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des débats
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Mardi 10 mai 2016

**Standing Committee on
Estimates**

Ministry of Transportation

Ministry of Health
and Long-Term Care

**Comité permanent des
budgets des dépenses**

Ministère des Transports

Ministère de la Santé
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ESTIMATESCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES
BUDGETS DES DÉPENSES

Tuesday 10 May 2016

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The committee met at 0901 in committee room 151.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Eric Rennie): Good morning, honourable members. As the Clerk of the Committee, it is my duty to inform you that as neither the Chair nor the Vice-Chair is here this morning, we must elect an Acting Chair for today's meeting. I would like to remind members that, pursuant to standing order 117(b), the Chair of the Standing Committee on Estimates shall be a member of a recognized party in opposition to the government. Are there any nominations for Acting Chair?

Mr. Grant Crack: I would like to nominate MPP Jagmeet Singh.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Eric Rennie): Thank you. Mr. Singh, do you accept the nomination?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): With great honour, I do so accept.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Eric Rennie): Are there any further nominations? Seeing none, I declare the nominations closed and Mr. Singh elected Acting Chair of the committee.

Mr. Singh, would you please come to take the seat?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): A very important matter that we have to address before we begin: In case anyone doesn't know, though my name is spelled with an "a", it's actually pronounced with a "u." So it's "jug" like "hug," and then "meet" like "we meet each other." Just to put that out there.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Now that that very important matter has been dealt with, are there any motions before we begin with today's matters or today's agenda? Are there any motions that anyone would like to table? I understand there was—

Mr. Michael Harris: Is it now? Yes, I have one.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Sure. Mr. Harris, I recognize you.

Mr. Michael Harris: I move that the Standing Committee on Estimates request that the Minister of Transportation submit responses and documents with the committee no later than June 9, 2016, relating to all outstanding questions as tracked by the legislative research officer during the consideration of the 2016-17 expenditure estimates of the Ministry of Transportation.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Okay. Before we begin debate on this motion, I just want to

remind you that we do have the minister here and we do have a tight schedule, so let's keep the debate on this motion as brief as possible to respect the time of the folks who are here to provide their deputation.

Please begin, Mr. Harris.

Mr. Michael Harris: This is basically a formality. Throughout the estimates of the Ministry of Transportation, I had acknowledgement from the ministry or minister about getting back to us on a few of the items that they were unable to answer at the time. We're just putting a little bit of a date on that, that by the end of the session we receive those responses. Again, the legislative research officer, Jeff here, has tracked all those items, so it would be using his list.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Any further debate on this motion?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I think that the minister should be given a chance, in good faith, to bring forward the documents that have been requested. He hasn't had that chance to show that yet.

I wouldn't accept this motion at the moment. I would request that we allow the minister to do what he said he was going to do.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Additional debate?

Mr. Michael Harris: I would agree with my colleague from Cambridge. We're just simply putting a bit of a timeline on it, at the end of the Legislature. We're not asking for anything other than what we've already asked for. This government talks a lot about transparency, openness and all those things. It's simply putting a bit of a timeline at the end—the last day of the legislative session—that we ask for those responses. I think that's fair.

In the spirit of transparency, questions that we have asked—and they're not so much documents, but they're answers that we would have expected to be forthcoming from the minister in preparation for this committee ahead of time, to be able to have those answers at committee. We were unfortunately not able to get them, simple answers that we felt would have deserved a response here at committee. We just ask for those that were tracked by legislative research to be provided back to the opposition and the government members by the end of the legislative session.

If there's a date that you'd propose other than June 9, I'd be happy to look at it, but I think we're looking at well over a month.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Thank you, Mr. Harris. I recognize Mrs. McGarry. I see Mr. Gates also has his hand up, so afterwards.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I think it's a little premature at the moment. I think that putting a deadline on it, as I said, is premature at this time. Just because it's the end of the session doesn't mean that those documents won't be submitted. We're not even finished the committee yet. We don't know what may be requested today. I think that the minister should be given a chance in good faith to bring forward the documentation that was requested and go from there.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Thank you, Mrs. McGarry. I recognize Mr. Gates.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you, brother Chair. How are you this morning?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Very well, sir.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Very good.

Listen, I kind of agree with the motion. I was actually surprised that some of the questions that I thought were relatively—not necessarily simple, but certainly with the amount of staff that the minister has, those answers could have been provided. The whole idea of the committee in estimates is to get some answers. You have to come here prepared; your staff have to come here prepared. I was surprised at the fact of some of the lack of answers.

I agree that we should all be open and transparent. I don't think that's an issue for all three parties. I think putting a deadline on it is probably the way we should go. I don't think I want to drag it through the summer as well. If you don't do it by the end of this session, you're looking at getting something in September.

When I take a look at the motion here, I think it's fair. I think it's reasonable. A month to get answers with the quality of staff that I know the Liberals have—they'd be able to do it quite easily.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Thank you, Mr. Gates. Again, a reminder to try to keep the debate tight.

We've heard from all parties and I understand, Mr. Harris, you'd like to follow up.

Mr. Michael Harris: I'll just read out a few of the questions or requests for responses so that the government members know exactly what we're talking about. For instance:

- the number of riders, on a monthly basis, who rode the UP Express with the discounted fare beyond the Presto card discount;

- the number of riders on a monthly basis who rode the UP Express on a complimentary basis or as part of a promotional program;

- the cost of Metrolinx commissioning nine reports on the fare structure of the UP Express;

- the original and revised cost estimates for the Union Station train shed renovation; the revised completion date for the new Burlington GO Station;

- the areas for which the ministry funded the 100 pieces of new equipment for winter road maintenance;

- the added cost for the Union Station train shed renovations to accommodate electric trains; and

- the initial estimate for the Union Station train shed renovation and additional costs since that estimate.

These are all really simple questions that in fact should have gotten a response when asked by the opposition or even the government to the minister or ministry. These are simple numbers that, frankly, the minister should have been prepared to answer with, coming into estimates.

I'll read a quote from your Premier, Kathleen Wynne. She was saying, "Our Open Government Initiative will help create the transparent, accessible government the people of Ontario deserve. This is part of our vision for one Ontario, where every voice counts." That's what your Premier said.

Frankly, we're not asking for anything outside of the things that we've already asked for and were given assurance by the minister or ministry that they would take them back or come back with the answer. We're simply putting a timeline in.

0910

Again, we're open to the timeline, but I think at the end of the legislative session is more than enough time to answer some of these simple, basic financial questions that frankly should have been already answered.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): I want to make sure that we have everyone's voice heard fairly, but I would like to move now towards wrapping this up. Is that okay at this point? Okay. Are we in a position now to decide on this motion? Yes? All those in favour of the motion? All those opposed? The motion is lost.

Mr. Michael Harris: I just want to check if all the members are voting members of the committee today.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Yes, we can double-check that.

Yes, Mr. Gates.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Maybe it's too late, but can I get a recorded vote?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): It is too late.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Really?

Mr. Michael Harris: It was defeated.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Well, it is early in the morning. I try to help.

MINISTRY OF TRANSPORTATION

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Thank you so much and good morning. We're going to resume the consideration of vote 2701 of the estimates, the Ministry of Transportation. There's a total of—probably not this exact amount yet, is it—two hours and two minutes remaining? Okay, there are.

Before we resume consideration of the estimates, if there are any inquiries from the previous meetings—I think Mr. Harris did already raise some of those—that the minister has responses to, perhaps information can be distributed to the Clerk at the beginning in order to assist

the members with any further questions. Are there any, Mr. Minister? Are any other responses prepared? Not right now.

When the committee was adjourned, the third party had 16 minutes left in their round of questions. Mr. Gates, the floor is yours.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thanks very much. Have you had any update since our meeting the other day? I asked a number of questions about timeline and GO to Niagara. Could you really give me a where-you're-at, where you think we can get to and how quickly we can get to a timeline and funding for GO to Niagara?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Sure. Thanks very much, Mr. Gates, and thank you, Mr. Chair. I know how important this is, not only to the member from St. Catharines but the member from Niagara Falls. In fact, there were a number of people in the building yesterday, including Mayor Diodati and some others, who I bumped into in the hallway, and they took a brief moment, as they often do, to remind me of the importance of this particular issue.

I would just repeat what I said last week when you raised this issue, which is that we continue to work, as per the language in budget 2016, with our freight rail partners for those segments of the GO system where we don't have corridor ownership towards being in a position, hopefully sooner rather than later, to provide an update to the affected communities. We're working hard on it. I just will repeat the guarantee that I gave you last week, which is as soon as we have an update to provide to all of the communities in question, we will do so. So we're working hard, but no concrete timelines just yet.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Well, the interesting part about that—Mayor Diodati was here yesterday, and I know Mayor Diodati is a good friend of your party. There's nothing wrong with that, but at the end of the day, Jim has gone on and has said—and Mr. Bradley from St. Catharines—that there will be an announcement in June. The community is expecting June to be the time.

You're the minister. It's coming from somewhere; they didn't pick June out of a hat. The regional chair is saying "June." Every elected official is saying that they've been told it's "June." Are you not aware that there's an announcement in June? Is June not the date, or you're not sure of the date? Because the mayor is saying it as well. The regional chair is saying "June." Your own elected member is saying "June." What you're saying is, "We're hoping to get it done, but there's no timeline. There's no funding tied to it."

I'm just trying to see if June is somebody's imagination, that it's not happening in June. I think the residents of Niagara should at least know where the heck we're at.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I think it is fair to say that the people of not just Niagara but some of the other communities that were referenced on page 71 of Ontario budget 2016 are provided updates as those updates are available. I think what's also really important for all of us to remember, given how passionate the emotions are around some of these topics, is that we not engage in speculation at this point with respect to specific dates.

My responsibility is to continue to move the yardsticks forward and reach a reasonable outcome or conclusion, a positive outcome or conclusion. That's the work that we are focused on right now. Honestly, I'm being as straightforward on this one as I possibly can be. As soon as we have an update to provide, in whatever month that update will be provided, it will be provided. But I want to make sure that we're giving comprehensive and accurate information to the communities when we provide those updates. So we're going to keep working at it.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate it. But when the MPP from St. Catharines is saying "June" as well, maybe somebody should tell you it's June. Just a thought.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: The MPP for St. Catharines isn't at this committee right now—

Mr. Wayne Gates: I understand that, but he is part of your party.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: —and I'm not sure that he would appreciate someone else speaking for him, given that he's been serving in this Legislature for as many years as he has.

Mr. Wayne Gates: He is part of your party.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: He's an integral part of our party.

Mr. Wayne Gates: On page 8 of the briefing books, we see capital expenses of about \$1.9 billion and capital assets of about \$2.1 billion, for a total of \$4 billion in capital expenditures for 2016-17. Last year, these added up to \$4.2 billion. Why have the MTO capital expenditures gone down by \$200 million in 2016-17?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm going to ask Linda McAusland, who should identify herself for the committee.

Ms. Linda McAusland: I'll do so. Linda McAusland, CAO for the Ministry of Transportation.

The decrease reflects the fact that some of our projects are coming to an end, so there are more projects that actually make up that value. But with Windsor being completed and the 407 East phase 1, you'll see the allocation go down, even though the number of projects on that list goes up.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Okay. Exactly how much cash from Ontario taxpayers, as opposed to cash for infrastructure given to the province from the federal or municipal governments or from third parties, will be leaving the treasury in 2016-17 in order to pay for transportation infrastructure?

The second part of that question is, how does this number compare with last year's budget and actual figures?

Ms. Linda McAusland: All I can speak to is the \$4-billion allocation that we have. That is all provincial funding. It doesn't reflect any federal or municipal at this time.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Okay. I'm going to go to Highway 3 again. One of my colleagues has done a member's statement on it. I'm going to read a little bit of it, just so you understand it maybe a little better and the frustrations that are going on up in his area in Windsor.

The government just spent millions on resurfacing and signage for a section of Highway 3 without expanding the lanes. The same was done for sections of the 401 starting at Tilbury. This section of the highway, like Highway 3, has also been identified for expansion and widening, and if you recall, that started in—do you remember what year that was, when I mentioned it last week?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I think you said 2007.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Not bad. I was just checking to see. It was actually 2006, but it's pretty good. That's not bad.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I was pretty close.

Mr. Wayne Gates: That's not bad.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: In case you don't think I pay attention to you, Wayne.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Again, we're talking a long period of time—10 years—on a project. This section of highway, like Highway 3, has also been identified for expansion and widening, yet the ministry continues to spend money on everything but the actual recommended project.

Highway 401, in an area between Tilbury and London, has seen many transport trucks cross the median and go into oncoming traffic—think about that—resulting in fatalities which could have been prevented by a median barrier.

I'd like you to comment. Why are we holding this project up, if we know that people are being killed, truck drivers are crossing the centre line, and people are being injured, and it has gone on for 10 years?

At some point in time, the province has to take responsibility. Because you know; you've got all the facts. You know exactly what has to get done there. What's the holdup, and why are we putting people's lives at risk in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I appreciate the question. I think there are a couple of things to remember. I know I did say this last week, but I think it is important for me to recognize that any time there is an injury, and certainly any time there's a fatality on a highway in Ontario, it's something that I take very personally and very seriously. My heart goes out to those involved in any kind of collision, and certainly if there's a fatality, my heart goes out very sincerely to the family and friends of a person who may lose their life as a result of a collision.

Over the last 13 years or so, Ontario has ranked first or second across North America with respect to the safety of our highways. I think that's a tremendous track record. In fact, I think one of the years, the other jurisdiction that managed to, I'll say, "beat out" Ontario was the District of Columbia, from what I recall. I think anybody who would do a comparison between Ontario's highway infrastructure, given its size, and the District of Columbia's would realize exactly how strong our track record is here with respect to road-user safety and the investments we make in our highways.

0920

There is no doubt that there are various parts of the province, on an ongoing basis, whether we're talking

about the Essex area, southwestern Ontario, or we're talking about eastern Ontario—I know I referenced this last week, not that many days ago: I was in Puslinch, Ontario, to announce that we would be proceeding with the Morriston bypass. I know that's a project of tremendous importance to the local member, Mr. Arnott, but also to Minister Sandals and Minister McMeekin. I've had, as another example, John Yakabuski speak to me repeatedly about a section of highway in his community that he believes is of significant importance. Just last night, your colleague Mr. Natyshak, who I know is doing his job as the local member for Essex, spoke to me again about the importance of Highway 3 and some of the other challenges that exist in his part of the province.

So my answer would be that we have a very robust highways program with respect to the investments we make on an annual basis. When you look at the totality of the highways in the province of Ontario, obviously, given the vastness of our geography, we're talking about a physically huge—I'll say—asset, owned by the people of Ontario, that requires ongoing maintenance, expansion and rehabilitation. We have, over the last number of years, invested and will continue to invest billions of dollars to make sure that we're able to address the challenges that exist with that kind of asset. It doesn't mean that we can get to every single project that may be deserving of investment all at the same time. I think that's something that everybody would understand. But we do prioritize and we do review the resources that are available. Again, when you're confronting the sheer size and scope of the geography that we have and the demands that we have on our system, you move forward as you can with the projects that are the most urgent need.

We just re-established a stand-alone Connecting Links Program. I'm going to point this out by way of illustrating: We were able to fund a number of projects, but there were some communities that felt that they weren't able to access funding in that first tranche that we've done with Connecting Links. They're right, because the funding set aside—\$20 million, moving up to \$25 million and then \$30 million by the third year—is a finite amount that's available. Again, with Connecting Links as an example, we know the demand is significant.

Again, I think the good news for the people of Essex and for the people of Ontario is that the funding that we provide to support our highways in this province is ongoing; it's annual, and it's billions of dollars, annually. I'm respectful and aware of the challenge that exists in Essex. The ministry will continue to do its work, do its analysis and due diligence and deploy the resources that we have available as we have them available so that it makes sense. But I want to stress: I am aware. I get the challenge, and I feel the responsibility to make sure that we're moving in the right direction in a very real way. But I appreciate the question.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Okay, so that was a long-winded answer, but I did write down a couple of things that you said. You talk about priorities: What is your priority? Is it public safety?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: That is absolutely one of my top priorities.

Mr. Wayne Gates: One of your tops or the top?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Well, sure; it absolutely is a top priority for the ministry and the minister.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Okay. I realize that you haven't been there since 2006, so I'll give you your due on that part, but do you think that 10 years of people being killed in that area on our highways—shouldn't that take it to the top of the list on getting infrastructure dollars spent there?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I think sometimes politicians forget the importance of being careful with language. While I respect everyone's right to ask questions as they see fit at committee of course, I think we have to be a little bit careful. There are individuals who are injured and, unfortunately, are involved or—there are fatalities on our highways across the province on occasion.

