—and Mr Tieppo will be able to fill us in on this one as well—the upgrades to that are being delivered by ARTC. It requires a heap of signalling and other work. That is nearing completion. I think it has not quite met practical completion just yet; he will be able to give an update on that. And once again the standard-gauge rolling stock, which is running now on the network and testing now, is available. Have you got time lines on that?

Mr TIEPPO: The time lines will be once the rolling stock will be fully complete, so the sets that will be complete by the first quarter of next year—the first train set will go out before Christmas, and then there are subsequent standard-gauge sets that will go out as well, so probably before the middle of next year.

Mr D O'BRIEN: So all 12 will be out by the middle of next year?

Mr TIEPPO: We are anticipating by June that all the sets on the north-east line will replace the old classic fleet trains.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Righto. And will all of those standard-gauge sets be used on the north-east line? Is there elsewhere they can be used at all?

Mr TIEPPO: No, because in terms of passenger services the north-east line is the only one that has got standard gauge.

Mr D O'BRIEN: The rest are broad—that is right. In my own area, the Bairnsdale line, again there was a plan for three to five—the Gippsland Regional Rail Revival project, again. When are we actually going to see new services and the requisite rolling stock? Is there rolling stock allocated directly to the Gippsland line—when I say Gippsland, Bairnsdale–Traralgon?

Mr YOUNIS: Yes, Traralgon. Mr Tieppo?

Mr TIEPPO: Yes. So in terms of the rolling stock requirements for Bairnsdale, there is sufficient number in the 54 extras plus the current fleet we have got. So the only extra trains that we need to order for those additional services are for Warrnambool and Shepparton, and the rest of the fleet—we have got enough trains to run that.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Can I ask, then: when is the Gippsland upgrade project going to be finished?

Mr YOUNIS: Once again part of the RRR program. Mr Tattersall? Yes, better come up, I think.

Mr D O'BRIEN: While Mr Tattersall is coming up, a question, probably irrespective of the answer: I can go back to 30 April 2017 where the minister, who is still the minister—Minister Allan—said of the Gippsland rail revival project:

We've done the planning work, we've done the business case work and we're ready to go.

And Ms Shing, a Member for Eastern Victoria Region, in the same article said that the project was 'shovel-ready'. It did not actually go to contract until March, leaving aside the Avon River bridge, which has been done. So four years after they said it was ready to go it still had not even started. So when is it going to be finished?

Mr NEWBURY: So they do not just announce it?

Mr D O'BRIEN: No, apparently not.

Mr NEWBURY: Oh, they do not just announce it; right.

Mr TATTERSALL: As you said, we completed Avon River bridge. We have done level crossings between Sale and Bairnsdale and enabled the VLocitys out to Bairnsdale. The main works, which I will call between Pakenham and Traralgon—they are targeted for the end of 2022. We are just working through the recent issues with the COVID impacts we have had and the restrictions there, but the target is the end of next year.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes. So when will we get new trains on the Bairnsdale line in particular? Just for context, we have got 19 a day from Traralgon, we have got three to Bairnsdale.

Mr YOUNIS: Deputy Chair, I think it is a really important point because there are so many steps involved in adding services to lines. There is the planning and development, there is the construction, there are the rolling stock elements and then there is what we do as a timetable change. The timetable changes, we plan for these years in advance and we factor in timetable changes to make sure that those trains coming in do not interfere with metropolitan lines and that we have got the right drivers and we have got all of the other elements that make up a service ready to go on that date. So there is quite a lead-in, it is not just the infrastructure. So in short—

Mr D O'BRIEN: I get it is complex. This was promised as ready to go four years ago, 4½ years ago, and I just want to know when it will actually be finished and when we will get new services on the Gippsland line.

Mr YOUNIS: What I am getting to is our objective always is to deliver the services as soon as the infrastructure is ready. There can be a delay in weeks or months in relation to that to make sure all of those elements are lined up and that we do not disrupt other services when we make these timetable changes. So we will always aim to complete—like we did we did with the Ballarat line, when that was completed we introduced the timetable change within three or four weeks after that line was completed. So our aim is to implement those changes on completion of the infrastructure work, which is the end of 20—

Mr TATTERSALL: The target is the end of 2022.

Mr YOUNIS: 22.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes. That is a good point, Secretary, because the Ballarat and Gippsland line projects were announced at about the same time. Ballarat has got its new services. Gippsland has not even got the works done. Can I move on. Sorry, Mr Tieppo might have to come back. What was the actual final delivery time of all the 54 VLocitys? Was that June next year as well?

Mr TIEPPO: The delivery of the full suite will be by the end of next year.

Mr D O'BRIEN: End of next year. No worries. Thank you. Can I just move on to punctuality. The V/Line service still is hitting reliability and punctuality issues. We have got a number of services per day being cancelled for various reasons. What is the reason that so many services are being cancelled, and when can we actually see some improvements on punctuality?

Mr YOUNIS: I will go to Mr Foa, who runs our transport services in this area, but our punctuality and reliability figures for V/Line have actually been quite strong for a regional network which has—

Mr D O'BRIEN: It was reported two days ago, Secretary, that the patronage has gone down from 22 million to 9 million, so I would hope that there would be some improvement.

Mr YOUNIS: Of course. The delays or issues in relation to running particularly a regional network—and to some degree we have the challenge in metro where you have a really open network, although we are changing that with level crossings—is that it is an open network so there are many natural elements which will disrupt a service, particularly trees over lines, storms and those sorts of things. The other element that impacts on our service is the rolling stock. We are still running a number of classic rolling stock—old rolling stock—and that is the purpose of such a large order of VLocitys. Those do not go away even if you have got low patronage numbers. So they are the challenges we have in running that service—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Can I perhaps, as we throw to Mr Foa, and these might be questions on notice, there are a number of blockages in the system as I understand it. There is a speed reduction just before the Geelong station from Melbourne from 65 kilometres to 30 kilometres an hour. At Footscray regional rail link speed has to go from 80 to 40. Between Bendigo and Swan Hill there are no less than 26 speed restrictions from 100 or

90 kilometres down to 60 kilometres or less, and likewise on the Traralgon line 10 locations where the speed has to be reduced between Traralgon and Bairnsdale. Some of those have probably been addressed by the level crossing works, but when are those issues going to be fixed?

Mr YOUNIS: Deputy Chair, I think that is a really relevant question. Every transport network in the world is continually reviewing and monitoring their network to make sure that it can be run in a safe mode. The very first thing that we do is ensure that there are layers of safety elements, and having speed restrictions is one of the safety elements that you build into the running and operation of a train network. The RRR program—

Mr D O'BRIEN: I want to go onto another issue. Would it be possible to get an answer to that on—

Mr YOUNIS: What I am saying is that they will always be there across any network in the world. You cannot go to one particular speed restriction and say, 'We are going to fix that', because there will be others at certain times because of trees across road or because of various infrastructure issues. That will change daily. We have a list daily of what they are, and they go out to our drivers. So that changes all of the time. But the Big Build program—the RRR program—is absolutely essential and has removed thousands of those speed restrictions over the past years, and we will continue to as we upgrade and renew that network.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Can I ask some questions on fishing and boating? It may well require Mr Dowling to come forward. The first one is in relation to the VFA annual report. It does not have any detail on the number of recreational fishing licences sold. Why is that, given that is a good indication of whether you are hitting your Target One Million campaign? Can that information be provided on notice? Then I will very quickly want to talk about riverside camping.

Mr DOWLING: Sure. I can actually give you those figures now if you would like. In terms of that number of rec fishing licences, at 2021 the total number sold was 252 692. I will just make the point, Mr O'Brien, that it is one indicator of fishing participation but, as you are aware, there are a lot of people that go fishing that are in the exempt category.

Mr D O'BRIEN: So we have got 750 000 pensioners and kids.

Mr DOWLING: There are a lot of children that go fishing. We have got a very successful—

Mr D O'BRIEN: We clearly have not met the 1 million target, have we?

Mr DOWLING: It is in an aspirational target that we are working towards.

Mr D O'BRIEN: There was a report previously that you had promised to provide us but did not. Is that report now available?

Mr DOWLING: It is. It is available on the website.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr O'Brien. Mr Maas.

Mr MAAS: Thanks, Chair, and thank you, Secretary and departmental officials, for your appearance this morning. I would like to move to the topic of road safety. Road safety is of course something that affects every Victorian's everyday life, as we well know, and something that this government takes very, very seriously. We of course note that Road Safety Victoria was recently included as a section within the Department of Transport. I was hoping that you could talk to us about the road safety action plan and specifically its areas of focus and the target cohorts.

Mr YOUNIS: Thank you, Mr Maas. I might call on Mr Calafiore to come forward, because one of the elements of our road safety program is that it is actually a really strong partnership across all of government. It is a strong collaboration between Road Safety Victoria, Department of Transport, VicPol, TAC are an incredibly important part, DJCS, DOH and every element of government, and that partnership is incredibly important. As you would be aware, we released our new road safety strategy late last year and that was followed up by our road safety action plan early in the new year, and certainly it changed some of our direction,

but road safety as you point out is a really important part of all of the parts of government. I might go to Mr Calafiore to give some of the detail of that road safety action plan.

Mr MAAS: Thank you.

Mr CALAFIORE: Thank you, Secretary. Good morning, committee members. As the Secretary indicated, road safety is a real partnership approach in Victoria—the TAC, Road Safety Victoria and the Transport department and also our broader partners in Victoria Police and the Department of Health. It is an extremely ambitious plan—a record amount of infrastructure in upgrading the quality of roads, in particular across the regional network, and record investments with enforcement with Victoria Police. Victoria has got a really proud history in road safety going right back to 1970 from the war on 1034, and we have seen really big reductions over the long run; however, as the Secretary has indicated, it is a real priority for the department. Far too many people still get killed on Victoria's roads, and we know from the TAC's perspective we get 80 new clients every single day at the TAC. We will get 80 clients today, and to be a client of the TAC you have not had a tap on the bumper bar, you have often spent a night or weeks in hospital and have lifelong injuries, quadriplegia and paraplegia, so we are really excited to be part of the of the action plan going forward. It is evidence led, it has been built with the best global experts in the world, and TAC in conjunction with the Transport department and partners are really confident that we are going to over the next five to 10 years keep putting that downward pressure on road trauma.

Mr MAAS: Thank you. So the government has invested \$385.8 million over the four years to deliver that action plan under the strategy. Could you speak to the planning undertaken for the implementation of the action plan?

Mr CALAFIORE: Yes, that is right. It is a really detailed implementation from Regional Roads Victoria as part of the Transport department. Quite a lot of the road safety infrastructure actually happens in regional communities, so there is a role for stakeholder groups, for emergency services, for local councils. We have actually had a really good record in recent years, if I could put it that way, in being able to get the infrastructure out the door efficiently and effectively. Planning is a really key part of efficient delivery in infrastructure, but if I may also add it is similarly important to all of the aspects in road safety, whether you are speaking about new enforcement programs or whether you are speaking about trialling of new technology. I know from a TAC perspective, we are working with some overseas partners about passive alcohol technology in vehicles, upgrades to the safety features in vehicle fleets—all of these integrated parts are key components of the strategy, and as I said, we are on track to be delivering those record amounts in the years going forward.

Mr MAAS: You mentioned enforcement; let us go to that. I am just wondering: what actions have the department been taking under the road safety strategy to address the critical issue of drink driving?

Mr CALAFIORE: Yes. So drink driving remains one of the key causes of road trauma in Victoria. The state of Victoria has made great gains in the area of drink driving. In 1989, when the TAC first launched 'Drink drive, bloody idiot' about one in five Victorians actually admitted to drink driving as a regular part of their activities. It is now actually quite rare; however, when it happens it has often very serious consequences, so the Transport department and the TAC work really closely with Victoria Police—police obviously from the enforcement side of things in terms of their operations across the state, and at the TAC's perspective we work closely with police from the educative perspective. The vast majority of Victorians know that drink driving is dangerous and it often has tragic consequences. And we understand that we focus on the lives lost and the road toll, but for all of us in the transport community there is a real hidden road toll in terms of serious injuries. We just see it every single day. We see it in the trauma wards of our hospitals. So while we have made great progress in drink driving as a state, and I think we should be proud of that, it accounts for nearly a quarter of road trauma in the state today, so we still have a lot of work to do on that topic.

Mr MAAS: Thank you. Now, you are behind the road safety action plan. Can you inform the committee how the plan itself actually reduces lives lost on the road?

Mr CALAFIORE: At its heart road safety is an evidence-led field. So we know, really, when you bore down to the fundamentals, safer roads at appropriate speeds in safer vehicles with people doing the right thing, at its heart, is what forms the fundamentals of a road safety strategy. As the Secretary alluded to, upgrades to the road network matter, and that counts—upgrades, and having people buy safer cars as they can afford. Now

I know that sounds like a really obvious thing to say, but we know from a TAC perspective the vast majority of our clients are in cars that do not have side-curtain airbags. They have a really—even at a 60–70 kilometre accident. So you see the TAC being quite aggressive in our advertising about demand in side-curtain airbags. And obviously road safety is dependent upon people doing the right thing in the system, so driving to the conditions; obeying the speed limits; and if you are a vulnerable road user, such as a motorbike rider, making sure you have got the protective gear, the boots and the gloves. So it is all of those integrated factors together, but the transport department is the lead on the strategy. We work together as partners, evidence-led. They are very ambitious targets, so we are looking to halve serious road trauma over the next decade. That is really quite a stretch target, but that is what the state of Victoria has a proud tradition of doing over the last four to five decades.

