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Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy

Estimates

Ministry of Transportation

Comité permanent du patrimoine, de l'infrastructure et de la culture

Budget des dépenses

Ministère des Transports

1st Session
44th Parliament

Thursday 6 November 2025

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44^e législature

Jeudi 6 novembre 2025

Chair: Hon. Laurie Scott
Clerk: Tanzima Khan

Présidente : L'hon. Laurie Scott
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HERITAGE,
INFRASTRUCTURE
AND CULTURAL POLICYCOMITÉ PERMANENT DU PATRIMOINE,
DE L'INFRASTRUCTURE
ET DE LA CULTURE

Thursday 6 November 2025

Jeudi 6 novembre 2025

The committee met at 1531 in committee room 1.

ESTIMATES

MINISTRY OF TRANSPORTATION

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Good afternoon, everyone. The Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy will now come to order.

We are meeting to consider the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Transportation for a total of two hours. We are joined today by staff from Hansard, broadcast and recording, and legislative research. From the ministry, we are joined by the Honourable Prabmeet Sarkaria, Minister of Transportation, parliamentary assistant MPP Rick Bresee, acting deputy minister Felix Fung, and ministry officials and staff.

As a reminder, 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 arranged to have the hearings closely monitored with respect to questions raised so that the ministry can respond accordingly.

Are there any questions from the members before we start? Seeing none—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Are we the first rotation?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Yes.

I am now required to call vote 2701, which sets the review process in motion. We will begin with a statement from the minister for up to 20 minutes.

Minister, welcome, and the floor is yours.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you very much, Chair. Good afternoon to everyone. I appreciate the opportunity to be before the committee here to discuss the important work the Ministry of Transportation is doing to keep people and goods moving across our province in the face of economic uncertainty.

Gridlock costs upward of \$56 billion each year. That's a cost that we cannot afford. Now more than ever, we must protect Ontario by investing in highways and public transit that will drive economic growth and generate good jobs for Ontario workers. Our government is spending \$30 billion to build, repair and expand highways, roads and bridges across the province. We're spending \$70 billion on the largest transit expansion in North America, including the largest subway expansion in Canadian history. These investments come with a hefty price tag, but the cost of doing nothing is far greater.

Last year, our government tabled the Reducing Gridlock, Saving You Time Act, which has allowed us to accelerate construction of priority projects such as Highway 413, the Bradford Bypass and the QEW Garden City Skyway twin bridge. Highway 413 will connect the regions of Peel, York and Halton, spanning 52 kilometres in length, running from Highway 400 in the east to Highway 401/407 interchange in the west. It would also include extensions to Highway 410 and Highway 427.

In August, we awarded the first two early works contracts for Highway 413. Crews are resurfacing a section of Highway 10 where a new bridge will carry traffic over Highway 413. And we're making upgrades to the Highway 401/407 interchange, which will serve as a western terminus of Highway 413.

Building Highway 413 is expected to support more than 6,000 jobs per year. It will contribute \$1 billion to Ontario's GDP.

Our ministry is also moving forward to accelerate construction of the Bradford Bypass, a 16-kilometre, four-lane freeway that will connect Highway 404 in the east to Highway 400 in the west, shortening travel times for the thousands of drivers in York region and Simcoe county.

Detailed design work for the west section of the Bradford Bypass is under way. Crews have completed tree clearing along the proposed western route. And earlier this year, we issued a request for proposals for the detailed design of the central and east sections of the Bradford Bypass.

During construction, the Bradford Bypass is expected to support up to 1,300 jobs annually and contribute up to \$190 million to Ontario's GDP.

The QEW Garden City Skyway is a key link in Ontario's highway network, connecting Niagara region's three crossings with the United States and supporting the movement of more than \$1.1 trillion worth of goods through the greater Golden Horseshoe every year.

Our government is building a 2.2-kilometre Garden City Skyway twin bridge that will carry Toronto-bound traffic over the Welland Canal. Earlier this year, we awarded a contract for the detailed design of the new bridge. Once the new bridge is complete, the existing bridge will be rehabilitated and carry Niagara-bound traffic.

The Ontario highways program features 629 highway expansion and rehabilitation projects that are currently under way or planned across the province. In the current

fiscal year, our government is investing \$4.3 billion in support of the program. This includes \$2.1 billion to expand and repair highways in southern Ontario and \$583 million for highway projects in northern Ontario.

This year, we marked significant milestones on several projects.

We added nine kilometres of new lanes to Highway 400 from Major Mackenzie Drive to King Road.

We added 11 kilometres of HOV lanes to Highway 404 from Highway 407 to Stouffville Road.

We've set the stage to widen Highway 401 in Durham region by awarding contracts to replace the Park Road and Cubert Street overpasses.

We are laying the groundwork to widen Highway 400 in Simcoe county by replacing the Dunlop Street and Bayfield Street bridges in Barrie.

We're replacing the Choate Road overpass and the Ganaraska River bridge to support the future widening of Highway 401 near Port Hope.

We're building a new roundabout at Highway 15 and County Road 42 in the township of Rideau Lakes.

And we have improved the connection between Guelph and Highway 401 by adding a new interchange and underpass to the Hanlon Expressway at Wellington County Road 34.

We recently also awarded a detailed design contract to replace the Little Current Swing Bridge—the only road access to Manitoulin Island in northern Ontario.

We continue to work to widen the Trans-Canada Highway from Thunder Bay and from Kenora to the Manitoba border. We've started with the preliminary design to widen the Trans-Canada Highway from Thunder Bay to Kakabeka Falls. We're widening Highway 69 from Parry Sound to Sudbury, improving traffic flow along a vital route for Ontario's energy sector.

We've launched a pilot—a historic pilot, the first of its kind in North America—to build a 2+1 highway near North Bay to enhance road safety. If this pilot is successful, Ontario would become the first jurisdiction in North America with a 2+1 highway.

Our government is helping municipalities maintain their road infrastructure. We also, this year, awarded \$45 million through the Connecting Links Program to support repairs for municipal roads and bridges connecting to the provincial highway network. And 27 municipalities received funding for 29 repair projects that will connect Ontarians to jobs, support the movement of goods and stimulate economic growth for years to come.

We're tackling congestion in Toronto by providing the city with up to \$73 million to accelerate construction on the Gardiner Expressway. Thanks to provincial support, construction on the Gardiner is now months ahead of schedule—and completed.