There are a number of factors that law enforcement will review with respect to any particular motor collision or vehicle collision to determine what the cause of a particular outcome was. I think we have to be really careful to not jump to conclusions, specifically, and with a very broad brush make an automatic presumption or assumption that what we see take place on a particular stretch of highway on a particular day, without any kind of input from law enforcement, in this case, with respect to their analysis as to the determining factor.

Having said that, one of the reasons the ministry has the extraordinary safety record that it does—again, first or second across North America over the last 13 years—is because not just the minister and not just my predecessor ministers but the entire ministry understand the importance of making sure that we keep safety as a paramount concern at all times in the decisions that we're making.

I'm forgetting right now the number of kilometres of highway that we have in the province; perhaps Gerry Chaput can remind me—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Just two minutes remaining.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Thank you, Chair.

We have 16,900 kilometres of highway in the province of Ontario, which I think we would all understand—

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate that, but seeing that I've only got two minutes left I want to finish off on this question. I don't need a lesson from you on what I should be saying. What I do know is that people are being killed on this area of the highway since 2006. Your government has known about it and, quite frankly, you should have done something about it.

I'm going to read something quickly, because I've only got two minutes left. This was done by the member from that area who has to live there every day and has to probably go to those funeral homes where people are after getting killed on these highways.

“The government's failure to complete the widening of Highway 3 between the town of Essex and the town of Leamington continues to be a public safety issue. People

are dying on this roadway.” This is coming from the MPP elected in that area.

“On April 27”—you guys should listen to this, because it's important—“we had yet another fatal crash. This is one more life that didn't need to be lost due to a roadway which has claimed far too many and will continue to do so until this government lives up to its commitment”—you understand that part?—“and honours the tireless work of Bruce Crozier to widen Highway 3 from Windsor to Leamington.”

On April 27 of this year, somebody else died on that highway. I'm not making that up. The member from Windsor's not making it up. You've made a commitment there for 10 years. Why is not getting done? I don't want to hear about all the other highways in the province of Ontario. I understand there are lots of highways; I drive them all the time. But when people are dying on that highway, and you know they're dying, your government knows they're dying, the people of Windsor know they're dying there—they're begging you to finish the project. I'm doing the same thing.

So when you tell me about people losing their lives and getting injured and we can stop that, and we can stop that immediately by finishing the project—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Mr. Gates, thank you so much. That completes your time.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm just getting going.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Thank you so much. Thank you, Minister. We now move to the government for 20 minutes. I acknowledge Madame Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Good morning, Minister.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Good morning.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: It's quite a pleasure to be here this morning because, as you're aware, I represent the wonderful riding of Ottawa–Orléans and I was very happy to see that we were the first at the table for the announcement of the LRT phase 1 in Ottawa. I have to say that it's on time and on budget. The mayor is very proud of that record, and everything is going very well.

As you know, phase 2 has been mentioned during the campaign. The Premier made a commitment to be at the table; that's my understanding. I know the city of Ottawa sent a proposal to the minister and the ministry, and I was wondering if you can give me a little bit of a—where are we at in terms of the status of the LRT phase 2, which will represent a lot in my community?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I appreciate that question. I want to begin by thanking you for being both respectful and careful with your language, unlike some other members of this committee who have chosen to grandstand with their questions instead of actually working with the ministry and with the government to try and improve the situation.

For example, it is borderline bizarre that somebody would demand that we continue to invest in certain highways and then stand in their place in the Legislature and vote consistently against budgets that contain

funding to do the exact work that they're claiming should be done. I think we've seen over the last number of years a very clear indication of how the people of Ontario treat politicians who choose to grandstand instead of actually coming forward with responsible positions and responsible platforms.

With respect to Ottawa, I think what's important to recognize is that across a number of municipalities—including Ottawa, of course, as our nation's capital—the Ontario government, under the leadership of Premier Wynne and with all of us involved in her caucus, has, as you mentioned quite rightly, been at the table first with respect to providing significant funding support for truly transformational projects like Ottawa's LRT.

0930

You are quite right in that the Ministry of Transportation has been working closely with the city of Ottawa over the last number of years on this project, and in the last few months in particular as Ottawa has come forward with submissions with respect to the second phase of this important project. The ministry has had some really tremendous and positive back-and-forth with the municipality. I know that in the last number of weeks, there has been additional back-and-forth with respect to making sure that the proposal is responding to some of the questions that were raised, quite rightly, by the ministry, all with a view to providing positive outcomes and a positive update for the city of Ottawa in the next number of weeks and months.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much. I have to say, I was very happy in 2014 when our plan to build Ontario up was chosen by the people of Ontario. It makes and will make significant investments in infrastructure. I think that's where we need to be to provide safe roads, but also to help with public transit and building bridges. I'm very happy as the member for Ottawa-Orléans. Thank you for the hard work. To all of the ministry: thank you.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): I recognize Ms. McGarry.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you very much for being here today. I have met with several delegations during the AMO and ROMA/OGRA conferences in the last while. Those folks were very, very pleased to see Bill 31 passed regarding road safety, recognizing, of course, that distracted driving and drug-impaired driving infractions are a risk to all road users, no matter what the condition of the road. If these very simple measures were taken into account, you would recognize that all road users have an obligation to drive fully alert and following the rules of the road.

In saying that, I know that these same municipalities that I was talking to were very happy to have the gas tax program made permanent in 2013. They use that for their public transportation. When we were in those meetings, they often talked about the federal gas tax program and that there were a few changes with that.

I know that many municipalities are looking for more infrastructure funding to improve their roads and high-

ways for cyclists, for expanding their shoulders and improving their bridges. What they're very excited about and what we're very excited about is that we had a federal election this past October and we have a federal government now in place that has some renewed interest in working with the provinces over transit, infrastructure and transportation things. I know that in Waterloo region, I've been meeting with Minister Bardish Chagger and other area MPPs and MPs regarding transportation issues and projects in and around Waterloo region. We've very excited that the federal government is now looking forward to having a renewed interest.

I know in Toronto last Friday, for instance, the Prime Minister was here in Toronto and had a very big announcement for transit. I'm wondering, then, Minister, what kind of support our government expects to receive from our new federal partner for expansion of transit in Ontario.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Well, thank you very much. That's a great question. I actually had the opportunity to stand with the Prime Minister and with Mayor Tory last Friday in Toronto as the federal government made the announcement that they would be providing up to \$840 million to the city of Toronto for the TTC over the next three years. This would be part of the additional \$3.4 billion that were included in the last federal budget. That's \$3.4 billion in new money over the next three years to support public transit, based, essentially, on ridership across the country. They followed up their budget commitment with, I guess, an announcement or a public communication around \$1.48 billion or so of that \$3.4 billion flowing to Ontario, again, based strictly on ridership numbers.

I know that the Prime Minister—we've mentioned that he was here in Toronto last Friday—has also been to parts of northern Ontario, for example, where he's talked about what some of those municipal transit systems can hope to receive. I think it's important to note that in his remarks Friday, the Prime Minister did say that this is also part and parcel of an ongoing discussion that's taking place with the provinces and territories, which I think is really important to stress, because that means that there is clear recognition federally that it's about all partners being at the table, which I know is a great relief to those who care passionately, as our government does, about investing in public transit and is a significant departure from what we had experienced over the preceding decade when the former federal government chose to unilaterally act according to its own agenda as opposed to being at the table, collectively working with the provinces and territories and, through them, working with all of the municipal partners that are very much so at the table with respect to their hopes and their requests.

There's a significant plan, as you know, to continue to build out a number of the public transit projects that we have across the province here in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, whether we're talking about GO regional express rail or a number of the LRTs that we are building, including the Crosstown, which is under construction

along Eglinton right now. There will be continued opportunities to engage in discussion with the new federal government to make sure that their understanding of what Ontario's priorities are. I think that we're fortunate in this province to have a government in place provincially that already has a significant infrastructure plan—we all know—over the next 12 years to invest \$160 billion across all forms of infrastructure. It's something that I believe is essentially unrivalled across Canada with respect to what the provinces and territories are doing. In some cases, other provinces and territories are doing quite a bit; it's just remarkable that we are doing that much more in this province thanks to the leadership of Premier Wynne and the rest of our team.

I should note you mentioned gas tax and the provincial gas tax program. It's something that I know we're all very proud of, and rightly so, in the province. Just to mention: Since 2004, we've committed \$3.4 billion in gas tax funding, including in the last round for this year almost \$333 million to support all of the municipalities across Ontario that have transit systems in place, which I know is ongoing annual funding that is very crucial to making sure that, working together, we can keep providing public transit options for the people that we represent in those communities.

By way of example: Those investments are paying off. In 2014, we saw an increase of more than 217 million passenger trips on municipal transit systems across Ontario compared to 2003. Just to put that in perspective: This investment, this gas tax investment that we've made, has had the effect of removing approximately 181 million trips from Ontario's roads since 2003. There's tremendous success, but the work will go on.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Thank you very much. I recognize Ms. McGarry.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Just to follow up on that, I know that as part of that gas tax funding, there was a pilot project that was started in Ontario for municipalities that put forward a proposal to pilot a transit project if they were connected with a larger area. This is really serving some of the smaller municipalities throughout Ontario.

For instance, I actually went down to the town of Pelham in the fall to help Mayor Dave down there kick the tires on a new, accessible wheelchair van that was in the town of Pelham. They were successful in their bid because they piloted their program and partnered with the Niagara transit commission to be able to run this wheelchair-accessible van.

We actually were outside a retirement home and there were at least four or five residents that just couldn't wait to get on this bus and to get out to shop. One of them said to me, "You know, I've been stuck here for two years and I'm really very much looking forward to being able to get on this transit van and go throughout the stores and where I need to go, getting in and out of physicians' offices and being far more independent."

I know that there are several pilot projects that are under way right now in Ontario taking advantage of that

gas tax funding. They have said that if it's successful, they'll look at permanent funding. Can you just speak a little bit more to those pilot projects, maybe where we're at and where we can see that going in the future?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Another great question. On the community transportation pilot program, I remember being in Etobicoke to make the announcement a number of months ago with, from what I recall, the original \$1 million in funding that was applied to that program. It has since been doubled up to \$2 million.

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We were in Etobicoke; it was me, Mario Sergio, the minister responsible for seniors, and Yvan Baker, the local member for Etobicoke Centre. We actually did the announcement at a facility that provides services to seniors in that community. Interestingly, it was a great announcement for all the really sound policy reasons, which I'll get to in a quick second, but it was also a venue that was around the corner from where I grew up in Etobicoke, before we moved to Vaughan. It was actually bringing flashbacks for me, because right next door to where we were standing for the announcement was the nursery school I went to as a kid. The residential streets around the area were where I delivered the newspaper as a kid growing up in that part of Etobicoke. So it was actually pretty remarkable to go back and make the announcement.

The one thing I'll say about that particular pilot program: I remember when it was first brought to my attention not that many months after becoming minister. Sometimes, we kind of lose perspective, I think, in a good way, because we're very much fixated on—and as I say, politicians of all parties—the massive dollar amounts that are included for the significant infrastructure we're building: LRTs, GO regional express rail, highways and so much more.

When I first heard about the amounts in this particular pilot program—and again, I'm a guy who spent his entire life in the GTHA as a resident—I thought, "Well, how impactful could this actually be?" Because the dollar amounts didn't give the impression of being huge. Then we had the consultations, we had the discussion at AMO and elsewhere, we started to roll out the funding, which I think is capped at a maximum of \$100,000 per grant. I could be wrong about that, but I'm pretty sure that it's pretty close to that—

Interjection: It is.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: It is; okay. I hear that I'm right. Okay, good.

But the impact that we then heard back—I know you heard it as well at some of the AMO opportunities we had—was actually quite extraordinary in terms of how much of a positive impact this funding support through this program was having for communities which, without that kind of support, wouldn't necessarily be able to take that leap towards providing a service that's essential for those who otherwise might not have that opportunity.

I think there's a good lesson in that sometimes. We obviously care about the big projects because those are

what will fundamentally move thousands of people and achieve things like the number of car trips off our roads via the gas tax and so forth. But sometimes, it's also in the micro. Sometimes, it's also in those smaller, more scoped projects that we have to be enlightened enough to pursue. We're very proud of that one, and I know we'll continue to look for creative ways to support communities with funding programs like that one.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Thank you very much. I recognize Mr. Crack.

Mr. Grant Crack: Good morning, Minister, staff.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Good morning, Mr. Crack.

Mr. Grant Crack: Minister, can I ask you a question about Connecting Links? I hope you're ready.

As you know, as a former mayor, I was pretty excited when we reinstated the Connecting Link Program. We've been hearing about that at ROMA/Good Roads and AMO conferences for a number of years. I think there is some frustration out there with the amount of funding that's due, so maybe you could just tell members of the committee or advise members of the committee what the Connecting Link Program is, what it's all about, how much funding and what we plan to do with it in the future.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Sure. Thank you very much for that question.

The Connecting Links program existed in Ontario up until a few years ago; I'm forgetting exactly how long ago, but about three or four years ago, roughly. Then a decision was made at that point in time to take that funding that historically had been, on an annual basis, depending on the year, in the range of \$15 million to \$20 million on average.

That funding opportunity was then rolled into other larger infrastructure funds, which at the time made a lot of sense, but what actually happened—and we certainly heard about this loud and clear at ROMA/OGRA conferences, at AMO conferences and in bilateral discussions with the affected municipalities. What that meant, then, for those communities that actually had a Connecting Link was that they would have to make a choice. If they were coming forward and had an infrastructure need—let's say it was in waste water, as an example—but they also had a Connecting Link, and both were in need of support, they would feel, possibly rightly so, that they would have to make a choice between the two, because we took that historic Connecting Links funding and, again, rolled it into a larger envelope.

There was a pretty clear message delivered that there was a need for a stand-alone Connecting Links Program. There are 77 communities in Ontario that have a connecting link. It could be a road; it could be a bridge, for example. There's a specific definition for what constitutes a connecting link.

So after the consultation occurred over the last couple of years, there was a decision made by our government as part of the Moving Ontario Forward plan to re-establish a Connecting Links Program as a stand-alone so that for

those 77 communities, they wouldn't have to make a very difficult choice. They could choose through other funds, like the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund, the OCIF. They could apply to support things again, like waste water infrastructure, but if they had a connecting link, they could apply to a stand-alone fund, and those two would no longer be mixed or intermingled.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Just a quick reminder: two minutes left for questions.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Thank you, Chair. So we announced initially a re-establishment of the Connecting Links Program. We've since had a chance—the Premier's had a chance—to go back and make the announcement that we're actually taking the original amount, which I believe was \$20 million that we had announced, and it's growing over the next couple of years. So it's \$20 million this year, \$25 million next year and then \$30 million the year after, and \$30 million on an annual basis going forward.

For those 77 communities, a number—almost all; not quite all, but almost all—came forward and applied for funding because there was an urgent need out there, and a number have now received confirmation that they are going to receive funding out of this first intake. There will be another intake that will happen because, again, this is an annual program.

I referenced a little bit earlier that some communities were disappointed. I get that; I understand that they were disappointed. But they will have a chance to apply again, and because it's an annual fund, I think we're going to get to a point fairly soon in the program where we will have managed to deal with a good chunk of that pent-up demand and then be able to provide ongoing rolling support for those 77 communities.

I certainly know the response has been overwhelmingly positive, and I think it's a clear example of a government that listens and responds appropriately.

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you very much. I think that's about it, eh, Mr. Chair?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Just about. Yes, 30 seconds left. Do you want to say anything else?

Mr. Grant Crack: Any final comments, Minister?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Again, Connecting Links is a great example of having the chance to hear directly from the communities that are affected about some of the occasional unintended consequences of decisions. But being able to pivot and make a decision largely because we do have the Moving Ontario Forward plan, that \$31.5 billion over a decade, is something that I think reflects really well that these are not just transportation links. In many cases, they're vital economic links as well. Thanks, Chair.

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Thank you very much.

We move now to the official opposition. I recognize Mr. Harris.

Mr. Michael Harris: Good morning, Minister. Staff, good morning. We ended off last week on winter main-

tenance. I think we all agree that road safety is imperative, especially in the wintertime, but as you know, over the last few years—relatively since 2009, since your government basically watered down the contracts to save a few bucks—our roads have in fact been more dangerous for people who have set out, especially in the wintertime.

I asked you or I was getting to the Ottawa-area maintenance contract that was recently tendered. It wasn't awarded. Were you told of the tender prices for the recent submission?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: For the Ottawa contract—I actually don't recall if I was made aware of the prices for the Ottawa contract specifically.