Mr MAAS: You have spoken about data analysis. You have spoken about evidence-led measures. I was just wondering: how will the effectiveness of the road safety action plan be measured? What are some of the other measures?

Mr CALAFIORE: It is critical, actually. Just from a TAC perspective, we recently completed an \$8 million research program with the Monash University Accident Research Centre. It is really critical that every single dollar that we invest in prevention we know is an effective countermeasure, so we know where the crashes are happening, we know the causes of the crashes and we look for those really long-term trends. So we take that very detailed research, and one of the things I love about this space is it is quite collegiate. So not only do we share it amongst ourselves in Victoria, we share it nationally and internationally. So we are always looking for improvements, whether it is better ways of implementing infrastructure, whether it is where we should be pushing our advertising in terms of vehicle safety. So we invest millions of dollars in research and data and analytics. That is really important for us, and just from a TAC perspective, look, we put out the door \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion in benefits and supports each year. That is just the TAC. When you add in the cost of emergency services, the economic cost alone would be over \$6 billion, and of course when you are speaking of road trauma you are not even touching on the emotional cost on tens of thousands of families that have to deal with it. So we make significant investments in data and analytics, and that is actually one of the exciting things about our road safety action plan going forward. We are going to be able to better target our initiatives at local levels going forward, which is really exciting.

Mr YOUNIS: Mr Maas, I might just add to that—

Mr MAAS: Sure.

Mr YOUNIS: because I think it is a really important point about the research and how we use that research, because it really does drive not only the elements of what we do but what infrastructure we build as well. The road safety barriers were absolutely supported by significant research, and we are still rolling them out. I think we rolled out another 200 kilometres of road safety barriers over the past 12 months. Even tactile line edging, a really simple measure, has shown through that type of research that that is effective in keeping people on roads, particularly in regional and rural roads. So that collaborative approach and that broad research really informs our priorities and particularly where we put this type of facility.

So it is an important part of our work, but also that research drives a couple of other programs. So the other element of the road safety action plan, which came about from a lot of that research, is safer driver behaviour. Mr Calafiore talked about getting unsafe vehicles off the road, so those older vehicles off the road, and we have launched a program in the last few months about encouraging scrapping older vehicles from the roads. We have done a lot, because we have got registration and licensing, as run by Mr Foa, as a part of our role as well. And I think Victoria has a really strong history of ensuring that people are qualified to drive on our roads, and our learner programs are world renowned and are really well supported.

We have done a huge amount of work over the past couple of years with online learners permits. There is the learner to provisional licence program, the L2P program. With 3700 learners receiving driver experience, there are a number of participants in that program. There is the Road Smart program, adapting online learning to year 10 students, so really making sure that those that are coming onto our network—and that is very much a part of that research, that you need people that are experienced in the program. Our app now allows learner drivers to log their time and not only how much time they have spent driving a vehicle but also the conditions, whether it has been night-time, foggy or raining. They can log that and understand exactly which parts of

experience they need to develop. That research really underpins so many elements of how we respond as a state to making sure we have a safer network.

Mr MAAS: Excellent. Thank you for that. I might now move to bus improvements across the network and more specifically to *Victoria's Bus Plan*. You have made reference to this in the questionnaire, and I was hoping you would be able to outline to the committee what improvements to the bus network were delivered as a part of the plan and other output-related initiatives, and in addition how the investment will support the delivery of the recently released bus plan.

Mr YOUNIS: Certainly our minister, Minister Carroll, has put buses very much in the spotlight of the department. We know that two-thirds of Victorians live outside the tram and the train networks. So buses, particularly in regional Victoria but also in our suburbs, become a really important part—

Mr MAAS: Narre Warren South, Cranbourne.

Mr YOUNIS: The bus plan was the first time we really brought all of those elements together, had a strategic direction and understood where we would be making our investments. Mr Foa has been working to develop and deliver the elements, and I think there are some really exciting parts. The bus plan is going to be so important because I think there will be changes in travel patterns as well. There will be much more local trips than we have had in the past.

Just one of the parts of our bus plan is our on-demand service—it is really exciting; I think it is really exciting—where you can book a bus and it picks you up and takes you to certain destinations. We have introduced a couple of trials of those, and there have been significant increases in patronage even over the COVID period. People are using those services.

The other element of that is we have just announced the new contract that we have got for 30 per cent of our metropolitan bus network, and that includes the upgrading of the actual buses to low-emission buses, so electric and hybrid buses. The bus plan covers a range of different elements but is such an important part of our overall transport task. I might go to Mr Foa, who has been tasked with delivering the outputs of our bus plan.

Mr MAAS: Terrific. Thank you.

Mr FOA: Thank you, Mr Maas, for your question. In addition to the Secretary's comments, some of the other things that we are trialling are rapid running on the Clifton Hill to St Kilda route whereby there is a minimum of a 10-minute frequency along that route. One of the frustrations and pain points for passengers was stopping at stops where there was no-one to pick up and just sticking to that timetable. We have found on that rapid running route that we are able to slice 10 minutes off people's journey times and reduce waiting times for buses as they come through. That is a really interesting trial that we are looking to expand as we evaluate that.

In addition to the on-demand services that the Secretary has talked about, we are also partnering with our colleagues in DELWP through the growth areas infrastructure charge and introducing new service types into the growth areas, which is really important given they are less transport rich in those communities. We know through COVID that bus actually dropped away the least out of all modes, and that is largely because of socio-economic factors—people having less choice in areas outside the tram routes, for instance, or outside the major train lines. So it is a really important part of the transport story for helping key workers, helping people get to medical appointments et cetera around less rich transport areas.

The bus refranchising that Mr Younis has spoken about will also accelerate the zero-emissions pledge on buses. Our government is committed to a 2025 date for zero-emission buses. That is likely to be a mixed fleet of hybrid, electric—there is also a very strong zero-emission bus trial going at the moment. But importantly with the new contract there will be 35 buses replaced as a part of that contract, and we will have buses in the fleet by the middle of next year from a zero-emissions perspective.

The bus reform plan is about a better network, a greener, smarter fleet. But also we reviewed some 300 routes with the introduction of the greenfields timetable to ensure that that interchange—again, another pain point for customers is arriving at your station and the bus has just left, so, you know, we have done a lot of work in making sure that we can reduce those interchange concerns and make sure that the timetables match so you are ending up with a better, more efficient bus network in that regard.

Mr MAAS: Excellent. Thank you very much. And with 30 seconds or so to go I might leave it there, Chair. Thank you.

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

Mr HIBBINS: Thanks, Chair. Thank you, Secretary and your team, for appearing this morning. I thought I would start off on active transport. I think it is Ride to Work Day today, so I think that is fitting. I would like to ask and really find out about the planning and preparation for the implementation of safe cycling routes. Now, from the department level you have got the principal bike network, then you have got the strategic cycling corridors on top of that and then we have got pop-up bike routes on the top of that. What does that all mean in terms of planning and design? I mean, obviously some sort of planning had to go into creating these strategic cycling routes, but have any of them been subjected to further design work or further planning works, or is that a separate process altogether?

Mr YOUNIS: Mr Hibbins, we are rolling out many kilometres of active cycling paths every day. And as you said, the planning is we have got the layers of hierarchy that guide where they will be and what sort of standards and all those types of elements that we deliver. But I suppose we have taken quite an opportunistic approach to our active transport rollout, although we have got specific programs that we have developed. The level crossing removal program, for example, has rolled out tens of kilometres of active cycling. I think if you go up to Brunswick and the Upfield line now and see the changes that we have made there, the amount of cycling paths, open space, that was built as a part of our level crossing removal program—that is just a live example of that. Our western roads upgrade—I think we rolled out nearly 50 kilometres of active cycle paths as well as bridges over the Federation Trail. So it is quite an opportunistic approach to specifically that infrastructure rollout and where we put it in. Given the fact that we have got a significant investment, all of our road projects—every single one of them—has included active cycling paths along them. That that is how we are approaching our rollout of the of the active cycling program.

Mr HIBBINS: Looking at attaching cycling projects to other major projects, do you ever distinguish in terms of the cost of those particular active transports and separate them out from the major projects?

Mr YOUNIS: No. And look, Mr Hibbins, you are right. We do not. They are actually part of that overall scope and project. So, for example, the western road projects—we do not pull them out and say in a separate budget line item that this is how much we spent on that because they are actually just a part of how we do business. Quite frankly, we have an integrated Department of Transport. Whether it be roads, trains, buses, active transport, every element of that—whether it be freight—has an equal importance. So we plan and develop them as one, but we do not have a separate budget line item that pulls out those parts.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. Thank you. So back to my original question. I mean, if we look at, for example, the principal bike network and then the subset of the strategic cycling corridors, what level of planning then goes into identifying those routes? And then what sort of level of planning is then needed? Does that involve any design work? What level of planning actually goes into that?

Mr YOUNIS: Yes. Mr Foa has been involved particularly with the City of Melbourne in recent times in reviewing a number of those routes. So we are continually engaging with local government particularly on what that plan looks like and upgrading that plan, and you might be able to—

Mr FOA: Yes. Thank you, Secretary and Mr Hibbins. The role of local government in informing where the critical linkages are is really, really important. So you know that we have been working with, through the eastern suburbs, various councils in trying to connect up the linkages through there, and there are a couple of missing links that we have been working very hard on. So our regional directors within the metro north-west or the metro south-east within our transport network are engaging with their active transport teams with the councils all the time on possible new connections, evaluating existing connections and looking at new technologies—for instance, the separated cycleways that we have done with the pop-up bike lanes during COVID.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. So just in terms of, I guess, again the level of planning and the level of works that that actually involves outside of, for example, announced projects or what have you, are we looking at design works that are being undertaken?

Mr FOA: Yes. So certainly the level of design and the standards are getting better all the time in terms of the work that you will see coming through the major transport infrastructure pipeline of projects, whether it be North East Link, whether it be LXRA. The infrastructure is getting better, and we are constantly working with our standards in our asset management department around the cycling standards. So safety is really important for us, and we have experimented with some on-road repurposing and those sorts of things that you have previously commented on. I think we are learning from those projects all the time, and we are constantly reviewing those standards.

Mr YOUNIS: Mr Hibbins, I think your question is: have we got a long pipeline of plans and works that we are rolling out? I think it goes back to my original answer. We have actually taken quite an opportunistic approach to specifically the really significant lengths of upgrades, but we know where they are and what they are because of our constant engagement with local government and the upgrade of those plans. But we do not have a pipeline of hundreds of kilometres that we have got ready to roll out. We really do take an opportunistic approach. And because we have got such a significant Big Build program, that means that we are developing and delivering a significant number and filling a lot of those gaps in our active transport network.

Mr HIBBINS: So it is largely in terms of attaching it to existing infrastructure projects.

Mr YOUNIS: The majority of our paths are that way, yes.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. I guess I just speak from the reflections of cyclists, particularly in the inner city, where obviously the higher proportion of cyclists are. Obviously you can look at, for example, the PBN, you can look at the strategic cycling network or routes or what have you, and the question asked is, 'Okay. Well, why isn't this being built or why isn't this being implemented?'. So that is why I asked the question about: where are we actually up to in terms of some of these routes? I mean, if you look at soon Flemington Road or what have you, we are up to various levels. We have got business cases on St Kilda Road. Sydney Road has had a VicRoads survey. So the question then comes back to: what is the actual barrier here? Is the department looking at further design works? Are they looking at budget bids? What is actually the barrier to getting some of these other cycling-specific routes?

Mr YOUNIS: Yes. Certainly there are programs and works that we have done that form budget bids.
Mr Foa?

Mr FOA: Yes. And we are actively working on all those projects you have just mentioned at the moment with our teams, sitting down with councils, looking at proposed routes. Sydney Road is a very, very congested corridor, also being a major tram route as well.

Mr MAAS: Or contentious?

Mr FOA: It is congested rather than contentious. But, Mr Hibbins, to your point, repurposing road space, advantaging active transport over freight or other vehicle types, is a difficult community issue that we have got to work through. We have done that successfully in some locations throughout Melbourne, and there are many more projects in delivery as well as, you know, a range of projects in planning, from the previously announced 100 kilometres of pop-up bike lanes. So we are working through those with local councils at the minute.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay, thank you. And then just specifically about some individual projects: the St Kilda Road project, which I think I ask about just about every time—how much has been expended so far? And has the business case been completed?

Mr YOUNIS: I have not got the figure—unless Mr Tieppo has got the figure—of how much we have spent so far. So we have allocated \$27 million in the 2019–20 financial year. That work is being coordinated with the Anzac station and will be delivered as a part of that Anzac station work, which is 2025—Mr Tattersall? I am pretty sure. Hopefully he is nodding. But certainly the St Kilda Road project is delayed—well, not actually delayed, it is actually being incorporated with the Anzac station. It cannot be delivered until that is fully delivered. And I have not got the figure of how much we have spent to date; that will be part of our budget updates.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay, thank you. And then in terms of just some specifics about that, you mentioned Anzac station. What we have seen from designs of Anzac station is a Copenhagen approach. There have then been

separate amounts for a central lane approach, with Copenhagen then beyond St Kilda Junction. Is that still the case, and has there been any thought just in terms of navigating St Kilda junction as to how cyclists are going to navigate from a central cycling route to then a Copenhagen route through—

Mr YOUNIS: Mr Hibbins, you are right. I have seen various plans, and we have done a lot of work in developing all of those elements. The current status of that, Mr Tieppo?