1540

We're saving Ontario's economy \$273 million by getting people and goods out of gridlock 18 months sooner than originally planned. We're supporting Ontario's electric vehicle industry and encouraging more drivers to

go electric through the EV ChargeON program. We're investing over \$180 million to increase the number of public EV charging stations across the province to reduce range anxiety, fill gaps in under-served areas, and build a more affordable and connected charging network for everyone in Ontario.

Another key priority of the province has been commercial vehicle safety. Earlier this year, transportation enforcement officers worked alongside policing partners and the Canada Border Services Agency to crack down on illegal activity at critical US border crossings as part of Operation Deterrence. Over 100 transportation enforcement officers conducted more than 60,000 vehicle inspections and intercepted 18 stolen vehicles. As part of Operation Deterrence, the ministry acquired mobile X-ray scanners, which are now being used at commercial vehicle inspection stations to ensure truck loads are secure and dangerous goods are transported safely.

We are also moving forward with a historic expansion of public transit. We recently completed a successful revenue service demonstration of the Finch West LRT in Toronto and handed full operational control of the line over to the TTC, the Toronto Transit Commission. The Finch West LRT will put 230,000 people within walking distance of fast, reliable transit, accommodating 51,000 passengers each day and 12 million boardings annually by the year 2031. On November 16, we will open the Mount Dennis GO and UP Express station, which will connect riders to GO Transit's Kitchener line, the UP Express and TTC bus services.

In Toronto, we have shovels in the ground across the entirety of the Ontario Line subway. This will give the city 15 new subway stations, running from Exhibition Place through the downtown core to Eglinton and Don Mills.

This summer, we broke ground on the Ontario Line's second tunnel launch shaft. The Ontario Line will support 4,700 good-paying jobs annually during construction. Once complete, the new subway line will put nearly 230,000 Ontarians within walking distance of transit, offering connections to more than 40 other transit routes and reducing crowding on the busiest stretch of the TTC's Line 1 subway by up to 15%. The Yonge North subway extension will extend the Line 1 subway into Vaughan, Markham and Richmond Hill for the first time.

This summer, we awarded a contract to design and build the extension's twin tunnels, bringing us one step closer to putting 26,000 Ontarians within walking distance of rapid transit. The Yonge North Subway Extension will cut travel times from Markham to downtown Toronto by as much as 22 minutes. Construction will support 4,300 jobs annually and generate more than \$3.6 billion in economic benefits for Ontario's economy.

We recently broke ground on the Scarborough Centre Station, the first of three stations for the Scarborough subway extension. The extension will add almost eight kilometres to the TTC's Line 2 subway, running from Kennedy Station to Sheppard Avenue and McCowan Road. Accommodating up to 105,000 daily trips, construction of the subway extension will keep 3,000 workers on

the job each year and put 38,000 people within walking distance of transit.

In March, we awarded a construction contract for Toronto's East Harbour Transit Hub, which will improve access to transit for thousands of residents and support more than 50,000 local jobs. The hub will serve approximately 100,000 daily riders, with connections to the Ontario Line, the subway, and the Lakeshore East and Stouffville GO lines.

The Eglinton Crosstown West extension will add seven stations to Line 5, Eglinton LRT, connecting riders from Scarborough to Mississauga. This year, we broke ground on the final tunnel segment of the nine-kilometre extension. Crews are excavating 500-metre twin tunnels under Eglinton Avenue West from Jane Street to the future Mount Dennis station. Building the extension will support an integrated and efficient transportation network and create more than 4,500 good-paying jobs.

Work continues on the Hazel McCallion Line. We're exploring options to tunnel the Brampton extension, which will connect the Brampton Innovation District GO station and the downtown core.

We marked a significant milestone in Hamilton earlier this year when we issued a request for proposals for the first package of work for the Hamilton LRT. Once complete, the Hamilton LRT will have 17 stops across the city, connecting 50,000 daily commuters to an expanded Hamilton Street Railway and GO network.

We're also really excited about the province's GO expansion program, which will bring two-way, all-day service to GO Transit's busiest rail routes. We continue to upgrade stations across the GO network and add new tracks to accommodate future service increases on Lakeshore East, the Lakeshore West line, the Stouffville line and the Barrie line.

Earlier this year, we completed upgrades to the West Harbour GO station. That will save more than 250,000 commuters in Niagara Falls and St. Catharines roughly 15 minutes on a round trip.

Our three GO extension projects: Expansions will bring new and improved service to commuters in Durham region, Kitchener-Waterloo, Hamilton and Niagara.

For the Kitchener GO extension, we've built a second platform at Guelph Central GO station, a new storage track for maintenance vehicles, and a new passing track between Guelph and Kitchener GO stations.

The Bowmanville extension will extend the Lakeshore East line nearly 20 kilometres.

For the Niagara extension, we will continue to increase service on the Lakeshore West line.

We recently completed construction of the new Confederation GO station in Hamilton, which will offer 13 train trips each weekday and 15 trips on weekends, in addition to serving as a hub for regional GO bus service.

These investments are working, and riders are responding. GO ridership is stronger than ever. In September, we broke a record, reaching 7.4 million trips on GO and UP Express combined, our biggest ridership month ever. I'm proud to say that weekend ridership has also

increased 157% compared to pre-pandemic levels. That's real confidence in the system and proof that when transit is frequent, reliable and affordable, people choose GO.

Our government is supporting local industries as we maintain our GO Transit fleet. Earlier this year, we invested nearly \$500 million to refurbish GO Transit rail cars at the Alstom plant in Thunder Bay, and more than \$350 million to refurbish rail cars at Ontario Northland's facility in North Bay.

Our government is restoring passenger rail service in northern Ontario. Once the Northlander is back in service, it will connect Toronto to Timmins with 16 stops, including a rail extension to Cochrane. And this summer, we broke ground on the Timmins-Porcupine Station, the Northlander's northern terminal station. We also completed the North Bay rail bypass, a 982-metre track that will shorten travel times by over 15 minutes.

This year, we awarded more than \$380 million through Ontario's gas tax program to help 106 municipalities expand service hours and routes, purchase new vehicles and improve accessibility to increase transit ridership.

1550

Last fall, our ministry launched the Ontario Transit Investment Fund to address transit gaps across Ontario, particularly in rural communities. This year, we awarded nearly \$15 million through programs in Grey county, Middlesex county, Lambton Shores and North Grenville. Each municipality is receiving up to five years of funding to support the expansion and integration of transit services in our communities.