Mr. Michael Harris: That was one of those contracts that was broken or walked away from mid-term—

Hon. Steven Del Duca: It was a mutual agreement with the contractor in place.

Mr. Michael Harris: Right. It was re-tendered, and there were three bidders, I believe, at the very least.

I guess I'll ask the ministry staff. Did you brief the minister on the tender prices for the Ottawa area maintenance contract?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Gerry's just going to clarify the number of bidders etc.

Mr. Michael Harris: Yes.

Mr. Gerry Chaput: Gerry Chaput, assistant deputy minister of provincial highways. There were five bidders, I think.

Mr. Michael Harris: Did you brief the minister on the tender prices that you received?

Mr. Gerry Chaput: I was just going to correct the record on the last time because we weren't quite clear on those.

Mr. Michael Harris: Okay, sure.

Mr. Gerry Chaput: Okay. It was Cruickshank construction, which is a sister company of HRM; Integrated Maintenance and Operations Services; Loisselle Group; and R.W. Tomlinson. So there were four contractors that bid on the contract.

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Mr. Michael Harris: Did you provide a briefing note to the minister or a summary of the tender—you know, the tender numbers or information?

Mr. Gerry Chaput: I don't believe we did, no.

Mr. Michael Harris: Okay, so Minister, you don't recollect anyone telling you what the lowest bidder number would have been for the Ottawa area?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I don't recall. I don't recall getting information with respect to the specific numbers around the bids. I don't recall that.

Mr. Michael Harris: Specific numbers but, would you say that—I mean, there was obviously a decision to not award the contract and to move to a more managed outsource model.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: That is correct.

Mr. Michael Harris: Who would have made that decision?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: That was a recommendation that came to me, and I was in agreement with that recommendation.

Mr. Michael Harris: Was the recommendation made to go that route because the tenders received were substantially higher than what you had accounted for or budgeted?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I think the recommendation and the ultimate decision on that particular one were made because we felt it was the best way to provide value to the people of Ontario, but in particular with respect to making sure that for that contract area, we would have for the foreseeable future a service in place that would give us the winter maintenance—well, the year-round maintenance, but the winter maintenance specifically—that the people of that contract area expect and deserve.

Mr. Michael Harris: The last cost for the fiscal year was \$15,984,300. Some suggest that that could have doubled, in fact, for the tenders that were received. I'll just put this and then we'll move on to something else, but not only has this government put Ontario motorist lives at risk with the poor standards that they've put in place with this AMC, now they're moving back to the managed outsource. This file is yours, and it's going to be a file that will be scrutinized by the public. We hope that you'll do a better job, not only with dealing with these contracts—it's just been a disaster. I think you have to agree with me on that from a fiscal perspective, but also from a road safety perspective.

I'll leave it at that, but we will keep an eye on some of those numbers and ensure that, come the wintertime, motorists can be assured that when they head out, the conditions are as good as they're going to get.

I would have hoped that the member from Cambridge would have talked about some local Kitchener-Waterloo regional transit initiatives. That brings me to the Waterloo ION. Of course, I did catch that announcement with the new Prime Minister last week in Toronto.

It made me think and recall the time in Kitchener-Waterloo when we had a funding partner in our federal government under Prime Minister Harper. Of course, there was a provincial commitment of two thirds, and then the cart was kind of pulled out from under the folks in the region of Waterloo. They slashed a third of the funding, sticking it to the local taxpayer. Of course, we're moving forward with the ION. We're in the midst of construction. You'll probably have heard about the corduroy road that's being pulled up.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I saw a picture.

Mr. Michael Harris: But I think aside from construction and paying for it, the Bombardier LRV issue is something that's on a lot of people's minds. We talked about this briefly. I recall asking about having conversations with Bombardier. There was an article on April 13 in the Waterloo Regional Record indicating that "the first train for the region of Waterloo's light rail transit project will be delayed by two months to October and the final, 14th vehicle will be delayed by four months to May 2017." Were you aware of this?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Generally speaking, I'm aware of the challenge that we face with Bombardier.

Mr. Michael Harris: So Bombardier has already come forward and said that the delivery for the LRVs to the Waterloo region—which is the first project of your 182-LRV purchase by Bombardier—will be delayed. Were you aware of this?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I was aware of the fact that there were challenges at large with Bombardier, and also challenges specific to the Waterloo project, yes.

Mr. Michael Harris: So have you had conversations directly with Bombardier or your officials with regard to this specific delay of the Bombardier LRVs to the region of Waterloo?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: There has been, over a number of months, I think, a consistent message delivered by me and by others, including the team at Metrolinx and the ministry itself, to Bombardier to express that we do have concerns around their ability to deliver a couple of things: to deliver on existing requests, contracts, etc., but also when you take a look at the rest of our transit infrastructure build-out, GO regional express rail, and a lot of other items that are included in there—you know, concerns about the ability that a traditional, significant supplier would have—I think that what you're seeing publicly, by way of media, is reflective of those concerns as well.

Mr. Michael Harris: Have you asked for assurances from Bombardier that the ION project will meet its launch in 2017?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: At the end of the day, I think there's an expectation that Bombardier will be required to meet its contractual obligations. I would say that of any contractor.

Mr. Michael Harris: If those contractual agreements are not met, are there any penalties for late delivery?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Sorry?

Mr. Michael Harris: When you talk about those contractual agreements, what are the penalties embedded into that contractual agreement if they were to be missed?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: From what I remember, this is a question that actually came up last week as well that we had said we would take back.

Mr. Michael Harris: And you have not been able to clarify on that answer yet?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: It's one of those ones that we're going to take back.

Mr. Michael Harris: Does anybody know, or can anybody tell me, if there are any penalties built into the Bombardier contract for late delivery of the vehicles? Can anybody tell me if there are penalties at all? You talked about those contractual agreements. You must have a good understanding—

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I don't think it's helpful to speculate on what a specific provision in a specific contract would be, here at committee, but we will take it back.

Mr. Michael Harris: Would it be fair, though, that an agreement of that magnitude would have penalties built into it for late deliveries?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I think it's reasonable for someone to expect that a contract of that nature would include all of the different clauses and measures that one would anticipate would exist in a contract of that nature. But I'm really not in a position to speculate today, so we will take that back.

Mr. Michael Harris: I'm just trying to think as to why we wouldn't want to be more transparent to the taxpayers who footed the bill for 182 LRVs that their government didn't build penalties into the contract, knowing the track record, unfortunately, of this company.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Yes, but now you're taking a bit of a leap in logic—

Mr. Michael Harris: Clarify it, then. Tell us.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: What I've said is that I won't speculate here today.

Mr. Michael Harris: Tell us that their government negotiated a good deal for them, and that if the trains are late and delays will mount because of that, their government established safeguards for the taxpayer, and that there will be penalties brought forward to the company.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I don't think it's helpful to either speculate or engage in hypotheticals at this point in time. Having said that, I'm prepared to take that one back.

Mr. Michael Harris: Will you get back to us on that?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm prepared to take it back and have a look. Again, I don't know what's contained in this specific section of this specific contract. I don't know what other potential commercial imperatives there might be in that particular aspect of a contract, which I think you can understand and respect. So I'm not going to speculate and I'm not going to engage in—

Mr. Michael Harris: I get that. We're just asking about penalties.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I understand what you're asking, but I'm not going to—

Mr. Michael Harris: Can you tell us what the penalties are if the ION product is complete but there are no trains to put on the track? Why can't you tell us those penalties?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Because I don't think it's helpful, even to you, frankly, for me to speculate here at committee, so I will take that one back.

Mr. Michael Harris: But will you make a commitment to get back to us on that?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I will make a commitment to take that one back.

Mr. Michael Harris: I wish you had brought whoever you're taking this back to today, to committee, so that we could have asked them directly.

I think you've got our concerns clearly—

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I do.

Mr. Michael Harris: —on not only the track record for the TTC, with the streetcars, but the LRT purchase, especially the project in the region of Waterloo.

Speaking of trains in the region of Waterloo, we'll move on to all-day, two-way GO, something I'm sure you're well aware of.

Back before the 2014 election, the Premier came to town and made a commitment. The then transportation minister said that we could accomplish that within five years. In November, the member for Kitchener Centre indicated that all-day, two-way was actually more like 10 years away. Would you agree with her?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: All that I can speak to, all that I can remember, is that in 2014, both our platform commitment and our budget, which we passed in the summer of 2014 following the election, was that we would deliver GO regional express rail, which would include two-way, all-day trains along our corridors, within a decade.

I think we are on track. We continue to work on that, but we are on track to be able to deliver on that commitment. I'll speak to the 10-year commitment that was included in both our platform and the Ontario budget. I guess that would have been 2014.

Mr. Michael Harris: The 10 years was from the date that the promise was made, back in 2014?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: In 2014, yes.

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Mr. Michael Harris: So I guess Minister Murray was incorrect to say "five years."

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm not in a position to make a comment about what someone else might have said. What I'm in a position to talk a little bit about, which I'll talk quite a bit about if you'd like me to, is that we did make a commitment in our platform—I say that as someone who served as platform co-chair in 2014—that was then included in our budget of 2014, which we passed after our victorious election campaign.

Mr. Michael Harris: It was also noted by that member that federal and shared rail hurdles are to be negotiated. Can you give us an update on those negotiations?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Yes. Specifically in the case of the Kitchener corridor, the challenge is that once we move effectively beyond Brampton, there's a chunk of that corridor—I think you know this—that's owned by CN. This year's past provincial budget—I think it's on page 71—references that we will continue to engage with our rail partners, CN and CP—CP for other corridors; CN for the Kitchen corridor—so that we can hopefully get to a place where there's an agreement and therefore then, what I like to say, unlock the true potential of the Kitchener corridor. When there's a chunk of the corridor, in the case of the Kitchener corridor, that we don't own outright, it has the potential, and in this case it does, in fact, limit the number of trains that we can run through that section.

Mr. Michael Harris: So those negotiations you would say are ongoing?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: They are.

Mr. Michael Harris: When would they have started?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I can speak to the stretch of time, I guess, since I became of Minister of Transportation. They have been essentially ongoing for certainly the last—

Mr. Michael Harris: Has there been anything agreed to at this point?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: There have been a lot of really positive discussions back and forth. I think everybody understands clearly—whether we're talking about all of the corridor municipalities and their mayors and councils, including your home region, your home community, to the mayor of Toronto—we have to do our best to unlock the transportation challenges in what's known as that innovation corridor. That's what we're working hard on. I think CN understands that too, but I respect that they're a private entity and they are required to run their business, which, by the way, helps to strengthen our economy, generally speaking.

I would say that we are hopefully being—like I mentioned regarding Niagara Falls earlier, I expect that we'll be able to provide an update at some point in the future. As soon as we're able to provide that update, we will do so.

Mr. Michael Harris: Do you have an expectation or a timeline as to when you expect to finish those negotiations?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I don't have a specific date in mind.

Mr. Michael Harris: Have you set a timeline to your officials for the negotiations to be complete?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Urgent. There's a feeling of urgency around unlocking all of these corridors. There's no doubt about that.

Mr. Michael Harris: Would there not have been discussions ahead of time with these rail partners before making that promise before an election?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I can't speculate about what took place before I became minister. I know that over the last number of years, including shortly after I became minister, there was another section of the Kitchener corridor that we did acquire. I think I mentioned last week that the government of Ontario owns about 80% of the corridors that we run our GO trains on, and there was an acquisition, again, just shortly after I became minister, for a chunk of the Kitchener corridor.

We've made some really tremendous progress with respect to acquiring more of these corridors, but there is still that 20% that's outstanding.

Mr. Michael Harris: Following that all-day promise in the first place, I'm sure they would have looked at costs and ridership. Have there been any studies since that election promise and then re-promise? Have there been any studies or costs at all done in terms of what the costs or the ridership would look like, similar to the UPX?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I know that on GO regional express rail, which the Premier and I announced in April 2015, which is the \$13.5-billion plan over a decade—I'm quite certain that the business case for that is now being posting to Metrolinx's website. That information is now contained publicly.

Mr. Michael Harris: Specific to the Kitchener two-way, all-day announcement, have there been any specific studies in terms of costs and ridership?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: The business case that I referenced a second ago would include the Kitchener corridor from Union to Bramalea, I'm quite certain.

Mr. Michael Harris: I'm not—I'm curious about—

Hon. Steven Del Duca: That's part of the Kitchener corridor. That's what you asked.

Mr. Michael Harris: It is, you're right, but we're talking about the rest of that.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: The other part of it is obviously, when you're engaged in negotiations, as we have been in discussions with, in this case, CN—I think some of what you're asking about goes to the heart of the discussion and negotiation, so I don't want to speculate about what costs might look like until we actually know, based on the outcome of the discussions.

Mr. Michael Harris: So you've not done any ridership numbers or case studies similar to the UPX?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Like a business case analysis?

Mr. Michael Harris: Yes.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I believe Metrolinx has undertaken some work with respect to what the comprehensive business case would be, assuming that we ran two-way all-day trains all the way out to Waterloo. I think one thing you also have to keep in mind is that part of the discussion ultimately—and this would exist on all of our corridors—is what the ultimate service concept will look like. Do you run an express train, do you run nothing but all-stop trains etc.?

But I think we would all agree, and I certainly heard it from Mayor Vrbancovic, Regional Chair Seiling and others, that the idea of being in a position to run trains in both directions, because of the nature of the innovation corridor, is something I know they are very keen for us to achieve.

Mr. Michael Harris: Yes, they are.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Two minutes remaining.

Mr. Michael Harris: The Kitchener Centre MPP also told reporters following the budget that there was going to be a very substantial announcement on all-day, two-way GO before the summer. What is that announcement, Minister?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I appreciate that question. What I believe the MPP has said, which is going to sound very similar to what I said a second ago regarding Niagara Falls, is that we are hopeful that we will be in a position to provide an update to the affected communities sooner rather than later, and as soon as that update is ready to go, with all of the necessary approvals, we will provide that update.

Mr. Michael Harris: You'll recall the long-time-ago promise—because I'm sure you've been briefed on it—about “four trains in, four trains back.” We're only seeing two in, two back. Is that major announcement just simply the addition of the additional two trains that were, frankly, due a long time ago?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I know you don't want me to engage in unhelpful speculation at this point in time. I think that the work that is currently being undertaken

needs to run its course. It will. There is an urgent need that we all feel to try and unlock the potential of this particular corridor, and as soon as we're—

Mr. Michael Harris: How come this substantial announcement didn't make its way into the budget?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I think you would appreciate that what the budget referenced is that we are still engaged in ongoing discussions and negotiations with our rail partners and with the federal government, depending on the circumstances or the situation that we're talking about. Again, as soon as we're in a position to provide a responsible update to the people of Waterloo, Niagara Falls or other communities, we'll be happy to do that.

Mr. Michael Harris: So again, just to clarify, you have not set a timeline on when you'd like to see those negotiations wrapped up with your rail partners?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I think you also have to recognize that there are other—well, the short answer is no, there is no set date per se, because, frankly, we can only control what we can control. I know that CN and CP also understand the nature of the challenge that we're facing and the urgent need that we have to provide those, so we're working on it.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Thank you very much, Minister.

Mr. Michael Harris: That's it?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): That's the 20 minutes. Thanks. Mr. Gates: 20 minutes.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Do I have 20 minutes, or are we—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): You'll have until 10:15, so about seven minutes.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate that, Chair.

I'll tell you that one thing that I've really learned over these wonderful three hours at estimates is that the government could use somebody to do a better job of bargaining agreements with a number of your partners, not only to protect taxpayers, but quite frankly maybe to protect your government.

What is the Treasury Board's approved maximum price for the Highway 427 P3 that you'll be giving bidders during the RFQ and the RFP stages?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: That's a project that is currently in procurement right now. The RFP was released a number of weeks ago. I'm not in a position to provide a number with respect to that. At the end of the day, we want to ensure that we are providing the taxpayers with maximum value for their tax dollars on this and all of our important infrastructure projects, so the procurement that is now out there in the market will run its course and we expect to have those bids back in the next number of months.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Is there a final date for when they have to be back, a closing date? Did you put a closing date on it?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Gerry?

Mr. Gerry Chaput: The RFP closes at the end of August this summer, and it will proceed to financial close over the next year.

Mr. Wayne Gates: August 31?

Mr. Gerry Chaput: August 29, to be exact.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Just a question: How much more will Highway 427 cost per kilometre as opposed to the usual cost per kilometre of a highway project like this?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm not sure I understand the question.