Mr TIEPPO: Yes, Mr Hibbins. Where we are at at the moment is we have done a fair bit of design development work with Major Road Projects Victoria, integrating the planning of that to ensure that it does seamlessly fit in and integrate with the Anzac station and going through. At the moment the business case has looked at both options, being the central as well as the Copenhagen, so that will be something that will be considered by government through the cabinet processes, and we are putting those options up. But the work that we have done with both the City of Port Phillip and the City of Melbourne has been quite positive in terms of the support for the outer Copenhagen-style lanes—you know, without the need to do major augmentation of intersections with signalisation and obviously getting the feedback from cyclists as well around their preference for that as well.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay, thank you. I would like to ask now about another specific road, and that is Flemington Road and Royal Parade. Obviously that has been identified for a long time as a priority bike route. Have any works been done on those particular roads? Any design works or—

Mr YOUNIS: I have not got an update. I personally have not got an update on that one. I will have to come back to you on that one, Mr Hibbins. I have not got—unless Mr Foa has got it.

Mr FOA: No, I have not got that.

Mr YOUNIS: I have not got detailed information on the status.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. Well, yes—any information and any new information in terms of what any barriers are to having bike lanes on that road. And then I further asked around the Sydney Road bike lane. So I think I am covering all of the Greens lower house electorates. I have got to Prahran, Melbourne and Brunswick in there on behalf of my colleagues. Obviously with Sydney Road, the Upfield line is now complete. There was a VicRoads survey some time ago which I think came back in favour of the separated bike line approach. What is the next step? What are the next steps there?

Mr FOA: Mr Hibbins, our team in in metro north-west is actively working with council on proposed routes and is talking through the issues of what is a very congested corridor. But we are doing the work with councils at the moment.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay.

Mr YOUNIS: That will be subject to future decisions of government and councils, I think. We have done the work. All of the design work still needs to be developed. I think that is still for future decisions.

Mr HIBBINS: Yes. Okay. Thank you. I think last time we discussed South Kensington station, and I think the Metro Tunnel works around there obviously do not preclude a future upgrade. But in terms of the \$1 million that was spent, what did that actually get spent on?

Mr YOUNIS: Yes, the South Kensington station was an extension—Mr Tieppo, do you remember the scope of that work?—to the platforms; increasing the canopy cover, the protection cover, over there; and it was for, I believe, some disability access works. That is my recollection of the extent of works on the South Kensington station, which I will need to just check. I think there was a little bit more to that, but those were the main parts of the works.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. Thank you. There were some disability access improvements, but it is still not necessarily compliant with—

Mr YOUNIS: No, all of those works are not completed yet, and it is certainly just trying to tie it in with the Metro Tunnel works. My recollection is that those works are not quite completed yet.

Mr FOA: Passenger information screens.

Mr YOUNIS: Passenger information screens, public screens, toilet facilities, bike parking racks—

Mr FOA: That is against the whole program.

Mr YOUNIS: Across the program, yes.

Mr FOA: But I think the PIDS happened at South Kensington.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. And then as well the upgrades to South Yarra station have now been completed, which is fantastic. I commend the department on that. Is the department actively looking now at a further stage of upgrades or a continuation? That was included in the business case?

Mr YOUNIS: Well, yes. Accessibility stops—we are continually rolling out our programs, and as you know, South Yarra station is an example. That was a difficult one: over a bridge, the connection into the station—all of those. We have picked out all the easy ones, I suppose—

Mr HIBBINS: But I mean in terms of—sorry—not just the tram stops but the station itself. I mean, obviously the whole front foyer was—

Mr YOUNIS: Yes, so that is still part of it. There is a business case, and that is part of a government decision as to the next phase of that development.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. Terrific. Thank you. Now, the VAGO report *Integrated Transport Planning*, within that it was disclosed that there were integrated transport reports for a number of regions—the south and west metropolitan regions, I understand—and that those transport plans had not been published. Have those plans been published yet, or are they to be published?

Mr YOUNIS: Some plans are published if they are completed to a stage where they have been through a government process. A lot of those plans will go through a government process. Once that government process is completed and the decision is made, then they would be made public. I do not think any of those are published as yet.

Mr HIBBINS: So they are in development, and then there is a government decision about whether they are actually made public or not. Okay. Thank you. I will go back to tram stops, because I think in 2020–21 there were two tram stops that were upgraded with four planned for this financial year. I mean, that is obviously a very long way from the 1500 that need to be upgraded or so. What action is the government taking to actually make sure that our tram network is accessible, noting that I think there was a 2022 deadline for this to occur through legislation?

Mr YOUNIS: The commonwealth legislation—we are talking to the commonwealth about how we manage that element, because of course one of the unique characteristics of Melbourne is the extensive tram network. I think it is unfair—well, it is incorrect—to actually say that just putting in at-level crossings is the solution. Certainly the introduction of our next-generation tram and the order of 100 extra trams will go a significant way in improving the accessibility of our network. We are developing a tram rollout strategy that was funded as part of the last budget to develop that tram rollout strategy, which will prioritise, will set the standards for the tram network and provide a pathway for gradual and continued upgrade of that network. That is still in development.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. And just finally, are you able to provide the committee with some updated figures in terms of road usage now that we are coming out of lockdown? I mean, you have obviously given it for public transport, but in terms of just where we are at in terms of our roads. Are we at 100 per cent yet or over 100 per cent?

Mr YOUNIS: Yesterday we were at 92 per cent, and I can talk about all of the modelling around that at some point.

Mr HIBBINS: Cheers. Thank you.

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

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. I actually should put on record my community are active cyclists as well. Having a look at the TAC data by road user, the only type of road user where the year-on-year change has increased and the last reported year is above the five-year average is bicyclists. So can I put that on the record as a clear policy issue to deal with.

Noting your slides earlier and obviously a lack of patronage in public transport and a third of the year being in lockdown, earlier this year I spoke to the minister about the cash bonanza in road safety camera fines, the increase of over 27 per cent year on year. With so few people on the road, why has there been a cash bonanza in road safety fine revenue?

Mr YOUNIS: Mr Newbury, there are still people on the road—

Mr NEWBURY: I think we all saw photos of the roads being empty.

Mr YOUNIS: so there are fines on the roads. It is reported in our annual report, the amount that we have received from fines, and that goes into—

Mr NEWBURY: A 27 per cent increase going in.

Mr YOUNIS: consolidated revenue. I have not done any work or research as to why fines have gone up during this period, if they have, or what the nature of that is.

Mr NEWBURY: You are just like a happy recipient, really. Is that how it works? I mean, year on year into the future—and I know we are not dealing with that at the committee—it is projected to increase as well. So does your department do work on projections on revenue?

Mr YOUNIS: Revenue from fines is not an element that goes into consolidated revenue. What we concentrate on—

Mr NEWBURY: Does the department do any work in terms of the projections? I mean, it is in the budget. Are the projections done by your department?

Mr YOUNIS: They are done in conjunction with Department of Treasury and Finance and VicPol. So that is how those projections are put together. Our concentration, and it comes through our road safety program, is in enforcement as an important part of that for our road safety elements. That is where we concentrate our research and efforts, that is certainly the research that we get from Monash University and all that is around about road safety elements. We do not put any emphasis at all on the dollar figures or how that is used. That is not a part of the way that we frame that decision-making.

Mr NEWBURY: No, I appreciate that. It is just that you can probably understand why Victorians would look and say, ‘When we have got lockdowns and empty roads, why was there such a huge increase in cash fines?’. But I take your point that you are just happy recipients.

Can I take you to the department’s annual report at page 116, which notes that you have a possible liability in relation to Southern Cross station because of low patronage numbers, and the report that effectively the state or Victorians may have to pay money to the contractors of the station because of low patronage. I presume those negotiations are complete?

Mr YOUNIS: We are continually working with that. The Southern Cross station is a PPP, so it was a construction done many years ago and incorporates the construction element of the station.

Mr NEWBURY: No, I appreciate your point. All I am asking—

Mr YOUNIS: It also included payments for—

Mr NEWBURY: People.

Mr YOUNIS: people, and so—

Mr NEWBURY: For people. What I am trying to understand is: your report says there may be a cost for low numbers. Was there a cost?

Mr YOUNIS: We have not finalised any agreements with Southern Cross station yet. We are still in negotiations.

Mr NEWBURY: So no money has been paid out in that regard? So for the last—

Mr YOUNIS: No, no. We have not finalised any agreements for compensation outside the current PPP contract.

Mr NEWBURY: Okay. What time frame do you see those negotiations taking?

Mr YOUNIS: I cannot put an answer to that, Mr Newbury. This contract has still got another 30 years, I think. Not that long? It was 30 years.

Mr NEWBURY: Look, it is not a trick question. I guess I am just saying that the annual report says there may be a cost to Victorians because of a lack of numbers. If you have a look at the annual report—it is just that top paragraph there, page 116, if you have got it—it suggests that there may be a cost to Victorians. What you are saying is that those negotiations that were listed in the annual report—I presume it is COVID related; you know, less people are on—

Mr YOUNIS: In actual fact it is not, Mr Newbury. The issue with Southern Cross station is that the numbers were exceeding what they were before COVID, so these claims go back before COVID.

Mr NEWBURY: Okay.

Mr YOUNIS: That is why, quite frankly, the negotiations will take quite a while—because they have changed significantly as a result of COVID and we need to work through that. That may take quite a while.

Mr NEWBURY: I mean, I presume that because you have got it there as a possibility, would it be fair to say there may be a cost?

Mr YOUNIS: That is quite possible. If you look at our contractual arrangements, it gets down to cleaning and maintenance costs. If you have significantly greater numbers, then your cleaning and maintenance costs and maintenance of lifts and all those sorts of things go up. Before COVID we had significantly greater numbers in Southern Cross station and across all of our network, which is great. So we are still quite a way from negotiating that because of COVID.

Mr NEWBURY: That is okay. I will come back at a future hearing, I guess. The reason I ask is we spent \$1.1 billion on not building a road, so I just want to know how much we are going to spend for not using Southern Cross. Can I take you to city loop fire safety? I know the Ombudsman has previously found that city loop's fire safety is in need of urgent upgrade. There was a contractor appointed to do that work. The contractor is no longer in place—three years that contractor is no longer in place. Has any work been done on appointing a new contractor in the last three years?

Mr YOUNIS: Yes, Mr Newbury. I will start this by saying absolutely safety is essential. So we will not operate or maintain or manage a system that is unsafe, and we have made sure every element that would impact safety is being addressed. There are priorities in relation to that. And, yes, the contractor that we had in there finished unfortunately.

Mr NEWBURY: That was about three years ago, was it? 2018, I think.

Mr YOUNIS: That was about 2½, three years ago. That is about right. Yes, it is around that time. We have had our own internal people, and Kevin Devlin's team have been doing significant works.

Mr NEWBURY: In three years I hope there is a lot of work—volumes of work.

Mr YOUNIS: He will be able to give you an update on where we are at with that planning at this stage.

Mr NEWBURY: That would be great.

Mr DEVLIN: Obviously stage 1 works were completed around fire hydrant and CCTV and intruder detection works as well as fire detection systems.

Mr NEWBURY: Under the previous contractor?

Mr DEVLIN: So following the liquidation of the contractor that was awarded the works, there has been a period of commercial resolution of that contract and wrap-up.

Mr NEWBURY: When did that finish? Was that 2018?

Mr DEVLIN: No, that has been going on through the course of 2019 and 2020.

Mr NEWBURY: Would that have slowed you down in appointing a new contractor?

Mr DEVLIN: Yes. There are significant complexities because they had started works in the city underground on that contract. And with the appointed administrators there is obviously, as you could understand, a fair process to go through in terms of understanding the creditors and debtors of the company, and so that is not a quick process. But in the last 18 months we have commenced parallel investigations of the works that were done in the underground by the contractor and further detailed surveys and recommenced essentially a development process with an alternative contractor, which is one of our contractors that we use with the Level Crossing Removal Project. They had experience, you may recall, in the Caulfield to Dandenong project, where we went into the MURL and did significant upgrades in the MURL as part of the 80-kilometre power and signalling upgrade on the Pakenham line. So that contractor had significant experience. So we have worked over the last 12 months with that contractor to develop up a new scope of work, a new design.

Mr NEWBURY: In terms of scope, what is needing to be done?

Mr DEVLIN: So at the moment the main scope of works is a significant smoke extraction system and sprinkler system on the three platforms, or the three stations, and the multiple platforms across the MURL. We are very close to being able to recommend a contract to government to award, so we are hoping to award a contract either late this year or early next year to get on with that smoke extraction system and the sprinkler upgrade. We would hope to have the works completed at this stage in 2023, subject just to confirming occupation. It is essentially a very major event, and when we do that work we will have to close the MURL for a period of time and that is a significant disruption, so we are just looking to find the right time. Hopefully we can piggyback on some other disruptions.

Mr NEWBURY: So you said you are about to appoint or you are—

Mr DEVLIN: We are hoping to award a contract, so we are about to make some recommendations to government to award a contract—to the Treasurer to award a contract—and we hope that award will happen either late this year or early next year.

Mr NEWBURY: You can probably understand why I am asking. I mean, five years after the contractor folded—that is probably the right word—you are projecting for the works to be complete. When you are talking about smoke extraction and sprinkler systems inside the city loop, that is urgent work I would have thought.

Mr DEVLIN: Certainly at the moment the work has to be matched in with the all the other works that are going across the network, so it is not a—

Mr NEWBURY: No, I appreciate that, but we are talking about safety here.