Our government is investing \$215 million to grow Ontario's shipbuilding and marine sector. This year, we established a \$15-million Ontario Shipbuilding Grant Program to expand the province's shipbuilding sector and support Canada's National Shipbuilding Strategy. The first of its kind program will provide funding to bolster Ontario's shipbuilding capacity, competitiveness and business growth, while strengthening the industry's workforce.

Our government recently tabled legislation that will protect Ontario's economy, allowing us to build faster and to get people moving. My ministry put forward initiatives that will make life better for people and communities across all Ontario by:

- prohibiting municipalities from operating automated speed enforcement cameras and helping them transition to traffic-calming measures to help keep roads safe;

- accelerating the delivery of public transit projects by expanding measures in the Building Transit Faster Act;

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): One minute remaining.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: —prohibiting all municipalities from reducing the number of vehicle lanes to install new bike lanes;

- setting the stage to streamline the construction of municipal roads so we can deliver much-needed infrastructure without unnecessary delays; and

- requiring all drivers from non-reciprocal jurisdictions to complete a G2 and G road test before becoming fully licensed to enhance road safety.

Few ministries have as wide-ranging an impact on the everyday lives of Ontarians as the Ministry of Transportation. We continue to, every day, ensure that Ontarians can count on us to get to work, school or their medical appointments. Without this transportation infrastructure, our economy would grind to a halt. This year we'll invest a total of \$10.7 billion in public transit, \$4.3 billion in highways, and \$321 million in other transportation property and planning activities.

And with that, Chair, I will hand it over to you.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): That's right on the dot. Thank you very much, Minister, for your presentation.

We will now begin the question-and-answer segment in rotations of 15 minutes for the official opposition members, 15 minutes for the third-party member, 15 minutes for the government members for the remainder of the allotted time. As always, please remember to make your comments through the Chair.

As the Chair, if a member seeks to reclaim the floor during their rotation while the minister is responding, I will recognize the member and allow them to reclaim the floor to ask a new question.

For the deputy minister, assistant deputy ministers and ministry staff: Please state your name and title the first time you speak, so that the proceedings can be accurately recorded in Hansard.

I will start with the official opposition and it's going to be MPP Begum.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you very much, Chair. Good afternoon, Minister and the entire staff. Thank you to the entire ministry staff for being here this afternoon. I was actually hoping that we would have some other folks who are also key stakeholders or members in terms of transportation and what's going on in the province, so pardon me if I direct a lot of the questions at you, Minister.

Over two years ago, the former Metrolinx CEO, Phil Verster, called a press conference to announce—and you'll remember this, because you and I both spoke about this and I spoke in the House asking about Phil Verster's press conference at that time—and he announced that the Eglinton Crosstown would not open that year. It was a press conference about nothing. But he had "a very good understanding" of when the line would open. More than two years later now, the line is still not open. It's clear that there are very serious problems with the Eglinton Crosstown, requiring more than just a few tweaks and adjustments and that Mr. Verster actually knew what these were. That probably explains why he left. But Metrolinx has repeatedly refused to explain what went wrong.

So my question is to the minister. How does Metrolinx justify withholding that information from the public?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you very much for your question.

Look, we have a very rigorous process, one that is taken from past experiences such as the Ottawa LRT, that we incorporate into ensuring that our transit operations that we then take online are safe and reliable.

I think what you're quoting at that time noted deficiencies that he had stated, and those are being worked on as

we work through the project. Right now, we are in the RSD phase of that project. Finch West LRT completed its RSD phase.

We have a very rigorous process on testing and commissioning before we open it up to the public. But ultimately, we will not open it until it's safe and reliable. We'll continue to work towards that over the next couple of weeks, and we're confident that we will get there.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you very much. I appreciate the answer, Minister.

The problem is, we have been left in the dark for so many years now with Metrolinx. There's sort of a sense of arrogance, I think, even to you and the entire ministry, from Metrolinx. We've heard rumours that there are tracks that were actually built wrong or the tunnel needed to be re-graded. So clearly there were major design or construction deficiencies, requiring years of remediation work.

Will you or your ministry tell the public what these deficiencies were?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Civil work on the project was completely completed, and I announced that probably over two years ago or a year ago. So I don't think it's appropriate for us to speculate on any of that.

But from our perspective, we continue to ensure that when this system is delivered, it is done so in a safe way and a way that is reliable for passengers to then be on in service when the TTC takes over.

Ms. Doly Begum: In that case, can I just ask: Do you know what the deficiencies were?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Look, we work every single day—

Ms. Doly Begum: Just a yes or no. Sorry—I have very few minutes.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: —with our members at Metrolinx, Michael Lindsay and his team, to ensure that we continue to develop a system, like we did on the Finch West LRT, that will pass the test and that will pass the reliability that will then give us the confidence to move it forward.

That's what we continue to do on Eglinton. We will rigorously test that system until it is appropriate—

Ms. Doly Begum: I live very close to—sorry, Minister, to cut you off.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: —and in a way that allows us to take it.

Ms. Doly Begum: I just want to reclaim my time.

I live very close to the line, so I watch the testing being done, and I know there needs to be consecutive days of this testing done. Unfortunately, there were a couple of pauses in between as well.

I'm guessing from the answer that the minister or the ministry does not actually know what these deficiencies were. Or is Metrolinx withholding that information from the ministry?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: What I can tell you is that we work very closely with Metrolinx to ensure that the system will be safe and reliable once it is open, and so we work through that and any challenges that come before

it. We have a team of engineers, designers, all of our counterparts that are involved in that contract that are taking to task every single one of those challenges—or any challenge that arises—as we try to get it to that phase, just like we did on the Finch West LRT. That's what we'll continue to do on Eglinton.

We're confident in our testing abilities and the rigorous standard that we apply to it—probably more rigorous than any other—learned from previous projects like the Ottawa LRT.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

I still didn't get an answer, so I'm going to, for the record, assume that it looks like Metrolinx is not actually being transparent with the ministry and the minister.

My next question would be: Why is it that Metrolinx is entitled to keep secrets from the public that pays for the project?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Look, we're delivering over \$70 billion in our public transit plan—

Ms. Doly Begum: That's a lot of money.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We continue to make improvements to our public transit system across the province, whether that's GO expansion, whether that's the Finch West LRT, and we'll continue to do that.

We're going to continue to build public transit, we're going to continue to make those investments, and we're going to continue to ensure that any line that is then operational passes the test of reliability and safety. It's my job, working with Metrolinx, to do that.

1600

Ms. Doly Begum: Minister, I think I know the answer, but do you think Ontarians work hard in this province? Just yes or no.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Sorry, what did you say?