1010

Mr. Wayne Gates: Well, is it going to cost more money? I guess you'd take a look at the report that the P3s have cost the province \$8.3 billion more, and not just in infrastructure—

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Oh, the Auditor General's report?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes. It said that P3s cost more money. From what I'm getting here, this is going to be a P3 project.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: It is.

Mr. Wayne Gates: How much more is it going to cost, as opposed to the usual cost per kilometre of a highway project like this?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I don't accept any aspect of the premise of that question, from the auditor's report regarding AFPs to the rest of that question.

This is a crucial infrastructure project for this part of the GTA. It will unlock hundreds of acres of employment land and, therefore, lead to massive job creation, both indirectly and directly. It is something that's long overdue for this particular part of Ontario. We are delivering it in the quickest and most effective and efficient way to deliver this kind of project.

Frankly, we have a world-leading record here in Ontario by virtue of how we deal with procurement of delivering massive, large-scale infrastructure projects, across a multitude of sectors, on time and on budget.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Okay. That wasn't my question. I guess if you're saying—

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Because your question didn't make any sense, so I chose not to answer it the way that you asked it.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Well, in your opinion, you didn't, obviously, because I probably don't agree with you on some P3 projects. If somebody's telling me a lot—

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Right. Clearly you don't.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm not saying this, okay? But somebody's telling the government that P3s cost the government over \$8 billion more than what they should have—

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I don't accept the premise.

Mr. Wayne Gates: You don't agree with that—

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I don't at all.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm speaking—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): One at a time. Let Mr. Gates finish his question.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Then I'll let you speak, and you can have as much time as you like.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Great.

Mr. Wayne Gates: But my understanding is, somebody who put a report together has said that P3s are costing \$8.3 billion more than the normal way. I guess

what I'm saying here is that you're putting this out as a P3. Is that correct?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Somebody can tell me if I'm right.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: That is correct.

Mr. Wayne Gates: What I'm asking you is, if you don't do it by a P3, what is the usual cost per kilometre of a highway project like this? I think it's a very simple question. You should have that. You know what it costs if it's not a P3. You should know what it costs if it is a P3. So maybe you don't understand the question. I can understand that—

Hon. Steven Del Duca: No, I understand the question. I also understand the simplistic approach that you're taking to the analysis, because, yet again, you're trying to grandstand around a question. I'm going to believe that that's the case, because I wouldn't want to believe that you could be so completely misled around how we deal with procurement as to ask, frankly, what I believe is a farcical question here at committee.

Having said all of that, I know that cutting across all sectors, from transportation to health care to justice to so many others, we have now delivered almost all, if not virtually all, of our large-scale AFP infrastructure projects on time, and a substantial portion on budget. That's being benchmarked independent of government. We have a world-leading ability to deliver these projects.

I also know what our experience was in the province of Ontario on large-scale procurement before 2003. What I know is that we will deliver the 427 extension, as we are currently delivering the 407 East, as we've delivered on multiples of hospitals that exist here in the GTHA and Niagara region and beyond, using partnering, in our case, between the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure Ontario, to make sure that we are providing benefits to the people of Ontario, providing value to the taxpayers and actually delivering on the projects that the people expect us to deliver on.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'll take you calling me "grandstanding" as a compliment, considering it's coming from probably the best grandstander that I know, so I do appreciate that.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I appreciate that. Thank you. Lots of compliments here this morning.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I don't think there's anybody better, so I'll give you those marks.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I appreciate that.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'll give you an example. It's certainly an example on P3s, because you mentioned hospitals, so you opened up the door.

In St. Catharines, we built a P3 hospital for a billion dollars. Actually, it was \$1.1 billion. It's around 350 beds. In Peterborough, where one of your members is from, they built almost the exact same hospital—same size, number of beds—for \$350 million.

Do you know what the difference was? The difference was that the one in St. Catharines was a P3. It cost \$700 million more. The one in Peterborough was publicly

funded, publicly delivered. So there's a difference of \$700 million.

So when we're hearing reports that it cost \$8.2 billion, I would think that it may be accurate. Having said that, wouldn't it—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Thank you, Mr. Gates. You'll be able to pick up the rest of your questioning after the recess.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Thank you, Chair.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Thank you, Minister. I want to say "Mr. Minister" because I'm saying "Mr." to everybody, but it's just "Minister."

Before we recess, I just want to give everyone a heads-up that there will be another meeting in here, so please take your belongings. Normally you can leave your belongings behind, but in this case, please take them with you.

We will recess until after routine proceedings today. Thank you so much.

The committee recessed from 1015 to 1545.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Good afternoon, members. Committee will now resume. We are here to resume consideration of vote 2701 of the estimates of the Ministry of Transportation. There is still remaining a total of 58 minutes. When the committee recessed this morning, as you all recall, we were with the third party. They have 13 minutes left in their rotation. Mr. Gates, the floor is yours.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you very much.

I'm going to follow up from this morning as well, because the response you gave me was a little bit of a concern, so I just want to clarify some things. Minister, would you agree with the statement that the Auditor General's office "is an independent office of the Legislative Assembly that conducts value-for-money and financial audits of the provincial government, its ministries and agencies"?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Yes.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I like short answers. Would you agree that the Auditor General herself then operates in an independent and impartial manner in preparing and presenting her reports?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Yes.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Would you then agree that disputing her reports is, in fact, disputing her ability to act as an independent and impartial judge?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: No.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Could you elaborate on why you would say no?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Sure. I think this morning we were talking a little bit about the auditor's report with respect to the AFP procurement model that the government of Ontario has used over the last number of years. I think at that time, when that report was released, a number of us within government, myself included, felt—I will say, from my perspective, despite best efforts—that there were perhaps some aspects of the assessment, particularly around risk transfer and the benefit or value that flows to the taxpayers of Ontario as a result of that

risk transfer, that were not taken into account to the extent that I believe they should have been taken into account.

I know I've already said here at committee on more than one occasion that we have an extraordinary track record of delivering large-scale infrastructure projects in Ontario across a number of different areas, including transit and transportation, where there are some that have already been delivered and some that continue to be delivered and will be delivered. For example, you mentioned the Highway 427 extension this morning, where the AFP model, I believe, has demonstrated that it can deliver on time and on budget and provide significant value to the taxpayers, especially as it relates to historically how we have been able to deliver projects. I think that answers the question.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Sort of.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I could try again.

Mr. Wayne Gates: In that case, Minister, I'm interested to know how you would respond to this section of the 2014 annual report that focused on Infrastructure Ontario. The report states: "For 74 infrastructure projects ... where Infrastructure Ontario concluded that private-sector project delivery ... would be more cost-effective, we noted that the tangible costs ... were estimated to be nearly \$8 billion higher than they were estimated to be if the projects were contracted out and managed by the public sector."

How would you respond to that, Minister?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: It's been a little bit of time that's passed since that report came out. My recollection was that the official response—not that I'm here to speak on behalf of Infrastructure Ontario, because, of course, they do report to government through a different ministry: economic development, employment and infrastructure. But from what I recall, I believe that there was an assessment of—forgive me if I'm off in my number, but I seem to recall that there was a risk transfer value of somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$17 billion that was assessed for those projects that demonstrate—and I could be off in my number, so forgive me for that—on balance, a significant, tangible financial value to the people of Ontario by the way in which we procured the projects that were being referenced. In essence, I think there was an underestimation of the value that should be placed on that risk transfer.

Mr. Wayne Gates: So you don't think the Auditor General did a very good job?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I think none of us who walk this earth are infallible.

Mr. Wayne Gates: That's interesting.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Yes.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Minister, given that, on average, an Infrastructure Ontario project, according to the Auditor General, who is independent, is more than \$100 million cheaper per project when managed by the public sector, why does your ministry continue to advance P3 models for projects such as the Highway 427 extension, which would fall closer to your ministry?

1550

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I guess that this will come across like a tiny bit of an echo of what I said earlier today. I think that our ability to deliver on the infrastructure projects that are part of our mandate is extremely important to the people that we represent across the province. I know that in the case of this particular project and others, we are able to more quickly deliver on the project and do so with a significant transfer of risk out to the private sector.

From my perspective as the Minister of Transportation, taking into account that we have an enormous demand for infrastructure, as I think you would agree, in this region, in your region and beyond to the rest of the province, and in light of the fact that it's important at all times for us to keep focused on delivering value for taxpayers, this is the best model for us to follow in this regard.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Just a comment to projects are done quicker: The Nipigon bridge was done quicker, and how did we make out there? Just a thought.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I don't believe the Nipigon River bridge was an AFP project.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Can the minister provide—

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Just to clarify that—

Mr. Wayne Gates: I heard that. That's good.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Well, I don't want there to be any confusion. The Nipigon River bridge wasn't an AFP.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate that; thank you.

Can the minister provide the information that led them to select a P3 model rather than a publicly managed model?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I think I've given a high-level explanation. This is a project—and I'm assuming we're still talking about 427 extension?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: It's a project that's in the marketplace right now, with respect to a procurement that will be closing, as was mentioned earlier today, on August 29 of this year. Given that value to taxpayers is of paramount importance to me and to our ministry, I don't want to do anything to imperil or undermine that value to taxpayers. I think the high-level explanation of the analysis that I've provided already is sufficient.

Mr. Wayne Gates: So you don't have any other information to add to that?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Again, I think that the high-level, in a way, parameters that I've already identified—one is the speed at which the project can be delivered and the value that flows to the people of Ontario because of being able to deliver the project more quickly—I know I've said that now twice—but also the overarching transfer of risk out to the private sector. Both of those are fairly fundamental guiding principles around the decision.

Again, I don't want to undermine a procurement that's in the marketplace right now.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Would you have any idea, if it was done in a publicly managed model, of what it would cost? Did you guys take a look at that at all?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Again, there is an overarching value that would be placed on any infrastructure project from an estimates standpoint. But by the same token, there is a procurement that's ongoing right now. The two prequalified—two, three?

Interjection.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Three, sorry. Thank you—the three pre-qualified bidders on this particular project are doing their work right now. They're doing their due diligence. I trust that they'll respond to the procurement, to the RFP, and they'll submit—I'm just making the assumption—within the deadline that has been provided in the procurement. We want to make sure that we get that best value for taxpayers.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Well, I can disagree with you that that's happened in the past, but you can disagree with me as well.

The pre-qualified: Who are they?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm going to ask Gerry Chaput to come forward and speak to that.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I thought that you would.

Mr. Gerry Chaput: Gerry Chaput, provincial highways management, assistant deputy minister. The three prime team members are groups. They're consortia. The first one is called 427 Link-PAW. The contractors are Plenary, Aecon, Walsh and Hatch Mott MacDonald. That's a variety of contractors and consulting engineers.

The second—

Mr. Wayne Gates: That's on the first one, right?

Mr. Gerry Chaput: Pardon me?

Mr. Wayne Gates: That's the first one.

Mr. Gerry Chaput: That's the first one.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you.

Mr. Gerry Chaput: Do you want the other two?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: There are two more.

Mr. Wayne Gates: No, I knew that. They're together.

Mr. Gerry Chaput: The second one is Blackbird Infrastructure Group, which is composed of Cintra, CRH, Ferrovia Agroman, Dufferin, AIA Engineers and Urban Systems Ltd.

The third consortium is Link 427-AM. That consortium is made up of ACS, Miller Construction, Dragados, Bot and MMM Group.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Are they all in Ontario?

Mr. Gerry Chaput: I know that they're working in Ontario right now.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm sorry; are you asking if they're all Ontario-based companies?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: From the reading of that list, there are companies within each of the consortia that would be Ontario-based, if I'm not mistaken.

Mr. Gerry Chaput: Yes, Miller bought—

Mr. Wayne Gates: Of the number of companies—it looks like there are 10 or 11 just off the top of my head; I didn't get a chance to write them down quick—how many of them would be based in Ontario that are just Ontario?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: As Gerry mentioned a second ago, in each of the consortia, there would be companies like Miller, like Bot—the third one you mentioned, Gerry?

Mr. Gerry Chaput: MMM.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: —like MMM. So there are a variety of companies that are part of each of the consortia that are Ontario-based companies that have—

Mr. Wayne Gates: Maybe it would be easier for you to answer which companies aren't Ontario-based.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: All of this information is available, I'm assuming, on the Infrastructure Ontario website, which shows the breakdown of the consortia when we announced what the RFQ demonstrated.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'll ask Gerry the question: Do you have that? Do you have that information? That's all I'm asking.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Well, I'm going to answer the question and say no, but it will be fairly easy for one of your staff to ask that by doing something called a Google search.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Do you have that now?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Not here at committee, no.

Mr. Wayne Gates: You don't bring that kind of information with you?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: How many of these companies are Ontario-based versus not Ontario-based?

Mr. Wayne Gates: So your staff guy wouldn't have this, is what you're saying here today.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: No.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Okay. That's fine.

You might not be able to answer this one either, since you couldn't answer that one. What is the cost of the difference between the P3 model and the publicly managed model for this project?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: You asked that question earlier today, and I already responded.

Mr. Wayne Gates: You can respond again.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: No, I'm not going to. I've already answered that question, Chair.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): You do whatever you want.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: So the answer is no. We're not going to answer.

Mr. Wayne Gates: You can say what you want. I have no problem with that.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): I would just caution. I don't think it looks really good, but people can do whatever they want. Ask the question; you can provide any answer you like.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Is that an impartial comment from the Chair, that it doesn't look good for me to answer that question or not answer that question?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): To say, "I don't want to answer the question," that's your discretion, what you want to do. Both of you can say whatever you like.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Just to be clear on this, Chair, it was a question that was specifically asked this morning and already responded to.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): That's fine. You can do what you like with the question, and you can ask the question you like.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Great. Thank you.

Mr. Wayne Gates: What percentage of the cost of this project will be allocated to building HOT lanes, collection booths and other infrastructure?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Again, this is a project that's currently in procurement. As part of that process, when I announced a number of months ago the high-occupancy toll-lane proposal that is part of this overall bid or procurement process that's out on the market right now—again, I'm not going to delve into the specifics of something that's in the marketplace right now.

Mr. Wayne Gates: How were the companies pre-qualified?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Gerry?

Mr. Gerry Chaput: The contractors would have gone through a process where they outlined their skills in order to be able to receive the RFP. It would have considered aspects such as their past experience, their ability to complete projects of that scale and scope within those time frames, experience in terms of linear infrastructure etc.—those types of components.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Minister, can you provide the business case or reports showing the estimates for these costs for the HOT lanes? You must have a breakdown of what it's going to cost. I understand it's in the procurement, but you must have an idea—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): There are 30 seconds remaining.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Again, specifically on the 427 extension, what I would say is that that entire process is part and parcel of the procurement that's in the marketplace right now. To speculate here at committee or to provide information on that would potentially put at risk the value to taxpayers that I'm expected to deliver on this project.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Can the minister provide the ridership and the market studies showing the revenue and the ridership projections for Highway 427 HOT lanes?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: When you say "ridership," that's normally a term that we assign to things like public transit. I think you're talking about usage per se?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Usage; whatever.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Can you repeat the question again—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Sorry, that completes the time. There will be another round where you can answer that question.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I was thrown off by the term "ridership." I didn't catch the rest of it.

Mr. Wayne Gates: You're easily thrown off. I apologize.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): It now moves to the government for 20 minutes. I recognize Mr. Dong.

Mr. Han Dong: Minister, I want to switch topics a little bit. I want to talk about the Pan Am Games. If we think about Pan Am, it happened less than a year ago, but I feel like not enough attention has been paid to it. We have to recognize that it did leave many infrastructure legacies for young athletes in the community. I congratulate the government. At the time, I think it was Minister Margaret Best who went out there and won the bid on behalf of the province to secure this opportunity.

All three levels of government need to be recognized for their preparation for the games. After all, it was the largest games in Ontario history; 1.4 million people came to Ontario. There was a lot of speculation on how we were going to cope with that: Where are they going to stay? How are they going to move around in the greater Golden Horseshoe area? I think the short three weeks was rather seamless in terms of transportation, moving people from one place to another. It also gave us a great opportunity to learn the potential of our province and our government.

1600

I'm wondering if you have anything to say in terms of your ministry. What did you learn throughout that experience and something that you think would be useful for our future planning?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Right. Thanks very much, MPP Dong, for the question.

I think it's useful for us to remind ourselves collectively that we were able, as a government and as a province, to deliver on the largest-scale event of its kind in the province's history, and to do so successfully.

From the transportation perspective, I think that we had a lot of lessons learned. We had a lot of success with respect to the ability to coordinate with so many different partners.