Mr DEVLIN: Yes. My understanding is—and maybe the Secretary can talk to it—that I think it was the Ombudsman's report recommended improvements. MTM still operate and are responsible for the safety of those stations and they are still safely being operated. There are certainly, as pointed out, opportunities to improve that safety, and that is the work that we are getting on and doing following the liquidation of the company. Essentially picking up the pieces of that is not straightforward, but we have been moving to do that as quickly and expeditiously as we can.

Mr YOUNIS: Mr Newbury, can I just add it is really important that you understand that MTM have the safe operation requirements—they run a safe network. They continually are inspecting and doing works across the MURL as well as the whole network to ensure it is safe. So there is no operation in there and the issues that still

need to be done will need to be done. Like on all networks, we need to address issues for the future, but right now, today, the network is running in a safe operation.

Mr NEWBURY: Look, I appreciate the point. It is just it is the best part of a decade since the Ombudsman made a finding and we are now projecting five years after the previous contractor folded. This is a long period of time for what I would have thought are serious safety works, but I take that—

Mr YOUNIS: Just to be clear, there have been works undertaken—

Mr NEWBURY: I understand the department has been thinking; I get that.

Mr YOUNIS: so the stage 1 works—there have been works done in the tunnels. There has been \$40 million to \$50 million worth of work expended on that program as a result of that, which were those works that needed to be done more urgently than the others.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. Can I just leave one final point: the scaffolding abandoned at Flagstaff Gardens and Parliament station, is that related to the folded contractor, or is that modern art?

Mr YOUNIS: I am not sure, Mr Newbury.

Mr NEWBURY: There is abandoned scaffolding that I am aware of at those stations, so just to perhaps take on—

The CHAIR: Sorry, Mr Newbury. I would also remind you to keep your questions to the terms of reference of this inquiry.

Mr NEWBURY: Absolutely. This is government land, and I think that is a very fair question.

The CHAIR: And we are discussing the financial and performance outcomes for the year 2020–21.

Mr NEWBURY: We are paying for it. If it was modern art, we would have paid for that too.

Can I take you to the *KPMG Suburban Rail Loop Demand Modelling Report* of February 2021. I do not know, Secretary, if that is a question for you.

Mr YOUNIS: Mr Frankie Carroll is the CEO of the Suburban Rail Loop, and I am sure if there are any detailed questions, he will be able to—

Mr NEWBURY: Okay, no worries. Can I take you to—I am not wearing my glasses—I think it is page 28. It is February 2021. Actually, I might take you instead to page B-34.

Mr YOUNIS: Sorry, of which—

Mr NEWBURY: *Suburban Rail Loop Demand Modelling Report*, February 2021, KPMG, B-34. In short it is about households by precinct, increases over time. I note that in Burwood the number of households increases from 8000 to 17 000, and Box Hill 11 500 to 34 500. Let me read that again: Box Hill 11 500 households to 34 500 households—wow. Heidelberg, 8000 to 25 000; Cheltenham, 8000 to 22 000, Member for Mordialloc. Eight thousand to 22 000—wow, that is a lot of households. Do you understand what these projections are based on, Secretary?

Mr YOUNIS: There is quite a deal of modelling that was done as a part of that, and I will hand over to Mr Carroll.

Mr CARROLL: Thank you, Secretary, and thanks for the question. The modelling that has been done is a projection based on population growth, and we know that population growth by the mid-2050s is going to reach about 9 million people in Melbourne. With that population growth comes new houses, and it is projected 47 500 dwellings will increase in the area of Suburban Rail Loop precincts around that period of time.

Mr NEWBURY: And I understand that as part of those works there would have been some work on locality in the department. I mean, it is not the same number per area, is it? There would have been some work in the department on how each of those areas increase differently from each other. Is that a fair comment?

Mr CARROLL: It looks at the land use planning in those areas and—

Mr NEWBURY: Yes, right. So the land use planning. If you are increasing Box Hill from 11 000 households to 35 000 households, how many high-rise apartments will be built there? I mean, are these the type of projections you think about?

Mr CARROLL: Well, this is something that we work with councils on over a period of time, because we are talking about 2050 for those projections.

Mr NEWBURY: Yes, I understand.

Mr CARROLL: Over a period of time we will work with councils in relation to the increase.

Mr NEWBURY: But when you are talking about the planning works—I am just trying to understand—do you look at what is going to be required to be built there to fit those people in? As far as I understand it, some of these decisions will actually be taken away from the usual planning processes, as is often the case, and it will be a ministerial decision. So when you look at these projections, do you actually say, ‘Well, you know, we’re going to have to line the entirety of every main street in Box Hill with 30-storey apartment blocks to fit in an increase from 11 000 to 35 000’? I mean, are these decisions or discussions that you have?

Mr CARROLL: This is where we work with council in relation to what increase in density—

Mr NEWBURY: Council will be bypassed in the planning decisions.

Mr CARROLL: Council will be part of the planning decisions.

Mr NEWBURY: They will be part of a discussion; they will not be part of the decision. The minister will be part of the decision.

Mr CARROLL: Yes, so making sure consultation with community and councils is taken into account in relation to the planning laws that are implemented in these areas.

Mr NEWBURY: They will be part of a discussion; they certainly will not be part of the decision. It would be a government decision. All I am asking is: are there any planning discussions that you have had that talk about how you will cater for that enormous increase in people?

Mr CARROLL: Not currently, because we are planning that for 2050. So those planning discussions will start happening with councils in the future.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. Can I just leave—

Mr YOUNIS: Mr Newbury, it is worth pointing out it is not just the Suburban Rail Loop. *Plan Melbourne* is the strategic document—

Mr NEWBURY: Yes, I understand. Thank you.

Mr YOUNIS: that is used by the state to determine that, and that will be updated and revised continually over the next 10, 15, 20 years to accommodate the population.

Mr NEWBURY: If you are living in Box Hill, expect a lot of people to be moving into your suburb.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Newbury. Time has expired. As we are halfway through the proceedings, we might take a quick 10-minute break and resume at 5 past 11, so I declare the hearing adjourned momentarily. Thank you.

I will reopen this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. The call is with Ms Richards.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you very much, Secretary and officials, for your appearance this morning and for all the work over the last couple of months. I know it has been a demanding time for everyone. I would like to explore the level crossing removal program and particularly acknowledge in the lead-up to the 2014 election the government announced 50 level crossings. It is nice to have Mr Devlin back at the table. I am conscious

there was a commitment for them to be removed by the end of 2022, so I am interested in having you advise us, the committee, on the progress of this commitment, please.

Mr YOUNIS: Thanks, Ms Richards, and you are right, Mr Devlin is here to talk about that. But I did refer to the Upfield line works that are now pretty well complete. Fortunately I got to go up there, which I had not been able to do for quite a while during lockdown, and you can see the public space that has been developed with those cycling paths. It goes down to what an integrated Department of Transport is about. It is not just about shifting people from A to B; it is very much building spaces and building communities. I am sure Mr Devlin will give us an update of where we are with that program.

Mr DEVLIN: Thanks, committee. Yes, happy to report that at the moment we have got three major occupations underway and coming close to completion, which will see us go over the 50 level crossings removed milestone, which will be a great achievement. Essentially that will be achieved a year ahead of schedule, so we are really looking forward to completing those works. It has been a little bit of a difficult time obviously, like for everyone. But the teams and crews have worked tremendously well, particularly over the last couple of months, to get those major occupations done. We will have Manchester and Maroondah level crossings removed very shortly—in the next week—followed by five on the Frankston line and then followed by Ferguson Street on the Williamstown line. So again, great progress.

At the moment we are removing on average a level crossing once a month. Over the last financial year we removed 11 level crossings, and again, Mr Younis was pointing out not only some great improvements to safety and congestion, allowing more trains to run along those corridors in the future; lots of open space. We have completed to date 26 new train stations, and the precincts and open space and the assets that go along with that have also been a quite considerable secondary benefit to those communities. We have built over 40 kilometres of shared path, over 2000 additional car parks and thousands of extra bicycle facilities and storage facilities at those stations, so again trying to fit within that integrated transport network and produce connected sites and connected stations that service transport hubs—again, pleased with the team's progress on that, and I think the communities, once they can get back into the public transport system, will be able to experience those new facilities even more.

Mr YOUNIS: Ms Richards, I might just add there, because Mr Devlin pointed out something that we sometimes lose track of with the level crossing removal program: Melbourne's train network is a very open system, one of the most open systems in the world. A lot of people have talked about why, but Melbourne's train network was laid out when the city was not much bigger than Geelong really. So there was much open space, whereas most major cities in the world's train networks were laid out when they were actually developed cities. London and even Sydney were far more developed cities than Melbourne was when trains became the thing in the late 1800s. So we have got this legacy issue which we have never properly addressed. The issue about that is that we have a significantly greater number of incidents of interaction with people and suicides and others on our network than other major cities because of that issue we have with an open network. This is such an important part in not just building spaces and building communities but creating a much safer environment for our community and for our road network. And we can talk about how much this opens up our road network and provides greater access and movement across our roads, but it is actually personal safety issues which are a really important part of the level crossing removal program which we often do not talk about, because there are such really good stories around that. But it would be an important part of it.

Ms RICHARDS: Thanks so much to both of you for those insights. The government has flagged that the government is going to increase the number of level crossings to be removed by 2025 from 75 to 85—looking across to both of you. I am interested in trying to have some sort of understanding of how this is going to be achieved.

Mr DEVLIN: Look, obviously being ahead of schedule and with crews out there at the moment working, the opportunity was there to add additional level crossings, 10 extra level crossings. So we have started the early planning stages of those 10 level crossings, and we are aiming to have those complete by 2025. So we are looking forward to getting the works done at the moment to the end of this year. Then some of our teams will be really starting to get into that planning and design work for those new crossings in full steam early next year, and we will be starting that. And as our ability to consult face to face with the communities increases we are looking forward to getting out into those communities and sharing our concepts and ideas for what those precincts and places are going to be and how we are going to approach the removal of those additional 10 level

crossings. So it is certainly providing significant ongoing continuity for the over 6000 workers that are working on the level crossing program, and importantly that continuity and pipeline is a highly valuable thing for the program. It allows us to drive lots of cost efficiencies and improvement across the program, and I think that is a benefit to having that significant pipeline ahead of us.

Ms RICHARDS: At the risk of being a little bit parochial, the government announced the Cranbourne line duplication project is a year ahead of schedule, and I am interested in perhaps understanding and exploring if this does still remain the case and what is the result for the commuters, the people of Cranbourne and in fact not just Cranbourne but the whole corridor that Cranbourne serves?

Mr DEVLIN: So, yes, it is certainly good to be able to announce that early next year we will complete the Cranbourne duplication—8 kilometres of duplicated track, a new station at Merinda Park and the removal of additional level crossings, particularly the Greens Road level crossing, which is about to go. The Cranbourne line will be the first line to be level crossing free come 2025, which will be an important milestone as well. But certainly as we have been doing improvements to the network we take the opportunity—with the level crossing removals impacting so many parts of the network—to make those improvements to the rest of the network. The Cranbourne duplication will allow 10-minute services on that line, essentially a turn-up-and-go service, so again it is significant benefit for the people on the Cranbourne line, particularly at the Cranbourne end. Also as part of the project, you know, significant kilometres of shared path as well are being constructed. So again the teams have done an excellent job to manage the challenges, to be ahead of schedule. They have adopted some very innovative construction methods. Again, that pipeline of work allows us to drive the efficiencies across our program of works, and we are seeing the benefits of that, being able to plan well ahead and deliver. The teams have executed the plan really well in Cranbourne, and we are pleased to have that opening a year ahead.

Mr YOUNIS: Ms Richards, it is worth pointing out though—because you have raised a point about the timing and when we program these sorts of works—there are a number of layers to that. One is the occupations, making the most so we minimise the impact on our community, ensure that if there are complementary works we may have to bring forward or even delay some projects just to ensure that we minimise that impact. So this planning happens on a yearly, on a weekly basis all the time. But the other element of that is—and we often hear about it, and I know Mr Hannett's team have done a lot of work on it—what they talk about as the heated market and the pipeline of works. And there have been a number of studies and work done across Australia about whether we can accept more of these major infrastructure works. But the way we manage that is not just in the planning of our programs to ensure that similar types of expertise are not, you know, all happening on 1 January 2022 or whatever it is, that we spread that program out, but it is also done on a micro level, like Mr Devlin has just said. The Cranbourne line is a classic example of that, where we brought forward some of those works to be done in conjunction with other elements so we can use similar skills that are already there and we not overheating the market or hitting other elements in our jobs. The spread of the jobs, the spread of the skills, is managed within the program that we have got and managed that way.

So there are a number of ways that we manage that pipeline of works, and the Cranbourne line upgrade was done in conjunction with similar skills that we have got available—and signalling and all those are probably the most heated market we have got—making sure we spread out those skills and we are not coming back in those circumstances trying to get those people again if we want them out at, you know, Gippsland building the Gippsland line or whatever we need them doing there. So that sort of micromanagement of the program will see some programs brought forward but also will see some programs delayed purely on a programming basis to ensure we manage that workload.

Ms RICHARDS: And, Mr Younis, I think you touched on this before. Firstly, I am interested in understanding if there are any other lines that will be level crossing free, but also perhaps to that point about what the other benefits are of a line being level crossing free, because sometimes it is not that clear.

Mr YOUNIS: So, Mr Devlin, you might have bit of the whole program. I have not got it in my head.