Ms. Doly Begum: Do you think Ontarians, people in this province, work hard?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Ontarians work hard, absolutely.

Ms. Doly Begum: Absolutely.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Every single Ontarian works hard. You work hard, everyone here—all of our officials, the people working on the line work very, very hard.

Interjection.

Ms. Doly Begum: Yes. So do you think when they pay their tax dollars for something that they want in return, how—

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Chair, point of order.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Sorry to interrupt. MPP Saunderson, point of order?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Madam Chair, we're out of scope here. I think the questions should be limited to the estimates for this year, for the MTO and the budget. We're getting off on a tangent here that I don't think has any relation to this year's scope.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): I'll let MPP Begum finish her question within what MPP Saunderson—

Ms. Doly Begum: Sure. I'll keep it to the estimates specifically.

Metrolinx has faced repeated cost overruns and delays on major projects such as the Eglinton Crosstown LRT, with operating subsidies projected to decrease by over \$182 million—which is in the estimates, for my friends on the other side—and capital allocations to be reduced by an estimated \$448 million within 2025-26.

What mechanisms are there in place to ensure that these funding adjustments do not further delay ongoing transit projects and compromise service improvements for commuters? It's directly related to the estimates.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Is your question on Eglinton or in general?

Ms. Doly Begum: In general, but specifically for Metrolinx, if you could.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: If you look at the global trends, there are a significant amount of reports in the public that are recognized worldwide, that over—if you want to take the last five years, last 10 years, the cost of building transit has significantly increased. I think that's a reality that we live in, if you look at the last five years, if you look since the pandemic. The global supply chain challenges—

Ms. Doly Begum: I'm sorry, Minister. You're not answering my question, so I'm just going to reclaim my time.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I am answering your question because you're asking about cost overruns. I have to address the issue of cost overruns to explain why costs are higher.

Ms. Doly Begum: So that I do have. Just to reclaim my time, when the Eglinton Crosstown, the P3 project, was signed in 2015, the estimated costs for the contract's capital component was \$5.5 billion. Trust me when I say this: We all know that the cost has gone up. What does the ministry now estimate will be the final capital cost to the public of the Eglinton Crosstown?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I think there are a couple of things—

Ms. Doly Begum: Just any number.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: There are a couple of things there. When the project was first announced, it only included construction costs. There are also property acquisition costs. There are maintenance and life cycle costs that also need to be considered that were not reported—sometimes or in this circumstance, in some projects or in some contracts—when they were issued.

Whether it be the Ontario Line or it some of the other projects, we continue to update that as the projects are completed, as the final values are established. We will continue to follow that process on all of our projects moving forward, as we have for the last many years.

Ms. Doly Begum: So it looks like we don't have an actual final capital cost. Then my questions are—I guess my only question would be: Will the Eglinton Crosstown open in 2025?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Well, look—

Ms. Doly Begum: Just a yes or no. I only have maybe just a minute left, so just yes or no.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: As I've said to you in the past and I will continue to repeat, my goal and my direction to Metrolinx is that we will open it when there is a safe and reliable system for individuals—

Ms. Doly Begum: And when will that be?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: When we continue to get through the testing, as we have done on the Finch West LRT. We need to see those tests pass. I have confidence in Metrolinx and their team to do that. So I continue to tell the team—whether it be at Metrolinx or working with the TTC—that we need to ensure that the system is safe and reliable before it can open for passengers.

Ms. Doly Begum: Absolutely. When do you expect the system to be safe and reliable to open? Will that be in 2025, do you think?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We continue to do the testing on it and when it is safe and reliable, we will ensure—

Ms. Doly Begum: Okay. In that case, I'll ask: Is it the first three months of 2026?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We will continue to test the system and when that is completed, we will let everyone know.

Ms. Doly Begum: The first six months of 2026?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: As I said, when the system is safe and reliable and we are satisfied that they can hold passengers, then we will move forward to opening.

Ms. Doly Begum: Then, in that case, today, can I get a promise from the ministry and the minister that it will open in 2026—within the entire year?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: As I've said to your last five questions, when I am confident that the system is in a safe and reliable manner, that is when we will proceed with opening the Eglinton LRT.

Ms. Doly Begum: I will pass it over to my colleague here.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP French, there's three minutes left.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm just going to shift gears entirely and go a bit local. The folks east of Toronto have been very patient, and I am glad to hear the minister talk about the Bowmanville GO extension. Do we have a date for when that will be completed, or a rough estimate?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We continue to make good progress on it. We work on that project, very specifically, with CPKC, who own the line on it, so our conversations with them continue. It is an ongoing negotiation. As a part of our plan to build the GO expansion over the next 10 years, this is a priority project for the government. So we continue to have dialogue with the members of CPKC on the additional tracks, on the upgrades that continue to need to happen to enable those service enhancements, and that's what we've committed to.

On the Lakeshore East line, for example, we have made improvements to those services just as recently as this past

month. Those are a recognition of our partnership with them.

Ultimately, as we make a commitment in the future to continue to build out the infrastructure investment needed to expand that, that is what we will do.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you.

Further to the projected construction and all of that, as I had mentioned to you briefly, folks in Oshawa are a bit twitchy because we're hearing about the construction shutting down our Simcoe Street in Oshawa, which is the main drag, so to speak. So I would like to know if Metrolinx—or if the minister is aware of or can connect with Metrolinx and get us an answer. Our city council has passed a motion; people are concerned. We want to know if Metrolinx plans to close down Simcoe Street in all directions for a full year while replacing the bridge on Simcoe Street South at the CPR tracks.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): One minute.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: That would be something that the city would need to plan for, and we haven't been given that information. So, as you can appreciate, people are worried about the timelines and negative impacts of living with construction. So can I get a commitment or information?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: MPP French, I'm happy to take that and get you the information you need with respect to our team at Metrolinx and any sort of closure. We do try to—and I hope this did happen—give advance notice of closures and work with the community to mitigate any of those closures and traffic impacts. So we will definitely, as a regular course of business with Metrolinx, but personally to yourself, have our team reach out.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You've got 15 seconds.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'll add to that, then: If we can touch base on this or connect at a later date, I also have constituency concerns that we can't get answers back from Metrolinx, and I'd appreciate help from the ministry navigating those community concerns with Metrolinx.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much.

Over to the third party. MPP Watt.

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you, Minister, and everyone who's here today. This is an interesting, fun process for us all.