I had the chance, as did the Premier, during the games to visit the Unified Transportation Coordination Centre, which was essentially the one key focal point for the entire transportation plan, at a facility that is a government facility, an MTO facility, just adjacent to Highway 400, just north of Highway 401, and to see so many different partners and so many different agencies working closely together—all of our affected municipal partners, law enforcement, municipal transit systems—to be literally housed in one area so that there could be rapid deployment of resources, as needed, so that there could be real-time information flowing.

We had two fundamental transportation goals with the Pan Am and Parapan Am Games. One was to make sure that all of those involved in the games, athletes, volunteers, officials, media and spectators etc., could get to the venues on time to participate or to witness the games themselves. That was goal number one.

Secondly, the other goal that we had in transportation was to make sure that the region kept moving, obviously, for those who live and work in this area, notwithstanding how significant the challenge was, especially as it relates to certain things that we deployed during the Pan Am and Parapan Am Games like the temporary HOV-lane

networks for the games route network, which I know were a bit of a challenge, a bit of a culture shock, for people who are used to using certain highways during the day to commute.

By and large, notwithstanding a few of the bumps along the way, the fact that we deployed, for example, the HOV lanes ahead of the games, so that law enforcement and the travelling public had a chance to grow accustomed to the fact that the games were coming and there'd be an opportunity to change commuting behaviour—I think we saw a significant spike in public transit usage. We saw a number of people who used the available software, the apps that were out there—Metrolinx had one; others had some as well—so that they could plan ahead.

At the end of it all, even though I recognize it was a bit of a challenge, by and large, the region kept moving. I'm proud to say that from the standpoint of the athletes and others affiliated with the games, everybody got to their sporting event or to their sporting venue on time.

I think it's that notion that we were able to coordinate and deploy this kind of large-scale event over a stretch of time—it wasn't just a day or two; it was over weeks when you factor in Pan Am and Parapan Am—and to do so successfully actually speaks to the appetite that exists in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area for more coordination. It also speaks to the fact that we're on the right track, as you look at the work that Metrolinx is currently involved in, not just with the capital build-out of more transit, but finding ways to engage in more coordinated behaviour, coordinated partnerships with all of our municipalities and affected partners in the area.

I would say to the team at MTO, a number of whom worked on this for months and months and months before, in partnership with all of those partners, all of those other moving parts that I mentioned a second ago, that they did a really fantastic job of both planning and executing.

Mr. Han Dong: I just want to add one more comment. I need to point out that all the preparation and the building of this infrastructure was done closely after the start of the greatest recession since the Great Depression. I think that needs to be recognized as well to put it in context. So thank you very much for that job well done.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Thank you for the question.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Ms. McGarry?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: As you know, Minister, part of my mandate letter included the autonomous vehicle legislation, to prepare—autonomous vehicles, self-driving, connected, automated; whatever you want to call them. I know that this is an emerging technology that I think Waterloo region is ripe to accept. As you know, we stood on a very windy hill at the University of Waterloo, and that's where you announced the fact that people could now test-pilot these technologies on highways in Ontario starting on January 1, 2016.

I know that Waterloo region particularly has a high number of companies that are dealing with robotics, IT,

quantum computing that would help secure those vehicles against hacking and a number of other things. I'm just wondering whether you could add a few comments about what Ontario is doing to stay ahead of these new technologies and how we can take advantage of this new company coming in.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Sure. First, let me start off by saying thank you to you for the work that you've done on this particular topic. As you quite rightly mentioned, it's part of the mandate letter that I have and, in turn, the one that you have as well. I know that we've seen some fantastic progress made on this important file.

From my perspective, the entire world of transportation planning and how we deal with particularly densely populated urban and suburban areas is something that is going through a bit of a transformational era. Right now, we have not only disruptive technology that exists—for example, around the driverless, autonomous, automated or automated-connected vehicle; I think what we're also witnessing is a cultural generational shift amongst the travelling public. Again, I think of my children, eight and five years of age, and those who are a bit older than them, part of the millennial generation who view traditional vehicle ownership slightly differently than I did and do, than my cohort does.

In terms of wanting to be in a position to access and utilize a more useful asset, I've said publicly before and I think I said here at committee just a few days ago that, on average, the traditional personal car sits idle for 90%, 92%, 93% of the day. That doesn't make it a particularly useful or well-used asset. I think that when you take into account the technology that exists, it's not just within the auto sector itself; it's also within the entire technology sector that we have.

You're 100% right in talking about how well placed not just Ontario is, but specifically how well placed Waterloo region is. When we had the first coming-together of both auto and technology companies interested in automated vehicles, when we had that event take place, I think I was—not “I think”; I know I was actually blown away by exactly how much energy there was in the room from all of those participants who recognize that this is the next big thing that's kind of upon us.

Obviously, there are different opinions as to how quickly this technology will be not just embraced but sort of broadly distributed on our roads and highways, but I thought it was important and I believe it's still important for Ontario, as a jurisdiction that has a very proud track record of delivering for the auto industry and employing hundreds of thousands of people directly and indirectly in this sector historically, to show leadership and to make sure that we had a framework, a pilot opportunity out there for this technology to be developed and tested here in the province.

Again, I use the term “developed” on purpose because it's not simply about testing the technology here; it's about the opportunity to demonstrate that in a climate like ours with conditions like we have in Ontario, we can attract the economic development, the investment and,

therefore, the jobs that will help supply what I think is the next shift within the world of vehicles, generally speaking.

I think it was a smart strategic move on the part of our government to be there first amongst Canadian provinces. Obviously there are some states south of the border and other parts of the world where this technology is already being tested, so in that regard playing a little bit of catch-up, but I wanted it to be successfully demonstrated that we are first in Canada. I think, going forward, we have to keep an open mind.

There will be other challenges with respect to some of the safety aspects that I know are a concern to some of public. I get that. Certainly, a range of other potential regulatory challenges will exist with this technology as it emerges, but I think it's undeniable that that's the direction that the transportation world is moving in. I think that when you combine that technology with the desire, that cultural shift towards more sharing and making assets more useful, hand in hand with the unprecedented traditional public transit infrastructure investments that we're making, I think those two phenomena combined will go a long way to helping us successfully combat the gridlock challenge that we face in densely populated areas like the GTHA.

1610

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): I recognize Ms. Vernile.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Minister, I'd like to ask you about light rail transit projects across Ontario. In particular, I have great interest in the ION that's coming to Waterloo region. As the MPP for Kitchener Centre, I can tell you that this is of great interest to the people of my riding and in our region.

I can report to you that the main street in Kitchener—Waterloo, King Street, is torn up now from end to end—and it's a good sign—because construction work is under way. I look forward to the day that you and I and my colleague from Cambridge, MPP McGarry, will ride on that maiden voyage on the LRT.

But I do think it's important for us to provide some clarification and some clarity to some misinformation that has been put forward. The province committed to two thirds the cost of the LRT. I can tell you this, as a journalist having covered this story from the beginning—I used to anchor and produce a weekly news and current affairs program in Kitchener called ProvinceWide. I remember sitting down in 2002 with the then CFO Gerry Thompson with the region of Waterloo—it was just an idea at the time—and he wanted an LRT. I asked him, “What's the cost going to be?” He said, “\$500 million.” The province was quick to the table at that time with two thirds of that, which was \$300 million, thanks to my predecessor John Milloy, who worked very hard for that.

When the costs began to scale, the feds eventually came to the table, as they should as an equal partner. But there has been some misinformation advanced by opposition members saying that somehow the province

has not met up to its responsibility of paying for two thirds, whereas we have, of the initial cost. I think that you're to be commended for showing leadership on that and for being there early to the table with that amount of money.

Now I want you, if you can, Minister, to give us an understanding on the scope of this project, what it's going to mean for Waterloo region and why LRT projects are important to you, the ministry and other Ontario communities, because this is a very important priority for your government.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Absolutely. Thank you very much for the question. I think right off the top I would say that Waterloo region, as per what you said in your question—obviously a conversation or a media interview happening all the way back in 2002—has shown tremendous leadership on the public transit file, generally speaking, through a number of local politicians and MPPs. You mentioned John Milloy, and obviously yourself and Ms. McGarry, who have shown tremendous leadership through the years with respect to working closely with the regional and local governments around making sure that we are making the right decisions. But it does take a significant degree of local leadership, and I would congratulate Waterloo region on showing that leadership.

They're not always easy conversations to have, especially when you're talking about LRT in terms of it being a transit technology. It's not something that's particularly well understood here in a province like Ontario. Between projects like the Waterloo ION and Ottawa's LRT and of course what we're building here in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, these will be, over the next two years, the very first opportunities that Ontarians have on a significant scale to use this kind of transit, which they haven't in the past. I think that there has been—in some areas, not necessarily Waterloo, though it may be in Waterloo as well—a degree, historically, of skepticism about this particular kind of technology, because again, people are not used to it. It's not a bus, it's not a streetcar, it's not a subway and it's not a GO train. It's something that provides significant benefit and can be deployed in a, relatively speaking, cost-effective way.

Again, I think Waterloo region, being such an early adopter of this concept, deserves praise for coming forward in that way and for sticking with it through thick and thin. I know there is tremendous excitement now, from my perspective, to be able to say to people, "We're not that far away now." It's only a matter of a couple of years, or a few years, before we can say to people in Waterloo and in Ottawa—here in Toronto, for example, the Crosstown, which I believe today, the tunnelling essentially from Black Creek Drive to Yonge Street, if I'm not mistaken; today or this week—has concluded. In that case, we're talking about an LRT project that is the single largest public transit project in Ontario history. But even here in Toronto there are a lot of people who, when I talk to them, say, "LRT? That's kind of cool. It sounds cool, but we've never tried it before."

I think whatever remaining challenge we have around convincing people that this was exactly the right thing to do, to be able to build and supply so much more transit service in a significantly more cost-effective way—whatever residual doubt there might be left in some communities will be eliminated completely as soon as this service comes into effect, and people have a chance to see exactly how it can transform local and regional communities.

But I want to stress again that thanks to you, MPP McGarry, your municipal leadership, your predecessor and an Ontario Liberal government that for the last 13 years, through two administrations, has recognized the value of investing in crucial public transit, we're getting it right. But our work is not done yet.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: We look forward to that initial ride with you, Minister.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Ms. McGarry.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: In the last two and a half minutes, I wanted to ask you briefly about another emerging technology, and that's advancing more charging stations for electric vehicles. What's that going to do for Ontario in terms of reducing greenhouse gas emissions? I'm just wondering if you wanted to provide any comments for wrap-up for our side.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Sure. Really quickly on that, just a couple of days ago I was in Mississauga to announce that we are now in a position to award the \$20 million that we talked about late last year for a network of new electric vehicle charging stations. There will be somewhere in the neighbourhood of 500 built and supplied or provided by 2017. They really will help us—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Two minutes remaining

Hon. Steven Del Duca: —provide a network of fast-charging stations right around Ontario, so that those individuals who may be inclined to purchase an electric vehicle—and obviously, by way of modernizing our Electric Vehicle Incentive Program, we're helping to encourage them on that side of the ledger as well—will now realize that not only can they access support for home-based charging infrastructure, but to help alleviate any range anxiety they may have, if they want to purchase a vehicle that's electric, they will now see, for example, potentially in their communities at a McDonald's, a Tim Hortons, an IKEA or some other retail or public space, that they will have access to a fast-charging station; meaning, depending on their vehicle, depending on the technology, in a much shorter time period, they'll be able to substantially charge or almost fully charge their vehicle to be able to get home or to wherever they're going in their particular commute.

So it's great news to be able to have these 500 new additional charging stations deployed, but again, I think this is part of the cultural shift towards some of the new technologies that are emerging. In my own community, people tell me they want to partner with us to fight climate change, and this is one fairly readily available

opportunity they have to help wage that war successfully with us.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Do you think that electric vehicles and automated vehicles at some point in the future can be combined to take some more cars off the road?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I did say earlier that the automated vehicle technology and how it gets deployed over the next number of years—that, combined with a different perspective of how our next generation of drivers or people who want to move themselves around view the car as an asset, will help significantly.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you very much.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: No problem.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Just two seconds left, so that's fine.

We have 24 minutes remaining, so the remaining time will be split up with eight minutes per caucus.

We move now to the official opposition. Mr. Harris.

Mr. Michael Harris: Minister, why was the second stage of the environmental assessment suspended for the GTA west corridor after a decade of taxpayers' investment on that?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Actually, I think you hit the nail on the head with respect to the answer in your question. Your question talked about the fact that this is a process that began a decade ago. It began a decade ago formally, but it began conceptually even before that point in time. In answering some of the questions from the government caucus here today, I talked a little bit about how the entire world of transportation planning is literally transforming under our feet, with new technologies, new challenges, particularly in densely populated urban and suburban areas.

I recognize that a number of our partners, particularly our municipal partners, have worked closely with the province on this over the last number of years. It's why I've had the chance to speak to some of them about this. But I felt, we felt, it was important to press "pause" on the environmental assessment which we announced in December.

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Mr. Michael Harris: Why?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Because the world of transportation is changing. I felt that a project that began so many years ago, before anyone had heard of automated vehicles; before we had taken up the fight, as we have, with respect to climate change; before we were able to launch a multimodal transportation plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe; before we were able to see how, for example, our growth plan was operating here in this region—and I know Minister McMeekin, myself, Minister Mauro and Minister Sousa announced some stuff earlier today in Mississauga regarding the greenbelt and growth plan. It was important for us to take stock of where we stood on this particular project, to determine how best to proceed.

Mr. Michael Harris: So you talk about municipal partners. Vaughan—you'll know that area well—Cal-

don, King, York and Peel have all passed resolutions—and I'm sure you're in receipt of those—asking for your ministry to resume the environmental assessment. When can they expect this EA to resume?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: They can expect that an update will be provided. What that update will say is not something, at this point, that I can comment on, because the internal review of the project is not complete.

I've had the chance to speak with, I believe, representatives from each of the municipalities you referenced a second ago. I've conveyed to them that I understand that they have a feeling of urgency around this particular project. I've committed to them that the entire review, and the result that flows from the review, will not languish and that we will provide an update as soon as the review is concluded. They seem to accept that.

Mr. Michael Harris: Do you feel that the GTA west corridor is a needed infrastructure project that should continue on?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I think, again, after 10-plus years—with a starting point prior to the initial growth plan that came out in 2005-06 but that was given life through that growth plan, and given that we are just in the process now of looking at updating the growth plan—again, that was the announcement that I participated in earlier today in Mississauga—I felt it was important for us to pause and take a look at this. When you consider the size and the scope of this kind of infrastructure, when theoretically it might come into service if you were to build it, and taking a look at where the world of transportation and transportation planning will be within that horizon and then beyond—because the last thing in the world I think anybody would want to do would be to inadvertently build what would eventually become potentially a stranded asset. We needed to take a look at this. It's not a small thing. This is not like a Highway 427 seven-kilometre extension, roughly. This is a 50-plus kilometre 400-series controlled-access highway—

Mr. Michael Harris: So this spring—

Hon. Steven Del Duca: —if I can just finish—so it was important for us, after this many years, to take a quick look at it, to review it internally, and to provide an update as soon as we can.

Mr. Michael Harris: So will that update give some assurance to folks, including your municipal partners as well as those that are looking at developing lands in or around that area, whose lands are in fact frozen because of this potential EA—will this spring's announcement give some clarity to those folks, do you feel?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: It's my hope that the update, when it comes, will provide clarity. But I also don't want to do anything to get too far ahead of the internal review that's under way currently. My expectation is that we'll be able to provide clarity.

Mr. Michael Harris: When do you expect this announcement to happen? Spring is here—

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I can assure everybody I'd like the review to be completed and be able to provide an update as soon as possible. But we want to make sure that we get it right.

Mr. Michael Harris: Right. It said “spring 2016,” right? Do you still expect it to happen in spring 2016?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I know the review is under way. Again, as soon as we receive the review back and I’ve had a chance to look at it, we’ll make a decision and provide the update. That’s the message that I’ve conveyed to the municipalities as well. I get it; nobody wants this to go on endlessly.

Mr. Michael Harris: Hopefully, you won’t tell them you’ll take it back. They may not like that. We expect it here, but I don’t know about them.

Have you done any sort of economic costing, in terms of what the economic cost to the province would be if the EA doesn’t follow through? I guess that’s what the committee is tasked with studying as well. Are there any economic studies that they’ll be doing in terms of the corridor not proceeding?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Again, the scope of the review, I guess I would call it, is fairly open-ended, and so I would anticipate that the review would cover off a number of topics, including areas or topics like the one you just referenced.

Mr. Michael Harris: How much time left?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Two minutes, 30 seconds.

Mr. Michael Harris: Have you had a chance to speak to some of your municipal partners who have put forward resolutions, including your own municipality?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: The list that you gave earlier—I believe I’ve either met with or spoken to municipal representatives from each of those municipalities, yes.