Mr DEVLIN: Yes. So certainly along with the Cranbourne line, with the addition of the extra 10 and taking it to 85 level crossings, we will have removed by 2025 all the level crossings along the Pakenham to Sunbury corridor as well, being the busiest rail corridor in Melbourne and supporting obviously a significant backbone to a number of the other projects that are in progress at the moment. You know, it is really important to be able

to have full freedom to run and choose the network and the timetable in the future to support that significant volume of people using that major corridor.

Ms RICHARDS: And the other part, the benefits, I think that that is a really interesting element.

Mr YOUNIS: I think it is, yes. Ms Richards, it goes down to there are so many layers of that, and it is that jobs pipeline, for a start. I know that Mr Hannett and his team work significantly in relation to: how do we attract the right skills? How do we build skills? There are a number of programs—and I wish I could roll them out—about developing skills, there are programs for increasing the women working in the transport sector and there are programs for increasing Aboriginal involvement in our programs and young people in development works. And these are hundreds of numbers, not just small percentages, that the programs, not only the level crossing program, attract. Mr Hannett might be able to talk a bit more about certainly those programs that he puts in there.

But the level crossing removal program is not just a rail program, and quite frankly primarily that public safety issue is significant. But it is very much a roads program as well, because anybody who is driving around these networks knows how much easier it is to move around the network. I will probably run out of time, but we have also introduced what we have called our Smarter Roads program, which really complements that, which works on signalling, access through the network, and is complemented by the level crossing removal program. Mr Hannett, you might be able to talk about some of the other social elements that are built into these programs, particularly the level crossing removal program.

Mr HANNETT: Thanks, Paul. The major skills guarantee—so cadets, apprentices and so forth—is a big part of the initiative. The Indigenous programs are 2.5 per cent of the workforce. It has to be that. Then we have a massive I suppose planning exercise across the program in terms of the skills that we require to deliver the infrastructure and make sure we plan ahead. I suppose we are planning two to five years ahead, seeing what we need as we go. On a project-by-project basis we just make sure that as we procure the jobs, the resources required to deliver them, we are confident they are there. That is why the level crossings program has been reasonably successful. Setting up five program teams and actually giving them a program of work where they have sort of got four or five years ahead of them enables the better plan on what we are doing.

Ms RICHARDS: I was fortunate to meet one of the people who had arrived in Australia as refugees recently from Syria—a few years ago now—who was working on one of the projects. To see that sort of additional social benefit and a name and a face was really extraordinary. Just to explore again, slightly deeper, I am interested in understanding what opportunities there have been for small business with the removal of the level crossings.

Mr HANNETT: I think there is a smorgasbord of work. We are actually turning over \$800 million a month across the program right now. Last year I think it was about an \$8.2 billion turnover. And within that obviously, across the program, we need all spectrums of support, depending on small or large businesses. A lot of the level crossings work in fact we build pretty well like Meccano sets. A lot of the work is actually manufactured off site and brought to site and put together on site. What that allows is lots of smaller businesses to actually help us with manufacturing precast elements. That is an example of it. Then we also have engaged social enterprises across the program for providing disadvantaged people or disabled people work with various aspects, whether it is landscaping across the programs or so forth. But yes, certainly with the volume of work that we are undertaking right now, the size of it creates enormous capacity to provide opportunity to small business.

Mr YOUNIS: And Ms Richards, I think it is a really important part because the level crossing removal program—and it goes down to some of the comments I have made earlier—is not just rail projects. While we develop really significant skills in signalling and rail construction and all of those elements, which really have not been in Victoria for—it would only be in the last decade or so. I remember going to engineering school and we were taught nothing about rail, it was all about road, so that has completely changed now, and developing that pipeline of skills has been a really important part of it. But because of the nature of the level crossings, and we talked about cycle paths and even street furniture, there are so many elements of it that invite less than tier 1 contractors, so a much broader array of smaller contractors into that field, and the way that Mr Devlin and the team that Corey has got there developed that really encouraged that type of involvement into these, particularly the level crossing removal program.

Ms RICHARDS: Terrific. Thanks very much for your evidence this morning.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Richards. Mr Limbrick.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you, Chair. And thank you all for appearing today. I just wanted to start with a couple of questions around the budget line item for train services. In the 2021 revised figures it was showing approximately \$170 million over budget, despite having low patronage as you indicated in your presentation. It says in the notes that it was due to COVID-19. Can you explain what was the cause of that?

Mr YOUNIS: Yes, we have incurred quite significant extra costs as a result of COVID-19, and I will go to Mr Foa, who will be able to give that breakdown of what that involved. What we did do of course is continue to run the network, so therefore those inbuilt costs of train maintenance and of operational issues were still there. So we did not cut the network down. We did not reduce our service levels. In actual fact we expanded our service levels. Some of those costs were an expansion of the service levels, but there are other specific COVID-related issues that we had to cover off, and Mr Foa might be able to cover some of those.

Mr FOA: Thanks, Secretary and Mr Limbrick. To the Secretary's point, maintaining a full service offer during COVID has been important for key workers. Twenty-five per cent of people using the network—although a much smaller volume, but 25 per cent of those persons—identified as health or related workers, so in terms of the pandemic response it was a really important part of the pandemic response to enable those key workers to access the services. The budget paper for the 2020–21 financial year has \$296.2 million for once-off COVID funding, which was additional cleaning stations, so each vehicle—bus, train and tram—is deep cleaned every night, and there is in-service cleaning. Originally before in the early days of COVID it was about surface and surface contacts, so a range of initiatives were put in place to work with Health about adopting a COVID-safe plan to enable us to keep operating the network. That meant reducing cash handling and it meant reducing interactions with authorised officers, so there were revenue impacts as well as expense impacts with the additional cleaning that took place. We also in that financial year did have a support package for operators. The last thing we want is for the operators to fall over and experience an insolvency event.

Mr LIMBRICK: This was related to decreased ticket sales?

Mr FOA: Correct, yes. Yarra Trams and MTM have an exposure to the fare box, and government sought to put in a support package that saw them making no profit against that money but that factored in the lower fare box and also factored in some repayments required from those operators in future years. It was a win-win for government and the companies to be able to keep going. The Victorian public did not pay extra profit on those services and it ensured that the services kept running.

We have kept the cleaning going in accordance with Health's requirements, and trains, trams and buses have never been cleaner, never been safer and never been more frequent, because there are additional services that are on the network. With the greenfields timetable that we introduced during the reporting period there were some 425 extra services a week put across the train network, and you know, many of those were regional services as well with V/Line. So it does show a higher level of expenditure, but certainly we have been monitoring the contracts to make sure that the Victorian public's value proposition is absolutely there.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you.

Mr YOUNIS: There was also quite a strong advertising campaign to get people back onto the network and talk about the safety and how you behave on the network—you know, wear masks, social distancing. We did quite a bit of work, and you would have heard them on the trains and trams and all of those—the buses.

Mr LIMBRICK: Yes.

Mr YOUNIS: So that program was also rolled out. And we had the 30 per cent off-peak fare, and that was about trying to spread the load across the network. But certainly the fare box reduction and the way the fare boxes work is that it is a shared responsibility. So if there is a reduction in fare box, then the state are required under the franchise contract to make that up to some degree. Likewise—and it has not happened in the last couple of years—if there is a significant increase in fare box, then the state receives a benefit from that. It has proven to be, quite frankly, a very effective mechanism through this period. There are so many other franchises across the world, and just about all of England, that have fallen over because they did not have that and the way

we have been able to manage this, and services have been stopped. So it has been effective in managing that. Of course what that means is that the state do not receive the fare box that was there, and that will impact on budgets.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you. With regard to the extra cleaning, I remember—and I think you alluded to it in your previous response—early on in the pandemic there was a lot of focus on surfaces and things like this, and then I think subsequently as we have learned more about COVID my understanding is that there has been less of a focus on that and more of a focus around aerosol transmission. Have you had updated advice from Health on whether this sort of surface cleaning is actually an effective thing to do or whether we should be changing to some different type of hygiene rather than surface cleaning?

Mr FOA: We are working with our Health colleagues almost weekly. We meet with them every week around changes in advice. As we know, the pandemic has kept shifting all the time around what the areas of difference should be. So we have looked at the standard of filtration and our handling in our vehicles. We have also been looking at the cleaning regimes. We have also put hand sanitisers right across the network as well. We are advised by Health that these are still important measures, and they also are very important, as are masks on public transport still a requirement. We see that being in place for some time. However, Health advises that the current cleaning regime we have in place has been effective and is likely to stay that way.

It is always a really healthy reminder that the pandemic is not over. We are not through this. We are seeing the numbers in the UK, for instance, and looking forward to what is going to happen in the winter ahead for the settings in public transport for us. So we have got a weather eye, with Health's advice, about what is likely to happen in June, July and into August next year. So we want to make sure that people have the confidence to travel, and I think people seeing highly visible on the network cleaning, signage, mask compliance as being all good confidence-building factors and resilience-building factors for the network.

Mr YOUNIS: Just to add, and Mr Foa might know himself, with the issue of cleaning, whether we need to continue that, I raised that with senior Health officials only in the last couple of weeks because I wanted to know exactly: is this something that is still—with COVID-19, with all of those other ones, the delta variant—an issue? Because exactly what you said, it is an airborne disease. They made it very clear to me that, no, it still settles, it is still there, and the surface cleaning is still a really important part of the overall management of the program.

Mr LIMBRICK: But you have had other things like focusing on air filtration and things like that?

Mr FOA: Yes.

Mr LIMBRICK: Yes. Okay. Understand. Another thing that surprised me from the budget paper was the customer satisfaction index of 77. I am not sure if that is a percentage or not. I rode on the network many times during lockdowns and things like that, and I have got to say it was pretty good. You get guaranteed a car park pretty much. You get your own private train carriage all to yourself, and sparkling clean, as you say, and it pretty much runs on time. In fact the only complaint I would have had is it is a bit lonely in there all by yourself. But why is the satisfaction index so low, considering that the service is so high? I do not understand. What would people be upset about?

Mr FOA: That is a metric. Built into the contracts, we do have like a mystery shopper exercise, so we have lots of reports coming in from people that use the service. We also monitor what comes in through our call centre and through our PTV app feedback and also through the website. We have found that those that are travelling have generally been very positive, and in fact the only service that we wound back was the Night Network during curfew, to align with the curfew. And that attracted some community feedback, because there were people relying on that service at night that did not have those other options. So we think with patronage, whilst low, people had a good experience as you are describing, but what we are aiming to do is to try and attract people back to the network and have confidence that it is clean and it is safe and it is reliable. And that is our focus going forward.

Mr YOUNIS: Mr Limbrick, one of the things—and I read them every now and then—about the complaints that come in, so let us concentrate on the things that people do not like, is it changed a lot during the period. So at certain times there was a lot with, 'We've seen people on the tram or the train without a mask on', and that created a lot of anxiety. So that was a strong one. Occasionally you would get the one where, 'We saw someone

on the staff that didn't have his mask on', so mask-related. So it tended to relate to where we were during the pandemic, or 'We saw people and they were standing too close to me on the train'. A lot of the issues which previously were about 'I turned up and it was raining' or 'I couldn't get onto the train' or 'It was too full' or 'It was late' or 'It didn't do the service I wanted', those sort of changed very much to personal space and personal responses. So that was most of the complaints we got about the network and are still getting in this period.

Mr LIMBRICK: I suppose what I am getting at is: given the current situation or the situation that we had during, you know, the last financial year and up to now even—like, it is still pretty empty on the trains; I took the train this morning because I knew we were doing transport—how can we get this figure higher? It seems like, you know, how could it get any higher? It seems unattainable to push this up any higher, isn't it?

Mr YOUNIS: Look, I think what we are doing is providing a really reliable service. So if you look at all the research, what we want to be able to do is turn up and be able to get on the transport choice that we had and be able to connect seamlessly across the network. So it is not just about the one trip that people really are looking for now. They are looking at a connection of trips, and certainly as a part of the Department of Transport, the integrated transport portfolio is connecting the bus network to our train network to our tram network to our active transport network, you know, providing the cages at the thing so that people do not have to plan or think about their trip. It just happens for them. If you look at the research, that is where the expectation around the community is. And I think the opportunities in that, particularly with technology advancements we have got, with apps about people able to connect things, our role is to provide as many services as we can so that it can be that turn-up-and-go experience, so that you can connect all of those journeys, so that I can walk down the street, use my bike and connect to whatever aspect it is. So they are the elements that we are concentrating on. Removing the congestion through the network is really important, and certainly pre pandemic a lot of the complaints about 'It was too crowded on St Kilda Road'—

Mr LIMBRICK: I imagine no-one complains about that anymore.

Mr YOUNIS: Well, it is not a complaint at the moment.

Mr FOA: If I can add, Secretary, we have also introduced technology that allows people to find out how busy their service is. The RideSpace technology that we have now surfaced through Google journey planners, which gets enormous amounts of hits through Google, allows people to see where their train is—like a rideshare app—and how many people are on it and how busy the platform is, so people can make an informed choice when people are starting to return back to the network. I think it was 36 per cent yesterday across the network. That is a pretty strong return coming just a couple of weeks out of lockdown. That is faster than last time around, and we are finding more hits on our website, on our journey-planning apps, already. So we are expecting strong returns to the network. We are trying to give as many technology tools for people to be able to navigate it better, and I think that will give us an uptick in customer satisfaction.

Mr LIMBRICK: On people returning to the network, what sort of modelling have you done on what the final network will look like? Because I notice when we look at the periods where we opened up, in the chart that you showed in your presentation, we got nowhere near back to normal, which you would expect. But I have been reading about what has been happening overseas. In large amounts of CBD areas that were office space they have got remote workers. They are going to continue with that pretty much indefinitely. A lot of people that used to catch the train do not want to catch the train anymore—they drive. How confident are we that we are going to get back to normal within some sort of time frame? Have you been modelling that?