Minister, I want to start off with discussing the Barnsdale interchange on Highway 416 in Ottawa. I was really happy to see that this is, in fact, in the estimates. The government had announced, back in 2014, that they were going to be investing \$5 million into this Barnsdale interchange.

So in the estimates, I just want to know, despite repeated announcements from my predecessor and this government, the photo op—we actually saw the Barnsdale interchange sign go up, and then it came down quickly after that, and there's reference in the 2024 and 2025 budgets—when can families in Nepean expect the beginning stages of Barnsdale Road and Highway 416?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you for the question, MPP Watt. We've been making good progress on it. As far as our initial investment for the detailed design phase of it and the environmental assessment phase, to get into a bit more detail on it, I'll ask Alain to come and share some details specifically on a project with respect to the interchange.

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Mr. Alain Beaulieu: Thank you, Minister. Hello, everybody. I'm Alain Beaulieu. I'm the chief engineer at the Ministry of Transportation.

So the Barnsdale Road underpass currently carries traffic east-west along Barnsdale Road over Highway 416. The city of Ottawa had identified a need for an interchange with Highway 416 at Barnsdale Road to address residential growth and development in south Ottawa. The proposed interchange will provide entry and exit to and from northbound—

MPP Tyler Watt: Sorry, I just wanted to—I appreciate the history on the Barnsdale interchange, but I want to know the timeline and how much money is going to be spent on it.

Mr. Alain Beaulieu: Absolutely. The ministry is currently initiating the detailed design phase of this work, and that's in procurement now, which will take place over the next three years, with an anticipated completion of 2027 for the detailed design then proceeding to construction.

Property acquisition is required for the new interchange and that will take up to 24 months, and then the scheduling of construction will follow the completion of this detailed design, property acquisition, any utility relocation work and obtaining all the necessary approvals.

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you very much. Is the ministry consulting with the city of Ottawa and local community associations like Barrhaven South and Half Moon Bay, to ensure that this interchange design meets local traffic, cycling and pedestrian safety needs?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Well, like we do with all of our investments, especially when we do partner with municipalities, we definitely as a part of our engagement have those conversations with the city officials, city designers, technical staff, and take into account and consideration local needs. So we will definitely be doing that, and probably have already begun that process, as we're working very closely with the city of Ottawa on this joint announcement for our spending.

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you very much. So given that the population growth around this area—it's booming right now, so this interchange is actually so critical to this community. I appreciate that it can take time to get the design and everything in place, and I'm looking forward to getting shovels in the ground there.

But with this potentially taking until 2027, how can we future-proof, with all the housing construction that's going on there, to ensure that there are not going to be even more delays that come with this design and then actually getting shovels in the ground?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I think the positive factor is that the procurement is out in market as we speak

for the design phase of it. There are ways for us to continue as the progress is being made on the detail design work to look at ways to accelerate projects that we have in the past, whether that be speeding up the property acquisition phase of it or enabling early works.

But ultimately, the reason for making this investment in that community, in your community, is recognizing the fact of the growth that is happening and the challenges that the city had at that time, and funding infrastructure to meet the needs. That's where the government stepped in to help support projects like this. We're very much committed to ensuring that this gets done in a timely fashion. The positive note, as I said, is that we've already launched the procurement side of it, and so post that, we will continue to work as quickly as we can to ensure that the timelines are met and that the infrastructure is—

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you, Minister. I'm going to move on to the Ottawa new deal.

I'm glad to see there's a section of Ottawa in here. I only see some stuff about Ottawa Road 174. During the provincial election, your party did promise to upload the Ottawa LRT, and I don't see anything in here about that, but there are some funding numbers in here and I'm wondering: Is the Ottawa LRT upload a part of Ottawa's new deal still?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: The Ottawa new deal occurred pre-official signing of the Ontario-Ottawa deal, so the Ottawa-Ontario deal initially was struck on a \$500-million commitment, and \$181 million of that was committed to transportation infrastructure. So you mentioned the Barnsdale Road interchange, Highway 174 and some money for—

MPP Tyler Watt: Sorry; just to bring it back, though: Is the LRT a part of this?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: The LRT is a commitment that we made during the election, which was on top of the investment that we made that was prior to the election—or two years prior, I believe, to the election—on investing \$500 million into the city of Ottawa. And so, we continue to work through having due diligence and conversations with respect to the mayor and his team and city officials as to how that would proceed in the coming years and months.

The Ottawa LRT is a commitment on upload that we made and something that we will continue to work through over the coming months. But that is on top of the new deal that we structured, which included the Kanata North Transitway, an investment that the government put forward; the Barnsdale interchange—

MPP Tyler Watt: I appreciate all of that, but are you saying that this was more just an election promise, instead of actually implementing it?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Well, look, this is a commitment that we've made, and as we've done in the past with the city of Ottawa, we've followed through in our commitments, and we continue to work with the city. We have a great relationship with your mayor—

MPP Tyler Watt: So why no mention of it, then, in this estimate?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: The Ottawa new deal happened prior on the timeline of the Ottawa LRT, and then months later when this came up, we worked with your mayor as the city's needs evolved to have conversations around the LRT. Those are conversations that continue to be had to this day, whether it's on the official levels or on the political level, and something that we continue to work with your team on.

I'll give you an example: We worked with the city of Toronto on the upload of the DVP. On the Gardiner, it continues to happen. We're in the due-diligence phase of it, and so we'll continue to work through the process on our commitments.

MPP Tyler Watt: Good, I'm glad that you've made a commitment, but when will this government fulfill that?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Well, we move through the process. We'll continue to have and engage in those conversations, as we have already started, and that is a process of time that will continue to evolve. These are large infrastructure commitments that we've already started to flow the funding on. For example, Highway 174: The \$9-million operating funding that started to flow, continues to flow today. On the Ottawa new deal, our commitments to policing in the Ottawa new deal have already gone forward.

MPP Tyler Watt: I appreciate it. No time frame, though?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: As we continue to have those conversations on the Ottawa LRT, we'll work with the city, do our due diligence with the city, understand the scope of what the ask is and continue to move forward on it.

MPP Tyler Watt: Okay. I appreciate it.

Something in your opening remarks: You said that ridership is stronger than ever. On page 18, your ministry says that transit ridership has only returned to 80% of pre-pandemic levels. I'm glad that it is slowly healing and coming back up, but with ridership stronger than ever, why is your ministry proposing to cut funding to transit operations?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We're not cutting money to transit operations, and I'll reference the number that—

MPP Tyler Watt: It shows hundred of millions being cut.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I'm happy to have our team explain any of that. But when we look at specifically—GO expansion is what I referenced in my remarks. For example, in September, we had a record year with the highest ridership that we've ever seen on the GO network. And so, we continue to build upon that as we continue with, I think, 94% on our GO ridership.