Mr. Michael Harris: What about some of the private sector organizations? Have you had a chance to meet with them? I’m sure they’ve corresponded with your office about this particular project.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Two minutes remaining.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I think in terms of formal correspondence, it has been a relatively limited number, but certainly people have approached me over the last four or five months. The message I’ve heard over and over again—which I respect—is: “Just don’t let it languish forever, because we’re all looking for some degree of certainty, having participated in the process now for a few years.” I respect that. That is the undertaking that I’m giving. That’s the commitment that I’m making. It will not languish. It will be reviewed and we’ll provide an update as soon as we can.

Mr. Michael Harris: Finally—because I’ve got two minutes left—what would you say the top three priorities for you are this year? What would they be? I know it sounds like a bit of a government question.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: This feels like a job interview.

Mr. Michael Harris: I know I probably stole one of their questions already, but—

Hon. Steven Del Duca: If I were an animal, what kind of animal would I be?

Mr. Michael Harris: Tell us what your top three priorities are in your portfolio right now.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Del Duca, why are you so great?

Anyway, the number one priority, always, is maintaining road and highway safety. Number two would be continuing to advance and build out the infrastructure, both the public transit and the traditional transportation infrastructure that we need so that our quality of life continues to be strong and also so that our economy can continue to grow. I think the last priority for me is to continue to be as open-minded as possible so as to help enable some of the outcomes that I referenced a second ago when discussing some of the emerging technologies. Those are probably, just off the top of my head, really quickly, three significant priorities for me for this year.

Mr. Michael Harris: Finally, you and I spoke about ride-sharing and some of the disruptive technologies. We saw how your government really allowed Toronto to go it alone. You see in Ottawa what’s happening there. We met about a year ago. What have you done since we met and what will you plan on bringing forward, if anything, to actually provide rules for ride-sharing that would be consistent right across the province?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I don’t know how much time we have, but I would say, really quickly on this, that to me, there’s a difference between vehicle-sharing and ride-sharing. When I talk about what’s happening in the transportation realm, generally speaking—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Sorry, Minister. That’s our time. And there’s no more time, so I apologize to all the folks who were in the middle of an answer.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: It’s a great topic. Maybe next time I get called to estimates we can talk about it more.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Now we move to Mr. Gates.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I’ll agree with you; it’s an interesting topic, for sure. We probably should spend a lot more time talking about it.

My colleagues from the Liberal government mentioned the auto sector.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: The auto sector?

Mr. Wayne Gates: The auto sector. It’s more of a statement than anything, but I think it needs to be said that the auto sector is going to need your government’s support this year. Obviously, they’re entering a year of bargaining. The Oshawa plant is in jeopardy. We all know that. They need a product there. There are 12,000 jobs in Oshawa, direct and indirect.

The problem that we’re seeing—and certainly Unifor, the union that your government is quite aware of, is not supporting the trans-Pacific trade agreement, which could cost the auto sector 20,000 jobs. They ran an information—even with an announcement in Windsor earlier this week, I think, or Friday—saying the importance of not supporting that. They’re here in Toronto on Friday.

I just want to get a message out that the auto industry is important to the overall health of this economy. We

can talk about electric things; we can talk about anything we want, but if we don't have any jobs in the auto sector, I think that's going to hurt our province.

You can answer something to that or you can just let me talk—it's fine, if you want—

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Really quickly, I would say that I think our government has a very strong track record of not only defending but being there to tangibly support Ontario's auto sector. Last I'd heard, somewhere in the neighbourhood of one of every seven jobs in our province is either directly or indirectly related to the auto sector. So you're 100% right in terms of making sure that we have a strong voice at the table to be supportive. I know Minister Duguid, who has the responsibility directly for the auto sector, is someone who is a champion for that sector.

I would say really quickly, though, that I think the sector itself recognizes—and we see this with examples between Ford and General Motors and now even Fiat Chrysler looking at some of the emerging technologies that have the potential to change, in a positive way, their traditional business model. I think that's something we're all going to have to grapple with. But fundamentally, you are 100% right. I think across the board, we need to be as supportive as we can of this industry, which has historically been and is still today so crucial to our economy.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I will say that I agree with the technology that's going on. I don't think that's the issue. The issue is the trans-Pacific trade agreement. I can't wait until we have a driverless car in the province of Ontario. I don't have anybody to drive me around; I've got to drive myself. So I think that's a good thing.

Just a question, and I don't know who can answer it. The Nipigon bridge: The lead company was from Spain. Am I correct on that?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I believe—Gerry can correct me if I'm wrong—the partnership was Bot Ferrovia; I believe that's the name of it. Bot is based in Oakville, Ontario. Ferrovia is, obviously, from Spain, I want to say; right?

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Mr. Gerry Chaput: Bot-Ferrovia joint venture.

Mr. Wayne Gates: So one of the companies was from Spain.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: And the other one was from Oakville.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I just wanted to clarify that, because I did get the P3 incorrect by not taking a look. So I just wanted to establish that.

I'm going to talk about the bridge for my next five or six minutes or whatever I have. Can the minister provide the certificates of assurance that were signed off by the MTO officials at the completion of the Nipigon bridge?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Gerry can tell me if I'm wrong about this one, but the bridge, as a project, is not a completed project. We had talked last week about this. There is a part of the span that is complete. There are—is it two more towers? One more tower?

Mr. Gerry Chaput: Just one more.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: There's one more tower on the other half of the bridge still to be completed as the overall project. I think that that would be the answer.

Mr. Wayne Gates: When it is completed, you will provide them?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: It's a couple of years away, is it not?

Mr. Gerry Chaput: Yes, it's several years away.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: It's two-plus years away.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Well, whatever it is, but you will provide them?

Mr. Gerry Chaput: There really is no official certificate of assurance. There is a commissioning process that we do. Following the commissioning and making sure that it is prepared for opening and that everything is safe and completed, then we allow the traffic to travel on it.

Mr. Wayne Gates: We'll have a discussion on whether or not it was safe, but that's a whole other issue for another day.

What reports were completed by the minister in the wake of the collapse?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Reports in the wake of the collapse?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I think that we had talked a little bit a few days ago, here at committee, about the fact that there is an ongoing investigation that will help us get to the root cause of why the bridge malfunctioned when it did. That is a process that's still ongoing. I'm hoping to receive information back on that in the near future.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Okay. Can the minister please tell us how much the temporary fix for the failure is going to cost?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm going to ask Gerry. I'm not sure if we're able to comment.

Mr. Gerry Chaput: Yes. The temporary fix: There were numerous aspects involved with it. We didn't calculate exactly. I don't have the number exactly of how much money was spent in that total amount. There was traffic control; there were pace vehicles; there was compensation to ensure that we had the right materials; the design etc. So there were a lot of operations that were ongoing at the same time. I don't have the total value of that.

Mr. Wayne Gates: The cost: There were a number of different items that were involved, going through the process, I guess.

Mr. Gerry Chaput: Yes.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Who's paying for that?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Go ahead, Gerry.

Mr. Gerry Chaput: Right now, we're looking at all sorts of different factors. We haven't even determined the primary cause of the failure, the reason why it lifted. What we're looking at, of course, are several different aspects. We're waiting for the testing reports to come back. As the minister had noted, we have not yet received those. So it's very premature to comment on the responsibility of costs and what those costs would be at the time.

Mr. Wayne Gates: But we can establish that it wasn't the taxpayers' fault that the bridge lifted. We can certainly say that.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: To amplify what Gerry said a second ago, I think it's important to remember that, in the immediate aftermath of what occurred, what was most important was to make sure that the one lane that was going to remain open after we had levelled off the bridge—I guess that's the best way for a layperson to describe it—was operating safely and that we had one lane open safely, which we managed to do fairly quickly, thanks to—I would say—the heroic efforts of the MTO and others involved.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): One minute, 30 seconds.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: The second part that was most important for us was to try and get that second lane of traffic open on the bridge—obviously, a fairly significant economic link for not just Ontario, but for Canada—and to do that safely to help Nipigon itself, but also our neighbouring municipalities and our neighbouring First Nations, and we were able to do that.

Those were the two priorities at the front end. Gerry is right in terms of saying that because we don't know the exact cause, we're not in a position to prematurely state how costs might be apportioned in the future.

Mr. Wayne Gates: With no disrespect, sir, I would hope that the contract that we signed would make sure that if there were deficiencies—and this was an incredible deficiency—we get those costs put onto to the companies that did the work. Hopefully, you have something to give us some safeguards for the taxpayers of the province of Ontario.

We haven't seen that in the road maintenance as strongly as we would certainly like. As you know, you've been battling courts and you may end up in arbitration. But, hopefully, with the deficiency language that you've put in place here with these companies, the taxpayers aren't going to pay.

What do I have left?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): You have 20 seconds.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Okay. I'm good. You can't answer any of these in 20 seconds. Not you, anyway.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Thank you, Mr. Gates.

Mr. Wayne Gates: That was a compliment.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm taking that as a compliment. I appreciate that. Thank you very much.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Thank you, Mr. Gates. Thank you, Minister.

Now we go to the government for the remaining eight minutes. Mr. Thibeault.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Minister, for being here. I'm looking forward to having this dialogue with you.

I know the last time you and I had the opportunity to speak when I was asking questions in this committee, we talked a little bit about, of course, Highway 69 and the four-laning of Highway 69, which is key for those of us

in the northeast. But, besides Highway 69, MTO is doing work throughout the northeast. I can think of Virginiatown, where we're extending and expanding highways up there. We're looking at doing more bridges and more highways throughout the north. It's key for us who live in northeastern Ontario, and even northern Ontario in general, to have an integrated highway system that links us together as communities and to be part of southern Ontario.

One of the things that I hear often in Sudbury is that it's fantastic that we're seeing Highway 69 expanded into four lanes, and it's making our roads safer—all of those things that come along with that. But what we hear more, as well, from the chamber of commerce and people in general talking, is this is going to change our economy. It's going to change the way southern Ontario people perceive the north because we're going to be part of the 400 series of highways.

I know that you've come up to my riding a couple of times and made some announcements, so kudos to you for braving the cold, so to speak, and having that conversation with the media and with the constituents in Sudbury. What is the plan? What is the continuation of Highway 69, in terms of MTO? How are we looking at making sure that we're meeting our timelines on that? Then I'm going to jump to the next question.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Sure. That's a great point that you raised, not just about Highway 69, but about all the work that is undertaken through MTO with respect to the northern highways program, which, as you would know, over the last number of years—certainly over the last 10, 12 or 13 years—has really been a very significant and robust program. In fact, even hearing from colleagues of ours like Ministers Mauro and Gravelle, people who have been serving in that this Legislature for quite a bit longer than both myself and yourself, they'll talk about how they've literally witnessed in some years that northern highways program being double and triple what it was prior to 2003. I think that speaks to two things. One is very clear recognition from the Liberal government that the close to 17,000 kilometres of highway we have across Ontario, particularly in the north, really are the lifeblood for our economy. They're also so crucial in terms of making sure that people have safe access to their homes and to their communities.

At every step along the way over the last 13 years—and particularly now with our infrastructure plan kind of on steroids with Moving Ontario Forward, that northern highways program will continue to be strong and robust. Even with that strength, there is no shortage of challenges in the northeast and the northwest: the four-laning of Highway 11/17, or portions thereof, and the fact that historically, we haven't always had a federal partner at the table who has been willing to partner in the same way that the federal government historically has partnered on things like the Trans-Canada in other parts of the country. We've had some challenges along the way but I think here at Queen's Park, from our government, historically there has been tremendous progress made.

You mentioned cold weather. I had the chance to be out there with you a number of months ago. I wasn't wearing a hat, from what I recall, which is not always the wisest thing to do during some of our colder months, especially when you have no natural insulation on your head. But it was a good announcement where we gave an update to the community about a timeline that had shifted a little bit. Obviously, we take our responsibilities with respect to the duty that we have to consult with our First Nations very seriously. We want to make sure we're on a solid footing with respect to achieving those goals and getting the approvals necessary to keep moving forward.

In your time here as an MPP for the community, thanks to your advocacy and thanks to MTO's great work, we've seen progress continue to be made and demonstrated, which I think also helps to deal with whatever concerns the community might have—the community at large; not just Sudbury itself but the greater area around Sudbury—about whether or not we really are going to get this done, because they can see progress, they can drive on more open stretches of highway that are four-laned and they realize that we are committed to getting it done. I have no doubt that between your local advocacy, your regional advocacy and the team at MTO, it will get done.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Excellent. I know you mentioned, with the Nipigon bridge, the heroic work of MTO officials. I think it's important to highlight an MTO official out of Sudbury. His name is John Cimino. He has done phenomenal work in keeping the community informed and does great work in keeping my office informed. So I just wanted to pass that along to you, Minister, that you do have heroic staff, and my hat goes off to all of them.

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Hon. Steven Del Duca: You shouldn't say that when they're in the room, though, because—

Laughter.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Very quickly, I talked about northeastern Ontario in general, and specifically, I'd like to now address transit.

We talk about trying to get more and more people onto transit. Sudbury is a unique situation where we can fit almost all of southern Ontario's cities within our boundaries. So, we have one bus that needs to travel 45 minutes to get up to another part of our community. We're slowly addressing that, but there are other rural communities that have issues—let's be clear—with transit.

Maybe you can tell members of this committee: What's the ministry's plan on addressing transit access issues in rural communities?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Yes. I don't think you were here a little bit earlier today; we did talk about the community transportation pilot program—I know it was something that we announced and provided ongoing funding to support—and how that has helped communities in all parts of Ontario, including in the north: relatively small dollar amounts, but really a significant impact that has been achieved as a result of some of those grants or some of those investments. I would anticipate,

given the uptake and the success that the program has demonstrated thus far, that we'll continue to be, hopefully, in a position to provide that kind of support.

Obviously, if it's a community that has an existing public transit service, there is support that flows through our gas tax program. If it's a community that's looking to head in that direction, I know that the door would always be open, our ears would be open. We want to encourage that.

But I also do recognize that it can be a bit of a challenge. When there is not necessarily a history in a community for a traditional public transit opportunity, it can represent a little bit of a challenge. That's when I think we have to be open as a ministry to creativity and innovation. In different parts of the province, including in the north, I think we are confronted regularly with some pretty innovative ideas around how we can partner to improve the outcomes for the people who we're representing—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): One minute remaining.

Hon. Steven Del Duca:—so we continue to be sort of “open ears, open doors,” and we look forward to partnering.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Thanks.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Ms. McGarry or Ms. Vernile?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: In the last minute, do you just want to update the committee on the rollout of Bill 31 and how it's going so far?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I think that, by and large, it's going really well so far.

One of the emerging challenges that we have are, some of you would've seen in the media just in the last couple of days, concerns expressed by law enforcement around drug-impaired driving. With plans that had been announced at the federal level with respect to the legalization of marijuana, which is within their purview to proceed on that issue, I think that one of my challenges—and I've said this publicly—is that we have to stress at all times that operating a vehicle impaired, whether you're alcohol-impaired or drug-impaired is, obviously, unacceptable, or if you're distracted by a hand-held. Obviously, you're not just breaking the law; you're putting yourself, your passengers and other road users at risk.

We talked a lot through this committee appearance, about the importance of road safety. It's something that I'll keep talking about publicly as it relates to road safety—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Thank you, Chair.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): My apologies. Our time is up.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: No, it's okay.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Thank you so much, Minister, for being here. Thank you to the staff

of the ministry for being here as well. Thank you for your deputation and your remarks.

We are now in a position to deal with the vote on the estimates. Just to be clear, because we've reached the time limit, there is no debate, but members can ask for a recorded vote, if they like. We'll go through the votes on various elements of the—

Interjection: The votes.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Exactly—each of the votes.

I'll read a preamble to begin, and then—Minister, at this point, if you do need to leave, you're welcome to. I don't want you to feel stuck there.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I can wait.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): This concludes the committee's consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Transportation. Standing order 66(b) requires that the Chair put, without further amendment or debate, every question necessary to dispose of the estimates. Are the members ready to vote? Excellent.

Beginning with the first one: Shall vote 2701, ministry administration program, carry? Carried.

Shall vote 2702, policy and planning, carry? Carried.

Shall vote 2703, road user safety program, carry? Carried.

Shall vote 2704, provincial highways management program, carry? Carried.

Shall vote 2705, labour and transportation cluster, carry? Carried.

Shall the 2016-17 estimates of the Ministry of Transportation carry? Carried.

Shall I report the 2016-17 estimates of the Ministry of Transportation to the House? Yes, that is carried, or that is done, whatever the term is. It's carried.