Mr YOUNIS: Yes. And look, this has been a modeller's dream world, about what the opportunities are, and certainly monitoring what has been happening overseas has been really important. Overseas they are talking about figures of 10 per cent or more that will not come back to the network or will work from home.

Mr LIMBRICK: That must have serious financial impacts and on the contracts with the operators as well, surely.

Mr YOUNIS: Well, not really, because when you are talking about the modelling, and particularly in transport, we plan and develop things for decades in advance. I think there is a short-term issue that we will need to manage, but long term it will be different. We expect over the next year to get back to around that 70 per cent of the network, on the public transport network. We are running various scenarios for this because of the vibrant nature of it and we are continually looking at overseas data, but it is generally 70 per cent—and

that is in the short term. But then what will happen is, if we think five or six or 10 years down the track, with population growth if you looked at the budget papers they showed that over the next two or three years population growth will actually recover significant amounts of what is lost out of the network now. Even 10 per cent off the network is only really a small number of trips, because we have hundreds of millions of trips a year. We have done a lot of work around what that means. It really means, from our infrastructure perspective, we should continue to build the infrastructure, because we will be getting back to the numbers we had within three or four years—with return to the network—and even if we do not get the return to the network and people travel differently and operate differently, we will get that back with population growth in three or four years time.

Mr LIMBRICK: Are those population growth projections coming from the ABS? Because I note we actually had a population decline in the last ABS figures, and there have been lots of questions about the population growth modelling.

Mr YOUNIS: DELWP do a lot of work around their population figures. We rely very much on them, and we are updating that all the time. I think the budget papers this year had what was a part of the government's projections for the next three or four years. That will of course be upgraded and developed each year, but we are continually reviewing those.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Limbrick. Ms Taylor.

Ms TAYLOR: Hello, Secretary and department officials. I was just wanting to move on to the North East Link, noting that a contract has been awarded for the North East Link primary package. I think it would be really helpful for the committee to have a better understanding of what the actual benefits are that this project will deliver for the community.

Mr YOUNIS: Ms Taylor, we have got Duncan Elliott here. He is all North East Link, another one of those programs that has progressed significantly over the COVID period, and he will be able to give you an update on all things North East Link.

Mr ELLIOTT: Thanks, Secretary. And thank you, Ms Taylor, for the question. About 10 days ago the North East Link reached a major milestone in awarding the tunnelling package for the works, which is a 6.5-kilometre tunnel extending from Watsonia through to Bulleen. It will be Victoria's longest tunnel. We were very pleased to have a very competitive field bidding for the works, made up of both international and domestic builders, designers and architects, and the project that we have now awarded responds to essentially three years of community feedback and the outcomes of the environment effects statement. We have, as I said, a longer tunnel. We have a very high degree of urban design that has been applied to the concept. We have the Yarra link bridge—land bridge—at the southern entry to the tunnel, which connects the Koonung Creek Trail to the Bulleen parklands and the Eastern Freeway city trail. And we have opened up some 50 MCGs worth of open space through the design approach but also through the construction methodology. And importantly, whilst the tunnel is around 600 metres longer than originally planned in terms of underground road, about 1.9 kilometres more of that tunnel will be built using underground boring machines, which is really where we manage the disruption to the local community and are able to then deliver elements such as the Greensborough Highway or Greensborough Road boulevard treatment with lots of tree planting. We knew obviously a project like this has an impact on trees in the area that we need to remove to construct the project, but having a design and construction methodology that has come forward in the bids allows us to then replant in the road reserve in response to where the community obviously will benefit most.

In terms of the benefits of the project, it is designed to carry up to 135 000 vehicles a day. For those that know the Rosanna Road–Bulleen Road–Manningham Road–Greensborough Highway corridor, it is exceptionally congested and has been even during COVID times, with a lot of freight moving from the north to the east and the south-east of Melbourne. The project is designed to take that freight and those trucks off local roads like Rosanna Road, so that will see 15 000 trucks a day removed from that corridor and into the tunnel and onto a freeway that is designed to safely manage that degree of demand. I think, as Mr Hibbins was referring to earlier, the project builders and designers have taken the opportunity to integrate eight key links in the active cycling network that have been difficult to close for some years, so resulting in some 34 kilometres of new and

connected paths that the project will deliver, and some of those really will service some of those high-need corridors such as the new link over the Yarra River near Kew.

The contract is now a build-and-operate contract, including 25 years of maintenance, which the Spark consortium have won, and they will now really kick on and start the detailed design work before moving into construction next year.

Ms TAYLOR: Very good.

Mr YOUNIS: Ms Taylor, I just would not mind adding—and it goes back to probably Mr Limbrick's question around the modelling—that the North East Link is going to be really important, because some of the modelling that we are seeing and the work that we have done show that freight traffic will increase proportionally higher than other types of traffic, and the North East Link will be absolutely crucial in accommodating some of those changed travel patterns. The Suburban Rail Loop is another one with those shorter different trips. But certainly the North East Link is picking up a lot of that freight increase, and I think last year, just in the last financial year, we had a 14 per cent increase in freight through the port of Melbourne. That was just last year, and we expect that to continue more. So the North East Link will be an important part of responding to some of that modelling that we have been doing, and we expect it to develop over the next couple of years.

Ms TAYLOR: Wow, all that freight. And I just want to double-check too, at the risk of being repetitious: you were detailing all of the benefits to the community et cetera—does that include the additional scope elements that you have transacted there, because I was just making sure I had covered all the elements?

Mr ELLIOTT: We are building essentially a new connection between two freeways in an area that does not have a freeway reserve. It was not a planned freeway reserve, so the planning process and the environment effects statement identified about 110 different conditions that needed to be applied to the design and construction method for the project, and they have been reflected in what we have seen come back. As an example, we need to occupy either temporarily or permanently a number of sporting fields in the corridor to actually build the project, and as a result of doing that we have had to invest in upgrading alternative sites to host those clubs during the construction period or permanently, and that has been a \$68 million investment that has been made at Ford Park in essentially West Ivanhoe as well as Binnak Park in Greensborough and the Greensborough secondary college. The investments in those sports clubs alone generates additional hours that can be made use of in those fields. They are all lit. They have all got female-friendly changing facilities and support a much broader range of different uses, and synthetic surfaces in some cases.

Those sorts of benefits as a result of how we need to build the project then flow on to the community as well, as well as this contract alone generating some 8000 jobs, which is a significant job creation number for that part of Melbourne. Overall we expect the project to deliver 10 000 jobs over the life of delivery, but this contract that we have just recently announced relates to just the tunnelling package and that is 8000 workers, so from that lots of opportunities, as has been mentioned this morning, around social procurement, major projects skills guarantees and the Aboriginal employment target. The SPA consortium have come back with quite a comprehensive program approach to bringing in different types of skills and priority jobseeker opportunities to their program and really providing added benefit to that part of the city.

Ms TAYLOR: Good. Now, I know also personally—it touches on the northern part of the Southern Metro Region, but I know there has been a long process of community consultation, as is appropriate. I think it would be really helpful for the committee to know how that community feedback has been incorporated into the design of the project and perhaps to outline what future opportunities there might be for community input.

Mr ELLIOTT: Yes. We have been fortunate enough to have had some 15 700 pieces of feedback from the public over the journey of this project. We commenced an environment effects statement in 2019. We had an eight-week panel hearing and, as I mentioned, that generated 110 performance requirements, if you like, for the project to respond to—planning conditions. As an example of one of those, which I know was a key factor during the hearings for the project, construction compounds that need to be established to build the project, that operate near homes and near businesses. For this project every one of those compounds has to have a plan developed which sets out the operations, the nature of the works, the footprint, and then that gets approved by the Minister for Planning. We have had a number of those already developed and approved and implemented

for our early works program. That is an example where the community were concerned about wanting to understand where the works were going to be managed from, where the lay-down areas were going to be and therefore are having a published version of that plan available on the website. Another example is the traffic noise outcomes on the Eastern Freeway where that corridor will be treated as essentially a new freeway under the traffic noise policy that the state has. That drops the standard down to a 63-decibel limit, which is better than what is there today.

I think the main point that I would make in relation to how community feedback has fed into the design is about the longer tunnel, both the finished product—longer tunnel to Watsonia—but also the way it is being built. I think some of the early feedback we have had from the public and stakeholders is the benefit that they see from having tunnel-boring machines run underground longer, replacing what would have previously been delivered as a cut and cover type approach with a lot more disruption and noise and dust and so forth. So, construction methodology—and then of course urban design. We heard from the community all the way through about the need for a project of this nature to have a legacy in terms of what it delivers, and I am sure that those who have seen the materials that we have released as part of the contract award would agree that the urban design outcome is very, very high.

In terms of next steps, the consortium will now move through their detailed design process. Again, one of our environmental performance requirements for this project is that we need to exhibit an urban design and landscape plan, which is quite a detailed document which gets down to dealing with really the local issues, so dealing with how people will see noise walls from the properties, the material selection on those walls, some of the local traffic movements and how they are being managed. So we expect that urban design and landscape plan to go on exhibition early next year. That will be on exhibition for about 30 days, people will be able to make submissions on that and that will then be ultimately put to the Minister for Planning for approval.

I think it is really important to say that right through this journey from 2017 community input and feedback have been fundamental to how we have come up with the concept and design for the project. We have two community liaison groups who have run for a number of years now. We have business liaison groups that we have now set up to provide feedback and two-way communication with places like the Watsonia traders, who will be potentially disrupted during the works, and to make sure that we have plans and actions in place to support those businesses during construction and to be able to take up the opportunities of having 8000 workers nearby to their business as well, which is a great opportunity for a number of them.

Obviously we have also got some key stakeholders that we have worked with for a long time through places like the Veneto Club, schools, the Heide gallery and others that need to continue to operate their businesses in what will be a challenging environment as we build the project. But we have built and will maintain and carry forward those relationships as we move through the next stage.

Ms TAYLOR: Very good. I just want to explore some other aspects of the project. I understand that there are extra lanes being provided on the Eastern Freeway and the M80 ring-road. Can you explain why this has been incorporated into the North East Link Project?

Mr ELLIOTT: Yes. The package that we have awarded now is really about getting the tunnel in and getting that constructed to provide access to the tunnel and to deal with the challenges that I am sure committee members are aware of on the Eastern Freeway today, particularly around Bulleen Road and Doncaster Road. Every afternoon and morning there is congestion and there is breakdown of the flow through there. The idea of the upgrades to the Eastern Freeway is to separate the movements of traffic getting on and off the freeway from that moving through on a longer trip into the tunnel, for example, to head onto North East Link.

The other key element of the additional lanes on the eastern is to provide a much improved and safer, more efficient environment for the buses that use that freeway. They currently run on the shoulders, so every time they cross an exit or entry ramp they need to move back onto the freeway and then back onto the shoulder to manage that manoeuvre safely, which obviously is a challenge in some parts of the day. So the project will also involve the construction of dedicated lanes off the freeway itself for buses heading from Doncaster via, as part of the network, a new park-and-ride at Bulleen, which has started construction at the moment, and then we are due to finish that towards the end of next year. So those buses will have their own right of way. They will run off the shoulders into the city in a much safer environment. Up the north end on the ring-road again we have the same problem of the weaving of traffic coming on and off the freeway—so a similar treatment to manage the

on and off movements and to ensure that people who want to go on that longer trip through the tunnel, out to the south-east or the east, make their decision sooner, get into the right lane and avoid that congestion effect of the weaving of traffic as they move on and off the freeway.

So a really important part is separating traffic, separating the movements that people need to make, providing good access into the tunnel. And I think I have mentioned to the committee before that the important element here is that most of this work is being undertaken on the Eastern Freeway east of the tunnels, because that is where the demand for the traffic using North East Link will head from the north and vice versa from the south and the east.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you. Now, I think it is also useful for committee to explore the state tolling corporation. I understand we are going with this as opposed to a private company. Can you explain the benefits of that?

Mr ELLIOTT: State Toll Co was established earlier this year. It is a Department of Transport entity. Rightly it is quite separate to my role as the CEO of the project delivery group. State Toll Co will be a statutory public non-financial corporation set up in the department. It will have the remit to deliver the tolling infrastructure over the life of the delivery of the project, and that will be making use of the latest technology of the day. It will then have the power to set prices for tolling and collect the revenue and, as you mentioned, that revenue is then captured by that public non-financial corporation within government. So the public-private partnership that has been let for the project is about design, build and maintain but has no role in collecting or managing the tolling interface for the project. It is the first time that has been done, I believe, in Victoria—to have a non-financial corporation set up to collect those tolls.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Taylor. Mrs McArthur.

Mrs McARTHUR: Thank you, Chair. My first question is to Mr Calafiore, and it involves the rollout spend on wire rope barriers. What was it in the last financial year?

Mr YOUNIS: Mrs McArthur, I think either Mr Calafiore or even Mr Northey might be able to help in the actual spend. Mr Calafiore, have you got that answer or is that a Mr Northey—

Mr NORTHEY: Yes.

Mr YOUNIS: The rollout figure is—the money is provided by TAC, but Regional Roads Victoria actually do the rollout for us, and Mr Northey might be able to give us that update.

Mr NORTHEY: Hi, Mrs McArthur.

Mrs McARTHUR: Very happy to be—

Mr NORTHEY: So the question was about rollout of wire rope barriers.

Mrs McARTHUR: What was the cost of wire rope barriers in the last financial year, and the rollout?