Now, there are some cities—for example, your city of Ottawa—that have not seen the recovery of ridership in transit and that's for specific reasons. You have other cities like the city of Brampton that have far exceeded their pre-pandemic levels, and Mississauga and York region. Everyone varies. But when we look specifically at the GO Transit operations, we have seen strong recovery on those

processes. But at no point have we decreased funding in any way to transit operations—

MPP Tyler Watt: I'm going to go back to my initial question, though. So, you said you're not cutting, but there is a \$450-million cut to transit operations. So how are you going to expand subway and GO train service when you're cutting operations budget by that much money?

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Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: That's not accurate, and I'll have James from our team explain specifically on the numbers, but there's no one that has invested—

MPP Tyler Watt: Page 12 shows the \$450-million budget cut.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: There has been no government that has invested more in transit operations and transit capital than this government. But James, who is the ADM on the transit side, can actually specifically mention that.

Mr. James Pearce: Hi there.

MPP Tyler Watt: I'd like to keep it about, in the estimate, the \$400-million cut.

Mr. James Pearce: James Pearce, ADM of the transit division of MTO.

I think the \$450 million you might be referencing is in transit capital, and that's actually just because, year over year, the number that's actually spent on capital fluctuates based on where a project might be in delivery.

For example, as the minister mentioned earlier, we've progressed to the point of having completed the revenue service demonstration on Finch. That means we're spending less on capital on that particular project. It's just a kind of ebb and flow of where we are in project delivery overall.

Minister, would you like me to speak to gas tax funding?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Sure.

Mr. James Pearce: From an operational funding perspective, we do fund municipal transit systems through our gas tax program, and that's consistently delivered approximately \$380 million a year over the last number of years to 106 municipal transit systems.

MPP Tyler Watt: Okay, thank you. I guess I'm just failing to understand how we can have that much of a change towards transit operations and transit capital spending. Some \$450 million—

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: It's not on operations, as the ADM explained. Capital expenditure in different parts of that capital process accounts for that. Operationally, there's no change and a higher investment into it, especially when you undertake—

MPP Tyler Watt: So you're saying there is no change in funding to Metrolinx funding operations?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: What I think you're looking at and what you might be seeing—as the ADM explained, every project, from a capital perspective, is in a different part of its life cycle. So, in some projects, you will see higher funding. As the years go on, these projects can take up to five years, seven years, eight years to build out. When you have transformational projects like the Ontario Line or others that have been in construction for a

long time, the spending on each of those projects varies year over year as to what the expenditure needs to be. Finch West, for example, as the ADM said, has completed all of its construction, so there's less money spent on that. When it goes into service, the operational dollars that we've committed through the Toronto—

MPP Tyler Watt: Sorry, can you explain what stages then of this capital process led to a \$450-million drop?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): One minute remaining.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We've got \$70 billion worth of projects over the next 10 years. You've got the GO expansion that's ongoing. You've got the Eglinton West. You've got the Ontario Line. You've got the Scarborough subway expansion. Any one of those projects that I've referenced have a capital expenditure to them.

MPP Tyler Watt: And what stages are these projects at? If we know what stage they're at, then why can't you give a date of completion for them?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Every one of the projects—the Yonge North subway expansion project—has a shovel in the ground, but every one of them, as they continue to move through the process, has different expenditures every single year. That is what you are looking at. But from an operational perspective, this government has invested historic amounts. From a capital expenditure perspective, we have invested historic amounts to maintain and increase the funding that we give to these transit projects.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much, Minister.

We'll now go to the government side for 15 minutes, and it's going to be MPP Grewal.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you, Minister, for joining us here today on estimates, and thank you to our entire team from MTO for joining us and your insights and all of your hard work that you've done over the years. As you've mentioned, Minister, this is a historic budget with \$70-plus billion being invested into infrastructure. No other government has done that.

What I want to highlight here is, as you're a member from Brampton—I have another colleague of mine who is here from Brampton as well—from 2003 to 2018, we know what it felt like to be ignored in Brampton with no investments coming our way, no new hospitals, no infrastructure improvements, no new highways and no upgrades on transit. There's a lot that Bramptonians have been asking for. It's this government, under your leadership and Premier Ford's leadership, that's delivering on those investments for Bramptonians.

I wanted to take a little look at some of those investments that you've made into Brampton, specifically on the public transit side, because Brampton, post-pandemic, reached ridership levels the fastest compared to any other city. When it comes to its workforce, it's a very growing workforce—a young population—so they need those viable transit options. What have you done so far to

improve transit in Brampton and improve Brampton's connectivity with other municipalities?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you very much, MPP Grewal, for your question and all of your hard work on this file as well. You've been an incredible asset to the team. Look, it's been a great success of the investments that we've made into the GTHA and specifically into the city of Brampton.

Just last week—or two weeks ago, actually—we made a significant announcement on the Kitchener GO line, which will, for the first time ever, bring weekend service to the Kitchener station on that line. If you think about it, you can now jump on a train, whether it's from the city of Toronto, on the Etobicoke side of it, Brampton, Guelph, and get all the way up to Kitchener and, vice versa, all the way back. It truly enables connectivity, for example, on the weekends to a different region, and something that we've never ever seen before on the weekend on a regular basis. So I think that's very exciting.

We've made significant, significant progress on the ridership with respect to the Kitchener GO line. I think it's one of the highest recoveries in the province with respect to post-pandemic ridership—I think up over 130-plus per cent. So it tells you that people are really using that line to travel.

With that is our Hurontario LRT investment and the expansion all the way from Port Credit to the city of Brampton. That LRT line will be significant in moving the people of both Brampton and Mississauga to where they need to go quicker and faster. We were excited to announce the expansion of that project into downtown Brampton as well. The missing part of that line will now be there and it's something that our government has undertaken to ensure we complete.