Thank you. At this point, we'll now ask for a five-minute recess so that we can allow the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to come.

Thank you again, Minister.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Thank you, Chair.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): We recess for five minutes.

The committee recessed from 1645 to 1656.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND LONG-TERM CARE

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Good afternoon. I call to order the Standing Committee on Estimates. We welcome the ministers, both the associate minister and the minister. Thank you for being here.

I have a little preamble that I need to read before we begin. I'm sure you're familiar with this process.

The committee is about to begin consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care for a total of 15 hours. As we have some new members—and perhaps a new Chair—a new ministry and a new minister before the committee, I would like to take this opportunity to remind everyone that the purpose of the estimates committee is for members of the Legislature to

determine if the government is spending money appropriately, wisely and effectively in the delivery of services intended.

I would also like to remind everyone that the estimates process has also worked well with a give-and-take approach. On the one hand, members of the committee take care to keep their questions relevant to the estimates of the ministry. The ministry, for its part, demonstrates openness in providing information requested by the committee.

As Chair, I tend to allow members to ask a wide range of questions pertaining to estimates before the committee to ensure that they are confident the ministry will spend those dollars appropriately. In the past, members have asked questions about the delivery of similar programs in previous fiscal years, about the policy framework that supports a ministry approach to a problem or to service delivery, or about the competence of a ministry to spend the money wisely and efficiently. However, it must be noted that the onus is on the member asking the question to make questions relevant to the estimates under consideration.

The ministry is required to monitor the proceedings for any questions or issues that the ministry undertakes to address. I trust that the deputy minister has made arrangements to have the hearings closely monitored with respect to questions raised so that the ministry can respond accordingly. If you wish, you may at the end of your appearance verify the questions and issues being tracked by the research officer.

Are there any questions before we begin? Seeing none, I am now required to call vote 1401 of the estimates, which sets the review process in motion. We will begin with a statement of not more than 30 minutes by the minister, followed by statements of up to 30 minutes by the official opposition and 30 minutes by the third party, and then the minister will have 30 minutes for a reply. The remaining time will be apportioned equally among the three parties.

Minister, the floor is now yours.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. It's been about six months since I last appeared here before you, together with the associate minister, but we're pleased to be back today as we have a great deal to report regarding our progress since we last met.

I am honoured to serve as Ontario's Minister of Health, not simply because the Premier asked me to serve in cabinet, but also because I have a genuine passion for improving health care for all Ontarians. Quite frankly, it's why I became a doctor, and it's why I spent so many years, good years, working in countries that can really only dream of having the quality of health care that we enjoy here in Ontario. I want to ensure that Ontarians continue to enjoy the best possible health care for generations to come.

Also, there probably couldn't be a more exciting time than now to be working in health care. Health care is truly one of the most important issues that our govern-

ment and our province are faced with. The baby boomers are now reaching an age where they need more health care, and it's creating greater pressure on our health care system. At the same time, the economic reality is that we have finite resources. The demand on health care services is growing. We can't simply spend our way out of these challenges, nor should we. Ontarians expect, rightly, that we spend their tax dollars wisely.

But the good news is that we have a health care system that is up to the challenge. By working together with our partners in health care, we can find new ways of doing things that will enable our health care system to serve Ontarians more efficiently and more effectively, while preserving quality.

We also have a plan. In 2012, our government made a commitment to the people of Ontario through our Action Plan for Health Care. That plan was to provide better access, better quality and better value.

Over the course of the first three years of our plan, we made many significant achievements. We introduced community health links to coordinate care for seniors and patients with multiple, complex health issues. We launched the Healthy Kids Strategy to help children to grow up healthy, to grow up happy and to be ready to succeed in life. We completed the first phase of our comprehensive mental health and addictions strategy, which was aimed at children and youth, and we began work on phase 2 of that strategy.

Through these and many other accomplishments, we laid a strong foundation for what was to come next.

In February 2015, I introduced Patients First: Ontario's Action Plan for Health Care, the next phase in our government's commitment to transform our health care system into one that puts the needs of the patients at its centre. It's a plan that recognizes that we still have more work to do to improve the patient experience, to make our system more transparent and accountable, and to ensure that our universal health care system will be there when we need it, for generations to come.

It's a plan that is focused on four key objectives, the first being faster access to the right care. We are working to expand access to more health services and more health care providers.

The second point is connecting services. We're working to deliver better coordinated and integrated care in the community, closer to home. This pillar is key to transforming and sustaining our health care system.

Third is informing. We're committed to supporting patients by providing the resources, information and transparency they need, to make the right decisions about their health.

Fourth and finally, protecting our publicly funded health care system: Publicly funded health care is a key part of our Canadian identity, and we are committed to making smart decisions to ensure our health care system remains sustainable for generations to come.

Since I was here last, in the fall, we have made significantly more progress on the Patients First action plan with respect to all four of those key objectives. In March

of this year, we released our first report back to the people of Ontario on the progress that we have made to date through our Patients First action plan, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to update everyone here today.

Our first commitment to the people of Ontario through the Patients First action plan is that we would provide faster access to the right care, and we are on the right track toward achieving that goal. Over the past year, we've increased access to quality health care in a number of ways. We have expanded the number of health links from 69 to 82 across the province. What this means for patients is that those with the greatest needs, who often have multiple and complex health care conditions, can now access better and better-coordinated care.

Through health links, the hospital, the family doctor, the long-term-care home, community organizations and other health care providers work as a team to design a care plan for each patient. They work together with patients and their families to ensure that they receive the care they need. This means that the patients have an individualized and coordinated plan. They have care providers who ensure that the plan is being followed. They have support to ensure that they are taking, for example, the right medications. They have a care provider they can call who knows them and who is familiar with their situation and can offer help.

I spoke a few minutes ago about our commitment to and achievements with respect to the comprehensive mental health and addictions strategy, and we continue to make progress under the Patients First action plan. Phase 2 of our mental health and addictions strategy expands our focus to include improved transitions between youth and adult services and a broader focus on addictions and adult mental health. We have already made considerable progress in phase 2, and several key initiatives are currently under way.

Thousands of Ontarians are now benefiting from additional investments in more than 200 community-based initiatives and funding for treatment and crisis centres. We are working with our community partners, service providers, and other sector leaders to improve how and where services are delivered. We've increased our investment in mental health and addictions services, which have grown by \$83 million annually in 2016-17.

Ontarians now also have greater access to fertility treatments, as we have expanded access to in vitro fertilization services for Ontarians with all forms of infertility, regardless of their sex, gender, sexual orientation or family status. Our government recognizes that children are our future, and this investment is going to help an additional 4,000 Ontarians grow their families each year.

We have also taken steps to make hospital parking more affordable for thousands of patients, their loved ones and caregivers. Hospital parking costs have often been cited as a serious barrier. We've consulted with patients, patient advocacy groups, hospitals and the Ontario Hospital Association to come up with a plan that reduces the financial burden of parking fees for patients

and their visitors. Under this plan, we've made hospital parking more affordable by reducing hospital parking fees by 50% for frequent hospital visitors, including patients with chronic conditions and their loved ones.

As part of the Ontario government's overall effort to build Ontario up, last year we invested close to \$1.3 billion to expand, renew and modernize hospital infrastructure, with approximately 35 major hospital projects in planning or under construction. In fact, it's part of Ontario's plan to provide \$12 billion over the next 10 years in capital grants to hospitals to continue building essential infrastructure.

Last October, Humber River Hospital became North America's first fully digital hospital and opened its doors to patients here in Toronto. That hospital is using the most modern technologies to offer patients more efficient, safe, accurate and reliable care.

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The opening of the Humber River Hospital was more than just an exciting milestone for Ontario. It was also another example of how Ontario is putting patients first by providing better access to high-quality health care services.

So you can see that we have made significant progress in terms of providing patients with faster access to services. But we have also made progress in connecting patients with the home and community care they want and need. This, in fact, is something I spoke about at length when I appeared before you last fall, but it bears repeating because it's such an essential part of our plan for transforming our health care system.

We know that Ontarians want and deserve a health care system that helps them live independently at home, where they want to be. We continue to work on Patients First: A Roadmap to Strengthen Home and Community Care, our three-year plan which will transform the way we deliver home and community care in this province. It's a plan that will introduce greater consistency in care, provide a better understanding of the services available, offer more support for caregivers and, ultimately, provide better access to the right care for those who need it most.

Our government will continue to fund growth in community-based care, at about 5% per year, for an increase of approximately \$250 million annually. That increase in funding is recognition of the importance of our home and community care sector.

I spoke earlier of our need to be innovative in order to find new ways to relieve the increasing pressure on our health care system. This is one of the reasons we've extended the funding for 23 community paramedicine projects for an additional 12 months. Over the next year, the ministry will further review the impact and role of community paramedicine within other changes to primary care, home and community care, and emergency health services. Through this program, we're exploring how the training and skills of paramedics can improve access to care in the community for patients with chronic conditions, especially seniors.

Chair, another way we're connecting patients to care is through our bundled care approach, which I shared with the committee last fall. This is where a group of providers uses a single payment to cover all the care needs of an individual patient. It builds on strong local examples, such as the program developed at St. Joseph's Health System in Hamilton. We've already announced six sites, and we are continuing to look at ways that we can expand this model.

Our government has also made a number of accomplishments with respect to providing patients with the resources, information and transparency that they need to make the right decisions about their own health. I know that Associate Minister Damerla will also have a great deal of news to share on this front, later in these proceedings.

But one of the key accomplishments of our Patients First action plan is that we are strengthening the immunization system here in Ontario through our Immunization 2020 strategy. Immunization 2020 is a call for participation and action within our communities. It's an invitation to everyone to come together and work towards success. The Immunization 2020 framework provides a common platform for all immunization partners. It supports a comprehensive approach to planning and it urges a system-wide approach to our immunization program. It also focuses on new vaccines and new technologies and on ways of strengthening the current system, and it emphasizes the need to develop system-level performance measurement systems to monitor our progress and ensure accountability.

We've also expanded our publicly funded immunization program to help protect more youth and adults from human papillomavirus, or HPV, infection and related cancers. In fact, last month I announced that beginning in September of this year, Ontario will offer the cancer-fighting HPV vaccine to boys as well as girls in grade 7 as part of our routine school-based HPV immunization program.

Our government also understands the positive impact that having good oral health and a healthy smile can have on a child's overall health, self-esteem and ability to learn. That is why last month I also announced that more than 323,000 children from low-income families are getting free dental care through the new Healthy Smiles Ontario program. Under this expanded program, Ontario is providing free dental care to eligible families to help them raise healthier kids. Children from low-income families can now access free preventive, routine, emergency and essential care from participating licensed dental providers.

Another of our efforts to keep patients informed is through the My CancerIQ website. My CancerIQ is a new online cancer assessment tool that allows Ontarians to find out their risk for breast, cervical, colorectal and lung cancer. Users can learn about their risk of developing one of these four cancers by completing a series of interactive questionnaires in less than 10 minutes. Over the last year, about half a million Ontarians have visited

the new site. The site provides personalized recommendations and teaches Ontarians about the steps that they themselves can take to reduce their risk of cancer.

The final objective of our Patients First action plan is to protect our health care system for generations to come and the patients who depend on it. Once again, this is an area where we have made significant progress in putting patients first. Patients and caregivers will have additional protection through Ontario's first-ever Patient Ombudsman. Christine Elliott was selected as the province's first-ever Patient Ombudsman, following a rigorous recruitment process that included province-wide public input and an independent search that considered almost 400 potential candidates.

In her new role, the Patient Ombudsman will respond to unresolved complaints from patients, residents and clients about their health care and health care experience, whether they received that care in a hospital, in a long-term-care home or in a CCAC. Once in place, she may investigate a health sector organization, following a complaint or on her own initiative, and she will make recommendations to a health sector organization that is the subject of an investigation once that work is complete. The Patient Ombudsman will make reports to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on her activities and recommendations each year and provide reports to our local health integration networks as appropriate.

Again, I want to return to the idea that one of the ways we can protect our health care system is by being innovative. To help us do that, last fall Ontario selected its first-ever Chief Health Innovation Strategist: William Charnetski. In his new role, Mr. Charnetski is championing Ontario as a leading centre not only for new and innovative health technology, but also for bringing that technology to market both here in Ontario and around the world. By helping new innovative technologies gain a foothold in our health care system, we're improving outcomes for patients and helping our health care system to work more efficiently.

Another way we are protecting our health care system is by making changes to ensure Ontarians get good value when it comes to drug costs now and in the future. As of October 1, 2015, pharmacists are required, in most cases, to provide Ontario Drug Benefit Program recipients who have chronic conditions with a full three-month supply of medication if that individual has been taking that medication for a long time. This change makes it easier and less expensive for patients with chronic conditions to fill their prescriptions and requires fewer visits to their community pharmacy. Pharmacists are also able to continue to provide more frequent dispensing for patients who, for safety reasons, require that more frequent dispensing.

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Another new initiative launched in October of last year requires patients to try at least two equivalent generic drug products, where available, before a brand product is reimbursed in order to maximize the use of safe and effective generic alternatives. These changes are part of an evidence-based approach that is providing us

with better value and helping to protect our health care system. Patients who have experienced an adverse reaction and currently possess a valid "no substitution" prescription from their physician, of course, continue to receive their brand medications.

We've also made changes to decrease the mark-up paid to pharmacies for high-cost drugs and we're reducing dispensing fees for pharmacies serving long-term-care-home residents.

Additionally, Ontario and other participating members of the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance have worked together over the last four years to lower the price of commonly used generic drugs to 18% of brand reference price. This joint approach leverages our combined purchasing power to obtain the lowest generic prices achieved to date in Canada. This initiative is providing greater value to taxpayers and to government, as well as to employers and private insurers.

I would also note that just last week we made another significant accomplishment under the Patients First action plan with the passage of the Health Information Protection Act. Under this new legislation, it will be mandatory for health care providers to report privacy breaches to the Information and Privacy Commissioner and, in certain circumstances, to relevant regulatory colleges; it will strengthen the process to prosecute offences by removing the requirement that prosecutions must begin within six months of the alleged offence occurring; and it will double the maximum fines for those offences from \$50,000 to \$100,000 for individuals and from \$250,000 to \$500,000 for organizations. The new legislation will also increase transparency and increase quality in our health care system by updating the Quality of Care Information Protection Act, or QCIPA.

This new legislation affirms the right of patients to access information about their own health care, and clarifies that certain information and facts about critical incidents cannot be withheld from them or their families. It also requires the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to review QCIPA every five years.

This new legislation is part of a larger effort in response to recommendations made by an expert committee created to review QCIPA with a view toward improving transparency in critical incidents. We are also taking steps in response to the recommendations to ensure that patients or their representatives are interviewed as part of a critical incident investigation and are informed of the cause of the incident, if it is known.

If you'll bear with me, for the last couple of minutes I'd like to circle back to our commitment to connecting people with better coordinated and integrated services. I want to do that because last December, I put forward for public consultation our Proposal to Strengthen Patient-Centred Health Care in Ontario. It's a proposal that is aimed at giving patients better access to care no matter where they live.

As I have outlined here today, Ontario is committed to a health care system that truly puts patients first. That

means faster access for patients today and a system that will be there for patients in the future.

Over the past decade, Ontario's health care system has improved significantly. We've reduced wait times for surgery, we've increased the number of Ontarians who have a primary health care provider and we've expanded services for Ontarians at home and in their communities.

But we can do more to put patients first. Our goal is to improve the patient experience with the next stage of our Patients First: Action Plan for Health Care by designing a path that will lead to better access to care, no matter where you live.

Under this proposal, we aim to improve communication and connections between primary health care, hospitals, and home and community care in order to provide for a smooth patient experience. We want to make it easier for patients to find a family doctor or nurse practitioner when they need one, to see that person quickly when they are sick and find the care they need closer to home.

We want to make it easier for doctors, nurses and other primary care providers to connect their patients to the health care they need. We will ensure that there is local planning so health care providers are available to patients where and when they are needed.

We need to strengthen indigenous involvement in the planning, design and delivery of health programs and services provided to their communities.

In order to provide better care for patients, we plan to make changes to local health networks so Ontarians get consistent care no matter where they live. Our goal is to provide patients with a health care system that is easier to navigate, better coordinated and more open and accountable.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Two minutes remaining.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: We want patients to have a say. Our plan puts patients at the centre of our health care system. With every decision we make, we're going to ask ourselves: How will this improve the patient experience? You will experience better care that is closer to home, and seniors will have the support they need to stay at home. You will have the tools and supports you need to stay healthy and manage your own health, and you will have confidence that the system is being managed effectively and your tax dollars are well spent.