Mr NORTHEY: Right, yes. So in terms of the rollout of wire rope barriers, there is a number of programs. So we have got the—

Mrs McARTHUR: Just the total cost will do.

Mr NORTHEY: Yes, okay. So the total cost is—I will have to take that exactly on notice. It comes out of three different programs. It is out of the safer roads program and also out of the commonwealth and state road safety stimulus program as well. So—

Mrs McARTHUR: Well, that will be good.

Mr NORTHEY: we will have to get a combined figure.

Mrs McARTHUR: While you are doing it, perhaps you would like to give me the detail of the separation costs of maintenance from accident damage. Do you know that? Or would you like that on notice?

Mr NORTHEY: No, I can answer the question. So we spent in 2020–21 \$11 million on maintenance, if you are talking again about wire rope barriers.

Mrs McARTHUR: Was that just for maintenance or from crashes?

Mr NORTHEY: Right. So we had over 3500 repairs. Now, I haven't got the breakdown in terms of that between crashes. We have also had, due to the adverse weather conditions over the last 12 months in regional Victoria, a number of impacts on our barriers due to trees falling et cetera, but the overall figure—

Mrs McARTHUR: That will be good. I will go to that in a minute, on roadside vegetation.

Mr NORTHEY: Right, okay. But the overall figure in terms of roadside barrier repairs was down from the previous year.

Mrs McARTHUR: Also, can you tell me how long it takes to repair a barrier after it is crashed into?

Mr NORTHEY: Yes. So we have different standards depending on the class of the road. So the—

Mrs McARTHUR: Average will do.

Mr NORTHEY: The number actually has reduced over the last period of time.

Mrs McARTHUR: From what to what?

Mr NORTHEY: According to the VAGO figures we dropped down to around, on average, less than 40 days. And again—

Mrs McARTHUR: Forty days?

Mr NORTHEY: Well, it depends again in terms of the class of road—

Mrs McARTHUR: Forty days is good. Can you tell me, are they still effective after they are crashed into and damaged?

Mr NORTHEY: We inspect the barriers as soon as they are impacted, or as soon as that is reported, and again it depends on the location, the type of incident and the type of road.

Mrs McARTHUR: Well, maybe you can take that on notice too and detail that.

Mr YOUNIS: Mrs McArthur, I would not mind just adding there, because when you get down to it what we do is a risk management assessment with our roads. Under the *Road Management Act* you categorise your roads and with your maintenance and response levels they are published, they are part of a community consultation process and community feedback, and that is based on a risk management. So certainly our category 1 roads—actually I cannot remember the categories—the highest category roads, the repair times and response times are absolutely significantly greater than they are on class C roads. It is based on a risk management approach.

Mrs McARTHUR: So the people in rural Victoria will wait a much longer time for the damage to be repaired. I get it.

Mr YOUNIS: Well, no, you see, that is actually not true because the roads are categorised due to their function and role, and certainly there are many roads in the regional areas which I am very familiar with which are high category roads and principal networks.

Mrs McARTHUR: So how many kilometres of wire rope barriers have been replaced by cement barriers or concrete barriers?

Mr NORTHEY: I haven't got that figure.

Mrs McARTHUR: On notice will be fine, and also the number of accidents involving motorcycles with wire rope barriers.

Mr NORTHEY: I will have to take that one on notice.

Mrs McARTHUR: Okay. You also install advertising to tell us how good wire rope barriers are—the ‘Safety barriers save lives’ approach. If they are so good, why do you need to advertise them and how much was that campaign?

Mr NORTHEY: That might be a question for Mr Calafiore.

Mr YOUNIS: Yes, Mr Calafiore runs the TAC, and it is actually about managing people that are actually injured—

Mrs McARTHUR: Well, he can come up.

Mr YOUNIS: We have got another seat up here, so he can come up to the other seat.

Mrs McARTHUR: Okay. Great. Just to go to a specific example where wire rope barriers have been installed, on the Fyansford-Gheringhap Road they have barely lasted a month without being hit or damaged. They lasted 11 days in August, 29 days in September, and the last time they were damaged they took over three months to repair. Is this an example of how good these wire rope barriers are?

Mr NORTHEY: On the Fyansford-Gheringhap Road we have got wire rope barriers, as you know, down the median within the road, so I—

Mrs McARTHUR: Yes, it barely allows a transport or a piece of machinery to pass through it.

Mr NORTHEY: Yes, well, there are areas where people can turn into driveways et cetera, et cetera. I do not know the figures in terms of what you are referring to there.

Mrs McARTHUR: You can take that on notice as well.

Mr NORTHEY: They sound like they might be specific examples.

Mr YOUNIS: Actually, Mrs McArthur, I think it actually demonstrates that these things are working. If they are not getting run into, particularly those ones down the centre, that means that cars are not crossing over to the other side of the road.

Mrs McARTHUR: No, no, there were no accidents there before these things were installed, Secretary. I am sorry. You even actually covered up some of the road entries to the farms, then had to alter it. But anyway, we will move on.

Mr YOUNIS: Actually, Mrs McArthur, we do install these in accordance with a risk management approach, and they are based on really detailed research, so I would absolutely—and I know Mr Calafiore, who is responsible for having a lot of the builds with this, would—back the installation of wire rope barriers as an incredibly important safety measure on our entire network that has contributed to a significant reduction in the road toll on our regional road network.

Mrs McARTHUR: Good. Okay. Let us go to vegetation. Who is responsible for that?

Mr NORTHEY: I can do vegetation.

Mrs McARTHUR: Okay. It clearly obstructs drivers’ vision in many areas, and provides a habitat for wildlife, which then results in roadkill. But also it is a fire hazard, as we have seen in many areas in rural Victoria, especially when dodgy power poles break off and fall down in your roadside vegetation, which is totally out of control in many areas. What risk analysis have you done in the last financial year on roadside vegetation, and should roadsides be safe places or conservation zones, biodiversity areas or wildlife corridors? What is your view on this?

Mr NORTHEY: Well, certainly there are some very significant vegetation and ecological values along our roadsides, so we do need to balance that in terms of the works that we do in road safety. And certainly when we are installing a wire rope barrier we have to take that on board and follow the right environmental approvals et cetera. In terms of vegetation management, we spend around \$7 million a year in terms of—

Mrs McARTHUR: How many?

Mr NORTHEY: \$7 million.

Mrs McARTHUR: \$7 million?

Mr NORTHEY: Yes. On top of that, last year—

Mrs McARTHUR: It would not fix too many roadsides.

Mr NORTHEY: On top of that we did have some additional funding through the state stimulus last year to do some additional—

Mrs McARTHUR: Perhaps we will compare it with the advertising on wire rope barriers.

Mr NORTHEY: Well, I think the key thing is it is a balance, obviously. And, as I said, it is a balance between road safety and also very much the important wildlife and environmental aspects of our roadsides.

Mr YOUNIS: Mrs McArthur, I think you have raised a really good point, because one of the challenges we have in transport is the corridors that we have are some of the only public corridors that are available across the state, and Transport own significant assets in relation to those corridors. They play various roles in our community—in vegetation management, biodiversity, transport, transmission of essential services, such as electricity and water, and all of those other elements.

Mrs McARTHUR: But they need to be safe places, Secretary.

Mr YOUNIS: And so you are balancing up all of those. It is absolutely safe to ensure that all of those services are provided, and so the challenge for us as a transport authority is that we do not control all of that road, of course, but as a community it is balancing those demands on that space.

Mrs McARTHUR: Well, I am sure most people in rural Victoria would think you have got the balance wrong.

So anyway, let us move to the administration costs of the TAC. They increased by \$6 million in the last financial year. Why was that?

Mr CALAFIORE: Yes. So the administration costs: it costs just under \$200 million a year to run the TAC. There would have been a slight increase in non-executive staff. Regrettably, each year far more clients enter the TAC scheme than exit. Our scheme is not actually projected to hit full maturity until about 2035–40. So to give you an example, this would be case workers, call centre staff—in effect frontline workers that deal with our injured clients.

Mrs McARTHUR: Okay. So when, you know, there were less people on the roads in the last financial year and many Victorians lost their jobs and livelihoods as a result of COVID lockdowns, why was it appropriate to pay TAC executives an extra \$315 000 in total?

Mr CALAFIORE: Our remuneration arrangements are in line with normal sort of VPS arrangements, so there has not been a particular increase in executives in that time. As an agency under the *Transport Accident Act 1986* we are required to run as efficiently as possible, and the way we measure that—our key measure—is our administrative ratio, which we try and keep under 10 per cent.

Mrs McARTHUR: Anyway, you have justified it. You have all done a wonderful job, so it was important to increase the amount. That is good. Fine. Going on to road maintenance.

Mr YOUNIS: Mr Northey will be mostly road maintenance—

Mrs McARTHUR: The most interested? Okay.

Mr YOUNIS: but I am happy to talk about road maintenance as well.

Mrs McARTHUR: It seems in many places in rural Victoria, with the poor maintenance of your roads and the poor road building quality, the most often solution is to reduce the speed limit. In many areas in my electorate it has gone down from 100 kilometres. In some places it is now 40. Do you think slowing down everybody on the roads is the best solution, or should we be fixing the roads or building them better?

Mr NORTHEY: Well, I think it is a combination. Sometimes we reduce the road limit permanently for safety reasons, and then there is a process that we go through with that. There are other times, if the road is in need of repair, that we will temporarily drop the speed limit.

Mrs McARTHUR: Well, I could suggest some that have been in need of repair for about four years.

The CHAIR: Mrs McArthur, I would appreciate if you could not interrupt people who are trying to answer the question.

Mr NORTHEY: I think one of the key issues or points is the fact that over the last 12 months our road maintenance program was just about the highest it ever was. We repaired or had periodic maintenance over about 1800 kilometres of our 19 000 kilometres of regional road network, and that was due to both the efficiency of our regional contractors and also some additional funding that we got through the state stimulus program.

Mrs McARTHUR: Good.

Mr YOUNIS: So Mrs McArthur, I think it is worth pointing out that it gets down to that issue again that we are always balancing all the pressures we have got in relation to our road network, and what we do—and it is set out very clearly in our road management plan and in the *Road Management Act*—is provide a risk management approach to that, and sometimes the most effective and efficient way to provide a safe network, as you have pointed out, is to reduce the speed in some areas, sometimes it is better off to do other treatments. So it is very much a risk management approach that we apply to our response to the network.

Mrs McARTHUR: Tell that to people who have to drive on these roads every day and for four years they have never had them repaired. So my next question is to Angela from Development Victoria. It relates to your agency's involvement in the Ballarat airport upgrade. As you may know, the first stage, the runway extension, is currently impossible because the access road to the airport cuts right across the site. So while funding for the runway extension has been secured from the federal government and the City of Ballarat a new access road is required before it can be used. Liberator Drive is the current main access road to the Ballarat West employment zone and is the obvious solution. Can you confirm that the \$2 million investment has been approved by Development Victoria?

Ms SKANDARAJAH: Thanks, Mrs McArthur, for the question. I am pleased to say that we have been working closely with council and Regional Development Victoria in order to deliver Liberator Drive, the extension—

Mrs McARTHUR: It is on its way?

Ms SKANDARAJAH: The steering committee, which the council and RDV are a member of, recently approved us proceeding with the scope of works for that extension. The issue that has been at hand is the quality of the road that needs to be developed, and we have needed to consult with council to be able to settle that—

Mrs McARTHUR: It has been going on for some years. You have got a solution coming?

Ms SKANDARAJAH: The road is actually servicing the industrial estate. It was not intended to service the airport. The expansion of the airport and the way that the expansion is occurring has cut off Airport Road, which currently services the airport, so we have been working to facilitate—

Mrs McARTHUR: So the multimillion-dollar expansion is—

The CHAIR: Mrs McArthur, could you please allow the witnesses to answer your question without interruption. It is very disconcerting. Thank you.

Ms SKANDARAJAH: We have been working with council to facilitate the expansion of the airport by council, and we have now reached agreement on the scope of work. We need to go through our own internal board processes to approve the expenditure of that money. It is funded through our balance sheet, but we are confident that that will proceed.

Mrs McARTHUR: Fantastic. Thank you. So let us go to the Lydiard Street gates, which for 550 days have now shut the road off. Why has it taken so long to fix this problem?

Mr YOUNIS: I will go to Mr Foa, who has been right across this program—

Mrs McARTHUR: Oh, fantastic.

Mr YOUNIS: because it has been a challenge for us, and it gets down a lot to the signalling and safety and heritage issues and once again the competing interests in relation to what we are trying to achieve with this. Mr Foa will be able to provide us with an update of where that program is at.

Mr FOA: Thank you, Secretary. Thanks for the question, Mrs McArthur. The signalling system on the gates, as you would appreciate, would be one of the oldest in the state, and in fact it required mechanical and visual intervention from a control room in Melbourne to align the gates over a sensor. That sensor often failed, and it has actually been the most contributory factor to delayed services out to the Ballarat corridor. So the design of the signalling is the most complex thing, not the design of the interim solution around the boom gates—

Mrs McARTHUR: It takes 530 days to devise—

Mr FOA: It is a very complex signalling system. There are points that also need to be redesigned, and of course you have to go through a heritage process, which has been really important to the local community. So I have personally been up speaking to the council and working through the issue with Heritage Victoria. We have—

Mrs McARTHUR: The solution is when?

Mr FOA: I think Monday.

Mrs McARTHUR: Monday. Excellent. Fantastic.