I can talk and talk about more of the investments on the transit side, but another big investment that we've made into that city that will benefit and be truly transformational is the 413. That's a project that, when we complete it, will save the residents of Peel region 30-plus minutes; York region, Halton region, 30-plus minutes each way. And not only that, but it will attract good-paying jobs through the cycle of construction. Over 3,000 jobs will be supported on the construction of that highway, but also the enabling of significantly more investment from companies looking to locate near critical infrastructure like highways that can get their goods to market quicker and faster. These are some pretty historic investments that have been made into that region, into that city, to really, truly help support the growth that we've seen there.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: It's astonishing to see that you've been able to work on this and achieve this in a short seven years, where the Liberals had about 15 and they weren't able to do any of this. So that's a great job, Minister. But I'll bring it back on track—it's all good. Even if we gave them another 15, they wouldn't have been able to do what you've done. Thank you for that and thank you for the Premier's leadership as well.

One thing that bothers me the most as you're travelling across municipalities through this province comes back to

potholes. Potholes—our weather climate changes all the time. What can you tell us—because municipalities are under pressure. They need funding to fix these potholes. That's been one of Premier Ford's messaging as well, dating back to when Rob Ford was mayor as well.

What's the pothole prevention fund? How is that going to work and how is that going to support municipalities to fix these issues?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: It's really a program focused on ensuring that some of our smaller communities get the support they need. Nothing is more frustrating than damaging your vehicle, your tire, on a pothole, while you hit a pothole. What we've been able to successfully do here is get a program that has been set up that will help us support some of those smaller communities that don't have the ability to repair their roads as a municipality with larger budgetary capabilities would do.

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So this program will really focus on us helping those municipalities repair their roads, make sure that we are in a good state of repair, and that people in those communities can have access to good roads across the province.

Deputy, maybe I'll pass it over you to explain further—or Jasan, if you want to go into some more of the thoughts on the program.

Mr. Jasan Boparai: Good afternoon. My name is Jasan Boparai, assistant deputy minister of MTO's operations division.

The pothole program is a program that is targeting smaller municipalities with a population of up to 10,000 people. The goals of the program are to support these municipalities in road maintenance, preventive maintenance, pothole repairs and, in general, improving the condition of roads to improve safety for all Ontarians who are using those roads.

This program will help fund those municipalities in specific areas. It will require them to follow Ontario provincial specifications in terms of the materials they use, the practices they use for repairs and preventive maintenance of roads. And it will require them to also share data with us, which will essentially enable us to ensure that we have a good understanding of road conditions, and we are able to further continue supporting these municipalities.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you, Jasan. Thank you, Minister and the team, for working so hard on filling these potholes across the province.

I'm going to yield my time to MPP Saunderson.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Saunderson, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you, Minister, for your presentation today and to your staff. This is one of the critical portfolios, not just for the GTA, but across the entire province, as you've set out in your comments.

While I admire my colleagues from Brampton, I'm not from Brampton. I'm from the Simcoe area—Simcoe-Grey. The 400 is one of the main arteries to get people to and from there, and we are one of the major release valves for the GTA. We're under incredible growth pressures in Simcoe county, which has a population of about 500,000.

It's anticipated to grow by 40% by 2051, so very intensive growth.

I know knocking on the doors in the last election—the last two elections, in fact—in Bradford West Gwillimbury, talk of the Bradford Bypass is a big, big topic and a big seller for this party. It's an important link between the 400 and the 404 corridors, which is another major artery coming out of the south or east GTA area that connects to the north.

I'm wondering if you can talk about the construction of the Bradford Bypass, the benefits for the Bradford Bypass, and the construction timeline—how it's proceeding and when it might be done.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you very much, MPP Saunderson, for that question.

I think the Bradford Bypass is one of the historic projects that we will undertake that will truly transform the 400 and 404 and the communities that live there, specifically in the county of Simcoe. It's a 16-kilometre-long highway. Once complete, at a minimum, it will save commuters 35 minutes each way, so there's a significant, significant time saving.

Truly measuring the success of some of these projects is how much time we can give somebody back in their week or in their day. If you think of somebody travelling that stretch almost every single day of the week, if they're commuting to work or if they're commuting to get to their family, you've given them five hours back in their week that they never had before to spend with family, to spend with their loved ones. So that really, truly highlights the success of what we're able to do once it's complete.

I think one of the big parts of the Bradford Bypass is the amount of jobs it will also create through construction. This project will create about 2,600 jobs as we move forward. The way that we've procured this project is through three phases.

I'll actually ask Malvika to walk us through the progress of the highway and where it stands, but we've invoked some really innovative ways to do so.

Malvika, I'll hand it over to you.

Ms. Malvika Rudra: Great. Thank you, Minister. I'm Malvika Rudra. I'm the assistant deputy minister of the major highway projects division.

As the minister mentioned, it's approximately a 16-kilometre highway that's been split up into three sections. There is the west section, which is currently nearing completion for design. We're headed to construction on that project next spring.

The central and east sections are currently—we're in the process of awarding the design work. In the next couple of years, we'll be heading into construction.

By this time next year, all three sections will be well under way and shovels in the ground by next spring. Early works on the projects at County Road 10 have also been completed recently, so we're making really great progress on completing the Bradford Bypass.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Great. Thank you very much. We look forward to that.

Who do you have up next?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): There are three minutes remaining.

We have MPP Sandhu.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you so much, Chair, and thank you, Minister.

First of all, let me begin by commending you and the entire team at the Ministry of Transportation for the historic and record investments you're making in Ontario's transportation network, and especially in Brampton, as my colleague mentioned. Brampton was always an ignored city for far too long, and since we took office in 2018, Brampton has seen a record number of investments, whether it's hospitals, LRT, long-term-care homes, the medical school.

But the most important project is Highway 413. Highway 413 is not just a highway; it's a lifeline. It will help move people, move goods and move our economy faster.

We all know where the opposition stands on Highway 413. The former leader of the Liberal Party said he will kill Highway 413 once and for all, and we have seen the results of that—where the Liberals and NDP stand in Brampton.

But thank you so much. It's a very important project for Brampton. It will not only significantly boost the provincial GDP; it will create thousands of new jobs. And most importantly, it will reduce countless hours of traffic when people are commuting with their family.

Can you please explain or highlight to the committee what the benefits are of Highway 413 for people, for families and for our economy?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I think that's a great question. Thank you, MPP Sandhu. I remember that you were the one who got up in the House post-2018 election to table the first motion in the House to restart the EA on the 413, so I know how much this project means to you. You've been a strong champion of that project ever since.

I think one of the biggest parts of that project is—you talked about GDP. It's going to return about \$350 million to the GDP every single year as we get into construction of that project.