In conclusion, Ontario is making significant progress in transforming our health care system to put patients first and to protect it for generations to come.

Every decision we have made is centred around the objectives of the Patients First action plan. While the goals we have set for ourselves may seem ambitious, they are achievable and we have the right plan to do it.

Once again, I would like to thank you, Chair and the committee, today for the opportunity to speak with you and I look forward to your questions. Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Thank you very much, Minister. Now we'll move to the official opposition. Just in terms of housekeeping, if, by chance,

your 30 minutes—you may be able to get all 30 minutes, but there will be a vote at some point. At that point, we'll adjourn and then you'll be able to have the remainder of your time afterwards. Without further ado, I recognize Mr. Yurek.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Thank you very much, Chair.

I'm going to start in with questions. Welcome, Minister, Associate Minister and Dr. Bell. I guess you have no choice to be here, but it's nice to see you again in such a short time.

First of all, before I start, we all gave statements today in the House. The Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Association of Ontario is here today. I just spoke to them before coming down here. The ministry committed to creating a task force, and I spoke to the ministry staff who were at the event a half-hour ago, I guess. I know you're working on a task force. Can you give us a date when the task force will be struck for this group?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Thank you for the question. This is, I think for all of us, an important issue, and we have committed to creating a task force with regard to environmental health, particularly the health conditions that are associated with environmental sensitivities. We are currently going through the various components of developing that task force, including the selection of the individuals who will play that important role. I expect that within a matter of months that task force will be fully up and running and convened to be able to begin that important work.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Thanks. I'm sure they'll be happy to see that task force up and running.

1730

I just want to start out with regard to what happened over the couple of weeks after the budget was released and the fact you had originally come out to raise the deductible for seniors' drug plans from \$100 to \$170 a year. Then, after public outcry, you changed your mind and returned back to the \$100 deductible. In the media here, you were reported as saying you're not sure how to make up the shortfall of changing this policy and it's—you were quoted as saying that \$100,000 is the cost of that change. Have you figured out where that money is coming from?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I think I'm also on record having, as the Premier has, expressed the intent behind the changes that were proposed and eventually passed in the budget which would result in a total of nearly half a million Ontarians paying no annual deductible and a significantly lower copayment as well. But notwithstanding the intent, over the course of the budget deliberations, you're right, we learned that there were some concerns expressed, particularly by seniors' groups, and we responded to those concerns.

I may in fact ask the deputy to comment more specifically with regard to the estimate—by not going through with what was initially proposed with regard to the changes to the copayment and the deductible—of what that amount is and also our plans for accommodating it.

Deputy?

Dr. Bob Bell: Thanks, Minister—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): My apologies. Could you just introduce yourself for the record?

Dr. Bob Bell: Robert Bell, deputy minister, health and long-term care.

In your changes I'm going to check on, Mr. Yurek—
Interjection.

Dr. Bob Bell: In your changes to the plan, we're expected to achieve about \$130 million net at the expansion of the low-income direct plan to include 170,000 more seniors, whose deductible would be lowered from \$100 to zero and whose copay would be lowered to \$2. So that total net cost totalled 130—

Interjection: You didn't hear me correctly: it was 100.

Dr. Bob Bell: It was 100? Thank you. So 100 in your—

Mr. Jeff Yurek: So the cost is \$100 million?

Dr. Bob Bell: That's correct. There's a variety of places that we're looking at to achieve offsets for that. Within the drug program itself, a review of the formulary that's available in a variety of different diseases to ensure that the evidence-based—that results in the best drugs being available for Ontarians is being enacted in the construct of the formulary.

Further savings are expected through the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance, our methods for listing products, our methods for further reduction of prices of generic drugs: These are some of the areas where we're expecting to find offsets for that increased cost.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: So will you possibly be delisting medications that are covered?

Dr. Bob Bell: No, we don't expect to delist, but some changes within the formulary in terms of when drugs are available, when drugs are substituted for these sorts of formulary changes—we don't expect to delist.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: If I could just add to that, I think you know that Ontario has the office for the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance, and it's estimated that the annual savings, nationally, for the measures that we put in place over the last four years are just under half a billion dollars annually. A lot of that accrues to Ontario. We are really, I would argue, just getting started at that national process. The federal government has just joined; Quebec has joined us as well. We have opportunity within that, so I don't want to underestimate the ability for us to find and accrue additional savings through that process, which would then allow us to counteract the costs, which, as we know—the costs of bringing an additional 170,000 people into that low-income category. That's what we're financing. We're not financing elements of a proposal—there were elements of the proposal we didn't carry through with, but the estimated \$100 million is the cost of increasing the GAINS threshold to bring an additional 170,000 Ontarians into that low-income category.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: You're just hoping to work it out through the incoming new medications that you're going to cover in the rebates that you'll be receiving?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Well, it's a substantial budget—or the budget drug line itself. Again, with a greater emphasis and more partners involved in the pan-Canadian process, I believe that we've got opportunity to find additional savings. But as we moved forward, the ministry, obviously, when that policy decision was made, began the difficult but essential work of beginning to find where those offsets would come from.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: So with respect to other medications coming on to the formulary, you don't suspect this \$100-million cost will affect new medications?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Well, to give you an example: The two new hepatitis C drugs, which are close to a cure—they are a cure for many, many people; exceptionally important breakthrough drugs. I think it's estimated—is it this year or next year?—that they will cost the government, between my ministry and community and social services, upwards of \$300 million, I believe is the figure. So for better or worse, I think we're quite used to a budget line which needs to be in an environment to accommodate changes that we see with regard to pharma. We've successfully managed that line over the years. I can't recall precisely what the annual budget is for drugs—three billion, roughly?

We have the ability. Through the national process that I described but also through innovations that take place, and some of the measures we've instituted that I referenced as well in terms of generic substitution and payments for pharmaceuticals, I'm confident that we'll be able to accommodate that additional cost of bringing those 170,000 into a low-income category.

Dr. Bob Bell: In terms of just carrying on with the new drugs, the process for federal approval of new drugs is being increasingly informed by CADTH, which is an evidence-based evaluation, looking at cost-effectiveness as well as effectiveness. That's another area where new drugs certainly can be negotiated—product listing agreements negotiated more aggressively than they have in the past with that federal approach and with all the partners engaged and supporting the CADTH recommendations. These are some of the reasons we're optimistic that we'll be able to bring on new drugs effectively.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Obviously you've looked at it. Quebec has a program in place to have coverage of Harvoni to cure hepatitis. Have you looked at their program, how over three years they're staging the implementation? You've costed out \$300 million a year that it's costing, but have you costed out implementing the stages that Quebec has implemented in their drug program?

Dr. Bob Bell: No, we haven't compared our program with Quebec's particularly. We're providing access to Harvoni and the other hepatitis C drugs currently in our formulary.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Okay. Thank you. If you look on page 109/110, for expenditure changes, it cites alternative service delivery methods as the reason for a \$5-million cut to the northern travel program. I'm sure the third party would concur that we hear a lot about the lack of

access to health care in our northern communities, and there's been no increase in funding for the teletriage services. Could you just give a quick explanation of how the alternative service delivery methods will make up the \$5-million cut to the program?

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Hon. Eric Hoskins: I just need a moment. I'll defer to the deputy for a moment.

Dr. Bob Bell: The anticipation is that teleservices will be part of that. The opportunity to provide new patients with teleconsultation using the Ontario Telemedicine Network is one way that's expected, as well as the opportunity for follow-up appointments for patients post-surgical appointments, for example, to be managed better through telemedicine resources using the OTN network.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: So without increasing the funding, you think the telesystem will replace the travel cuts that have occurred?

Dr. Bob Bell: It won't replace them entirely, but the reduction that you're talking about—we're anticipating finding service replacement for some of that with the Ontario Telemedicine Network.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Can you also explain, back on 109 and 110, the efficiencies that you found that allowed for a 20% cut to the quality health initiatives for 2016-17?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I think I can do this as well. Quality health initiatives, a decrease of \$1 million in 2016-17 and ongoing: This is due to operational efficiencies. We've put this change in place, the savings of \$1 million annually. It was recommended by the ministry, as previously approved funding had been underutilized in previous years.

This is really, I think, right-sizing a budget line that reflects the historic fact that it has been underutilized by approximately that amount on an annual basis. This is a simple example of operational efficiencies.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Okay. How much time—you don't know when the vote is?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): It's in 16 minutes.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: In 16 minutes? Okay.

We discussed in question period the stem cell transplant crisis that occurred in Ontario. I'm glad you've acted on making up for the breakdown of the system. My question is, now that we have a number of people heading to the States for treatment, I'm assuming that you've set up a system where the government will be paying up front for stem cell treatment. The patient is not going to have to ask for reimbursement on that, right?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Yes, that is correct.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: The question is, the out-of-pocket expenses for the family members who are going: Are they also going to have to pay and submit to get reimbursement, or are you providing some sort of funding for them so the family members can be with them during the three to six months that they'll be in the States?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: There are currently three sites in the United States where we have agreements for the provision of out-of-country transplant services, stem cell

transplants for Ontario patients. We've set aside up to \$100 million to fund that. But it was clear that although this option has been made available since the fall to Ontario patients, the uptake wasn't as pronounced as I would have liked to have seen.

I believe now, with the three sites we have in place—one of the issues that came up was the requirement or necessity for caregiver support, not for the time in hospital, obviously, in one of those three sites in the United States, but for the time post-surgery, because there is a requirement for a stay. So we have implemented a change where the province will pay for the cost of a caregiver for the duration of an individual's stay at one of those three sites.

But importantly, we're also looking at other measures that we should consider, including the one that you referenced, to make this a viable option for Ontarians, again emphasizing that we intend and hope that this be a short-term measure. Our preference, of course, is to give all Ontarians the option to achieve this transplant in province. In fact, we're already seeing a decrease in wait times and an increase in capacity in certain sites—

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Sorry. I don't mean to interrupt, but—

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Go ahead.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Are you going to have funding for the family members to be down there? Will they get upfront funding so they don't have to submit bills down the road?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: So the funding for—

Dr. Bob Bell: It's covered.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: It is covered? Bob, do you want to go ahead?

Dr. Bob Bell: Thank you. Part of the contract that we've negotiated with the treatment centres provides opportunity for folks to have their residential costs covered when they're out of country with their loved one. That's part of the contract.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Up front? They're not going to have to pay and submit?

Dr. Bob Bell: That's correct.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Good for you. Now, just a continuation on the stem cell—obviously, something went wrong in the system, and it's going to be a couple of years for it to be fully fixed. There were questions to ask about how many people on the wait-list had died or relapsed while waiting on this long wait-list to go to the States for treatment. Cancer Care Ontario said, "No, we're not going to release that information due to privacy concerns," but the privacy commissioner indicated that it's not a privacy concern if you give us just the raw data. Will you release those numbers for us and—that's my question. Will you release those numbers for us?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: It is the policy of CCO, of Cancer Care Ontario—in fact, it is a widely held policy across the academic community and certainly the health care community—that there is a threshold of cases under which, because of the small number of cases and other publicly available information, there is a real risk, a

substantial risk, that individuals could or might be identified if a small number of cases is revealed. This is not specific to CCO. There are a number of agencies across the provincial government and around the world and in the United States—it's a commonly held principle, for good reason.

Certainly, I think we would all agree that privacy is of paramount importance. So the policy of CCO is that that threshold, which is not unique to them, is at a level where if the number of cases involved, in this particular question that has been posited, falls below that threshold, they would refrain from disclosing those numbers because of a legitimate risk, in concert with other publicly available information, that that individual or individuals could be identified.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: So the privacy commissioner is wrong in this case? He was saying that it doesn't affect privacy.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'll let the privacy commissioner speak for himself.

I'm trained as a statistician and epidemiologist. I've asked the ministry as well, as a result of this particular request that came in, to look in detail, and I've spoken directly with the CEO of Cancer Care Ontario about this. We've reviewed what is a commonly held policy, for good reason: to protect the privacy of information.

When you're dealing with a number of cases, if you have a very small number of cases that are impacted, together with public information—I think any of us could learn this through researching what the policy is across many highly credible institutions, particularly health care institutions around the world, including in North America, that that policy exists for good reason. CCO is implementing a policy which is really solely aiming to protect the identity of certain individuals.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: So you've obviously seen the numbers.

Mr. Michael Harris: I have not.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: You have not seen them. They won't listen to you, either.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I have not, but I have an understanding of the policy that CCO and others adhere to.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Okay. Also in reports with the stem cell treatment, when they're now being referred to Ottawa in order to go to the States, Dr. Wells was quoted as saying that it was up to three weeks and he still had not heard what was happening with his patient. What's the time frame now for a doctor referring his patient to Ottawa to get the necessary review to get into the States to get the transplant? How long is it taking now to actually get through that process?

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Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm going to tidy up the last question, just to give you, I think, a useful piece of information. Then perhaps I'll ask the deputy to weigh in on that, but I'll reference that as well.

The policy that I was referring to in CCO, which is commonly held across health care institutions, is if the number, the "N," is less than five. I'm not revealing any

information. I'm simply stating their policy in a generic sense. If the number of individuals affected is less than five, that is the threshold where there is a very real risk that revealing that number, put together with public information, actually could allow for identification.

I'll ask the deputy to speak to your most recent question, other than to say that as a result of some of the changes that we've made to improve access and to decrease the wait times, I established a task force, which has already met. I convened the first meeting of clinical experts—CCO and others. One of the action items coming out of that very first meeting was to work to improve the interaction between the various sites and the referring physicians as well—that network, if you will—to expedite and streamline exactly the process that you've described, and including if there is an option for out-of-country, to ensure that that process is as tight as possible as well.

Looking at each of the steps from the point of, say, the hematologist making the referral to the transplant surgeon, to finding the appropriate site for that individual—if the wait-list is such that an out-of-country option should be considered—to ensure that our role, which is that out-of-country component, that all of those pieces work together as expeditiously as possible.

I'm not sure, Deputy, if you want to add to that.

Dr. Bob Bell: The time now for patients to be seen by the ad hoc transplant committee for out-of-country referral is about two days. They'll meet any time a referral is made, to consider the data that's provided to them, and make a decision within two days of considering the data.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Within two days of considering the data?

Dr. Bob Bell: That's correct.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: So if Dr. Wells refers a patient now, you're saying that within two days, he's going to get a response?

Dr. Bob Bell: He's going to get a response for out-of-country referral within two days. If it's an institutional referral—which is really a very small number, to this point, since most patients are being referred not within Ontario institutions but, rather, out of country—that's up to the institutions to make that referral. We don't really have any time recorded for that.

As of April 15, for the out-of-country program, we've had 191 patients approved to go and 31 have agreed to go, following that decision being made. It's in the past month that the turnaround time for that out-of-country referral has come down to two days.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Two days. So 191 were approved and 31 agreed. What happened to the 160? What are the barriers?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I think it's a combination of features. Some of them invariably will move up the wait-list or perhaps be referred. There are three allogeneic centres across the province that provide this particular type of transplant service. There are patients as well that choose to remain on the wait-list for a variety of reasons.

It's a condition, as you can appreciate, which can change reasonably rapidly in one direction or the other. I would imagine there's not one single source.

But as I've spoken to already, one of the concerns that I had expressed, and I think that we all felt, was what changes were necessary to the out-of-country program to make it more viable for families. So that's why we stepped in to provide the caregiver support, for example, and the other supports that the deputy referenced.

I want to make sure that, particularly with such a devastating diagnosis and the importance of timely response, and the emotional and potential financial burden that it places on individuals and their families, to make sure that the province is providing the supports necessary to make sure that we're not contributing further to that burden.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Just to close this section of the stem cell question, so you can 100% confirm that financial barriers will not be a problem for families going to the States. The province will pick up the costs up front.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: As I mentioned, one of the significant challenges for patients were the caregiver expenses I referenced—

Mr. Jeff Yurek: And family.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Pardon me?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: And family.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: And family, and also this is an ongoing process; right? We've created the position of a patient navigator to work specifically with families that are on the wait-list, those who are and are not considering out-of-country, to further investigate other measures that perhaps need to be taken to make sure that this a viable option for those individuals.

Of course, the other change that we made recently with regard to those who had relapsed is giving them an opportunity for transplant, both in and out of country as well.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: They're going to buzz us in a second. Before he knocks it on me—because I won't see you for a bit—I want to congratulate you on hiring Christine Elliott as the patient advocate. It's a great selection. I look forward to working with her.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): You'll have the remaining two minutes when we meet again. Thank you very much, Minister and Associate Minister, for being here. This committee will be adjourned until tomorrow following routine proceedings.

The committee adjourned at 1757.

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