Mr FOA: So we are actually testing the new interim solution at the moment. I need to stress that this is an interim solution—

Mrs McARTHUR: Interim solution. Yes, I am well aware of that.

Mr FOA: with boom gates. The heritage values of the precinct are really important, and we will be restoring those heritage features.

Mrs McARTHUR: Thank you very much. So just finally to the Secretary. On page 166 of the Department of Transport annual report you trumpeted that 27 per cent of the road network is permitted for work by high-productivity vehicles. Exactly what specific work has been undertaken in the last 12 months to ensure operators can run their vehicles at the maximum possible weight?

Mr YOUNIS: So there is quite a bit of work, and it has increased the extent of the high-capacity network. It involves significant bridge assessments and a lot of engineering works to make sure that the grade remains safe through that process. So primarily it is an assessment of bridges and structures.

The CHAIR: Thank you. The member's time has expired. Mr Richardson.

Mr RICHARDSON: Thank you, Chair. And thank you, Secretary and department officials, for joining us this afternoon for today's evidence. Thank you for the informative evidence that has been provided. I also place

on record our substantial appreciation of the Transport Accident Commission, their executives and their wonderful staff, who do a great deal of work on behalf of Victorians.

Can I take you, Secretary and any relevant officials, to the Suburban Rail Loop. The government has released the business and investment case recently into the Suburban Rail Loop. I am wondering if you could advise for the committee's benefit the key findings of this business and investment case.

Mr YOUNIS: I will call on Mr Carroll to come; he is the CEO of the Suburban Rail Loop Authority. He will be able to give the full overview of the Suburban Rail Loop.

Mr RICHARDSON: Thank you.

Mr CARROLL: Thank you for the question and the interest in the project. The Suburban Rail Loop business and investment case was released in August of this year with some key findings in it: an increase of more than 430 000 passengers per day, taking more than 600 000 daily car trips off the road, equating to 2.2 million fewer kilometres daily on the roads. It will cut public transport travel time by an average of 40 minutes. It will support about 24 000 jobs during construction and provide \$58.7 billion in economic, social and environmental benefits to the state. It will lead to more jobs closer to home, which through this COVID time we have seen as a trend in what we are doing; 165 000 extra jobs in station precincts; and greater housing choices around those precinct areas by 2056.

There is a positive benefit-cost ratio of between 1.1 and 1.7. So for every dollar invested we get \$1.10 to \$1.70 return. We will see it operational for the first Cheltenham to Box Hill, open by 2035.

Mr RICHARDSON: Can I take you to the enabling legislation for the Suburban Rail Loop that recently passed through the Parliament. I am wondering if you could update the committee on how this legislation will help deliver the project.

Mr CARROLL: Thank you. First of all, the enabling legislation that went through the house will make the Suburban Rail Loop Authority responsible for the delivery of the rail infrastructure and precincts area and will become operational on 1 December of this year. That legislation has many powers in relation to what we can and cannot do. It will streamline the process in relation to planning and development around the areas. The planning powers in there are planning powers that are available across the board. We are dealing with 11 different council areas, which will streamline the process of those planning powers in those 11 council areas, making sure that consultation is in the forefront in our planning powers going forward.

Mr RICHARDSON: You talked a little bit about the employment opportunities from the Suburban Rail Loop. In my area, in the City of Kingston, at the Cheltenham end that would be significant as well, but I am wondering if you could outline for the committee's benefit a little bit more about those employment opportunities from the Suburban Rail Loop project.

Mr CARROLL: The direct employment is about 24 000 across the whole broad network. In the first stage, from Cheltenham to Box Hill, we will see about 8000 direct employees between now and 2035 in the construction. And that will have a multiplier effect in relation to supply chain employees. But not only that, it will create precincts around those areas that will actually attract economic investment and employment. The modelling we have done suggests an increase of about 165 000 additional jobs in the precincts across the Suburban Rail Loop network, from Cheltenham to Box Hill and through to the airport.

Mr RICHARDSON: I know there is a lot of interest in my neck of the woods around the environment effects statement, and the government has announced that the Suburban Rail Loop environment effects statement will be Victoria's first digital EES process. I am wondering if you could explain how this will work for the committee's benefit.

Mr CARROLL: The environment effects statement was released on 5 November, the first digital EES for Victoria. This makes it a lot easier for people to actually get through the 33,000 pages of information that is available in it so people can focus on the area of interest that they want to look at or focus on noise and traffic modelling or the impacts to tree cover and canopy going forward. So you can actually go and search and on a digital platform focus your area on what you want to look at and what information you want to actually absorb

from that environmental effects statement. We have seen about 3000 hits already on the website in the first two or three days, so we are seeing a great interest in the environmental effects statement, which is great to see.

Mr RICHARDSON: What is the time line for the environmental effects statement process?

Mr CARROLL: The public consultation opened on 5 November, through to 16 December, which is in line with the legislation. So we will see submissions close on 16 December for public consultation, with hearings in the next year and hopefully a planning scheme amendment before the end of 2022.

Mr RICHARDSON: And just finally on this section, the government has announced that you will not have to touch off and back on when transferring between existing stations and new Suburban Rail Loop stations. That is particularly relevant in the City of Kingston and bayside areas between Southland station and the Cheltenham station, where it is proposed to be at Sir William Fry Reserve. Can you explain for the committee's benefit how this might be achieved?

Mr CARROLL: Absolutely. So we are working with our colleagues in the Department of Transport putting the customer experience first in relation to the commuter on the Suburban Rail Loop and the wider network. So the idea of making sure there is no touch on and touch off and making sure there is interchange between the stations makes it more efficient for people to use the network. We will plan with the Department of Transport in relation to how it affects the wider network and the wider stations—Southland, for example—and that work is ongoing with the department at the moment.

Mr RICHARDSON: Fantastic. Thank you very much for your evidence. I might go back, Secretary, to the issues around buses and the bus improvement and Victorian bus plan. There was a discussion before around the zero-emissions buses, but I want to take you in this section to school buses. Secretary, can you outline for the committee's benefit how these output initiatives and program outcomes provided in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's questionnaire that has been submitted by the department, in responses to questions 1 and 2, will improve access for students that rely on their local bus network to get to school?

Mr YOUNIS: Mr Foa may have the numbers, but I think 4000 different bus networks provide the school bus network—so a really important part of getting kids to school. Importantly, during the pandemic the school bus network—we kept it running during parts of that to be able to connect people as much as possible. Have you got some of those figures, Mr Foa?

Mr FOA: Mr Younis, I have not got the actual figures—I think I remember I recently presented to the school bus inquiry—my apologies for that. But suffice to say we work very closely with the department of education. So there are three elements to the school bus network, Mr Richardson, the first being the disability network that education provides, then there is the school bus network and the school bus specials. So across those three elements we have a targeted range of vehicles and targeted range of providers that work with the schools. The schools give us an assessment about what their demand is likely to be in the following year, and we as the Department of Transport go and contract the service providers to provide the school bus services for the education department.

Mr RICHARDSON: And particularly for specialist and SES schools, some of those operators are just outstanding in their care and comfort and support for students.

Mr FOA: Yes, and indeed the education department has a carers program and a concierge that accompanies many of the high-needs kids.

Mr RICHARDSON: It is a big job, a network for a million schoolkids and over 2200 schools. I want to go to bus service innovation. Secretary, I specifically refer to question 2 of the PAEC questionnaire response provided by your department in relation to public transport program outcomes, on page 9. As I understand, the department has been trialling new approaches to bus service delivery, including rapid running down main arterial roads and FlexiRide—if I have pronounced that—services where commuters are able to book a bus through an app. Secretary, are you able to provide an outline of what ways the investments outlined in the questionnaire—again referring to those provided in question 1—are supporting investments such as these to improve the bus service delivery?

Mr YOUNIS: Thank you, Mr Richardson. I think some of the elements of that bus service have changed considerably. Mr Foa will be able to add some more to this, particularly on the rapid running trials because he has implemented a lot of those. But the on-demand bus program, I think, is one of the most important programs and additional transport options that we have made available. One of the things as an integrated Department of Transport is to be able to provide choice to people and make our travel patterns as flexible as possible.

We have run a trial out of Rowville, and the on-demand bus runs to specific destinations—high-volume—whether it is a train station or a shopping centre. They go to specific destinations. What you can do is get on your app and book the bus, and it goes to a stop very close to you. They are virtual stops, so we do not need to construct normal stops. They are virtual stops that move all around the place. The response time—in the latest figures I saw—for people, from booking to getting on the bus, is less than 10 minutes. I think for some it was down to 6 minutes at certain times of the day. So it is a really responsive on-demand service that takes you, picks up potentially one or two people on the way, on a much more direct route into those destinations that you are going to, whether it be a shopping centre or whether it be a train station. We are looking—and certainly in the bus plan and certainly in the work that Minister Carroll has requested—at ways to expand that. We are using our existing contracts, because sometimes you have got really low patronage routes that are covering all over the place. They are historic routes that do not really go directly to a destination, and they meander all over a suburb, particularly in the growing suburbs. We are looking at in some places transitioning those really low patronage routes to these on-demand services. I looked at the figures a month or two ago on the Rowville one, and there was something like a 2000 per cent increase in patronage—significant numbers, from really low patronage, mind you. The growth of that and the usage of that during COVID, during a period when we were low, was significant.

I think the opportunities of those types of changing patterns are technology, because we can actually book these now. The drivers have the information. They book the most efficient and effective route from point to destination. It is not wandering all over the place, which you know if you have travelled on a bus network in some of the metropolitan ones it becomes really like, ‘Oh, I have to go down that street when I want to go over there?’. It really fixes those.

I think we will be looking at opportunities under our existing bus contracts to continue to roll these innovative practices out, which I think will be quite transformative in the way that we deliver transport services end to end, because they will clearly then connect to other forms of transport, whether it be cycling, walking, trams or buses. They are a really important part of the next phase of the transport offering.

Mr RICHARDSON: Fantastic. I want to take you to the pressure on growth corridors—something that my colleagues to the left and the right, in Cranbourne and Narre South, would be very interested in—and the outer suburbs experiencing significant population growth as the new communities of tomorrow are created on that existing local infrastructure. There is a lot of pressure there. Can you please provide an outline of how these output initiatives and program outcomes outlined in the department’s questionnaire response will help improve access to bus services for those Victorians living in growth corridors?

Mr YOUNIS: Yes. I think the figures are that two-thirds of the population live outside the tram and the train network. I might go to Mr Foa. Hopefully he has done a bit of research on buses over time about that. But we are looking at expanding the network—firstly expanding the network in those growth areas, because they will form the backbone of the transport task, on top of the expansion that we are doing to the rail network, in those growth areas. We will be rolling out some more on-demand bus services in those areas, but we have got specific areas in those growth areas for the bus expansion. It is being funded a lot by that Growth Areas Infrastructure Fund, and Mr Foa might be able to add something on those.

Mr FOA: Yes. So new and extended routes, Secretary, in Clyde, Clyde North, Tarneit North, Broadmeadows, but also the urban renewal areas to complement things like Fishermans Bend and other urban renewal areas. In addition to the on demand, we have got the rapid running trial, which is on route 246 from 7.00 am until 7.00 pm weekdays, Clifton Hill to Elsternwick, which is really giving that turn-up-and-go experience and trialling all-door boarding, so getting people on and off the bus much more quickly and indeed allowing drivers to go through the route up to 20 minutes faster than they potentially would have otherwise. That has been a really successful trial to date and certainly is encouraging going forward.

The other element of what we are doing around the congestion in various parts of Melbourne is through our Smarter Roads plan, where we are using smart technology of CCTV and bluetooth sensors in the network to prioritise bus and tram, so on-road public transport. So in addition to reducing congestion for traffic generally, it will be a significant boost for buses and trams as well.

Mr RICHARDSON: Fantastic.

Mr YOUNIS: Mr Richardson, that Smarter Roads program I think is the next innovation program which will benefit significantly the northern outgrowth areas, and we have rolled that out. If we go back 30 or 40 years, Victoria rolled out the SCATS traffic light network, which is still an innovative and quite advanced program. But what this new Smarter Roads program does is build on that. Now, we can control every single traffic light remotely in the state. We can do that, but we do not have the information that will feed that in a way that tells us where a bus is coming from, where our biggest transport routes are. So what we are doing now in a number of different layers is building on that network: we are adding CCTV cameras and bluetooth and adding to the data so the information becomes far more robust and across the entire network. We have got much stronger information across the network. We have strengthened our traffic management centre. So you will hear in the mornings on all the radios our people in our traffic management centre. We have strengthened that so that they can respond in real time to incidents, and we have strengthened our on-the-road responses so when there is an incident then we are out there clearing that incident and putting the localised traffic management around it.

I would say it is one of the most significant investments we have made in innovation and technology around our traffic management, particularly targeted towards freight, buses and public transport because that will free up space. We are looking at numbers around 15 per cent improvement in the capacity of our road network, and already I think Mr Foa this morning showed me some figures where today in light of our road network we are back over 100 per cent of the network—although generally I think the figure was 92 per cent, we are back over 100 per cent on arterials usage on our road network. So those sorts of programs will be really important in making sure that we can continue that growth in our traffic system.

Mr RICHARDSON: Fantastic. I might leave it there, Chair. Thank you. Thanks for the evidence.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Mr Richardson. That concludes the time we have set aside for consideration with the Department of Transport today, so we thank you very much for appearing before the committee. The committee will follow up on any questions which were taken on notice in writing, and responses will be required within five working days of the committee's request.

The committee will now take a 1-hour break before resuming consideration with the Department of Education. We thank you for your time and declare this hearing adjourned. Thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.