I don't know why the opposition would not support the 413, whether it be the NDP or Liberals.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): One minute.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I think it's one of the most popular projects in our region and something that everyone is truly looking forward to, given the amount of investment, the amount of community benefits from just saving people time every single week—five hours back in your week by travelling that section every single year—and, ultimately, the 3,000-plus jobs that will be created through the construction of that project. So we're really excited to continue that project.

As I explained in my opening remarks, the first two early works parts of that project were already released, and contract work is started. But it's time for us to continue moving forward on other parts of the project, which we're really excited to announce in the coming days and weeks.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you, Minister.

We'll now go to the official opposition for 15 minutes. MPP French.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you very much. Time ran out, Minister, just as I was asking if I could connect with you or ministry staff to navigate some of those local Metrolinx questions for my constituents.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I know. Thank you. I'm actually happy—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Did you say “no”?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: No, no. I didn't say “no.”

Ms. Jennifer K. French: May I pretty please have a meeting?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I'm happy to connect you—not a problem.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay. Thank you.

Since the minister brought up the 413, I'm going to ask that he not lecture me on it. I have a quick question, though: What is the government's estimate of how much Highway 413 will cost?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: As with every one of our highway projects, whether it's the Bradford Bypass, whether it's the 413 that's a part of our \$30-billion plan over the next 10 years, until the contract has been issued, we do not announce the price because of the impacts to market and the competitiveness of that project. So whether it be any of our transit projects or the 413 or Bradford Bypass, we follow the exact same model.

1640

Ms. Jennifer K. French: So my follow-up question is: What is the government's estimate of how much the Bradford Bypass will cost? Will it be the same answer or within that \$30-billion bucket?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Yes. We allocate capital dollars in every single one of our budgets for these projects. Once the procurement is completed—for example, Bradford is split up into three different projects: central, east and west regions. Once those are tendered, completed, we would be happy to release the details, as we do on every one of our projects.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay. I will also be happy when you release those details. Thank you.

In 2020, the government announced that it would finally move ahead on the long-planned and long-delayed widening of Highway 17 from Arnprior to Renfrew. The project was listed in various infrastructure market updates as being in pre-procurement, but then was bumped back to the planning stage and then disappeared altogether in Infrastructure Ontario's most recent market update.

Has this project been delayed again? In what year will this section of Highway 17 be widened, as promised?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We're committed to the project. This is something that continues to be a part of our plan to build for the future.

I will ask Alain to maybe speak to it specifically, if you don't mind.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: If you're going to answer that, I appreciate it.

I also am wondering: MTO has built roads, well, since MTO became a thing, right? That's the track record. So

when you have so much history of building roads, I'm just wondering if MTO is taking control back from Infrastructure Ontario, if we're bringing it back—all of that.

I'm curious about this project: if it's been delayed again; what the plans are for it. I appreciate that you're committed to it, but—yes.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: There are two parts to that. IO plays a role, but the construction of the highways still falls under the Ministry of Transportation. We use IO in some circumstances, on some projects. Garden City Skyway would be a project which we collaborated with IO on for contracting advice. But ultimately, all of our plans are run through the Ministry of Transportation.

But if you want—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay. Did we take this one back from IO?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Maybe I'll let Alain—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: And I'll stop interrupting for a while, temporarily.

Mr. Alain Beaulieu: We are prioritizing this work and advancing some advanced works necessary to prepare for the highway twinning, but our plan is to go to Treasury Board to change the delivery model from what the initial model was, which was a P3 that was established as a plan years ago. We're working with Infrastructure Ontario to determine the best approach to deliver this project and then we'll take that to Treasury Board and get the approval to proceed with the project under a different model.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: That sounds good. Is MTO, then, planning to proceed with a traditional procurement, as it should have done in the first place, arguably? I have faith in MTO to build roads. I do not have faith in this P3 model that is really expensive and really problematic, as we've seen. You guys are good at building roads; can we do that again? Is it traditional procurement?

Mr. Alain Beaulieu: Thank you for that. Yes, we have been building roads for over a hundred years.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Yes. Let's get back to it.

Mr. Alain Beaulieu: And so, we are initiating a preliminary design for this this route, which—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Traditional procurement?

Mr. Alain Beaulieu: Correct.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay. Thank you.

In 2007—I'll shift gears here—the Liberal government promised to build a widened Highway 7 from Guelph to Kitchener. It never happened. Then the Conservative government started making the same promise. It still hasn't happened. According to MTO figures, crashes along the Highway 7 corridor increased after the Conservative government first delayed the project in 2019.

Today, when we look at the government's Southern Highways Program document, the project still has no estimated start or completion date. We see fast-tracking highway projects and mega-projects in the Toronto area, but I would like to know why communities outside of Toronto are still waiting for long-planned and long-delayed projects like Highway 7.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you, MPP French, for that. We had multiple phases that enable the work for Highway 7 to be fully completed. Phase 1 of that work was enabling works. Phase 2 of it I announced last year, which was the Frederick Street bridge that will then be made to accommodate Highway 7.

I can say that I think it was in the first week of October that we officially got our permit from the federal government to proceed on work with respect to the bridges over the Grand River. That was something that we could not move forward on until we got those permits from the federal government. I believe the Department of Fisheries and Oceans was the authority on permitting. Now that we have that, we are okay to proceed on some of our other procurements that will enable the Highway 7 project.

Very soon, very shortly, we will continue to mark the progress on that. We'll get those contracts out the door. But that is a priority highway project for us that we continue to deliver on very quickly. We have, on that project, just announced a tree-clearing contract with the local First Nation community there that will help in partnership to build that highway.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay, thank you. How about the Morriston bypass? Can you say when this long-planned and long-delayed project will begin construction or be completed? Because in this Southern Highways Program document it just says, "not available."

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: The Morriston bypass, like in some of our other projects, has many enabling works that have to occur before the actual project is going to happen. We are in that phase of enabling work on—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Enabling.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: —enabling work that allows for the contract to happen. We have undertaken that work currently—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: But construction plans—is there a date?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Absolutely, and once those works are completed—for example, utility relocations that are needed—those are actively being procured and under way in different phases of that project. Once those are complete, we're moving forward with that project.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you. How much time?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Seven minutes.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Seven minutes. Okay. And thank you, Minister. You and I are making good time. That's a new thing for us.

Has the government awarded the contract to study the feasibility of building a three-story tunnel under Highway 401?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Yes, we have.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Woo, okay. Who won the contract?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: It is a Canadian company. I'm blanking on it right now.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Felix, do you know?

Interjection.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: WSP.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay. And how much does the government plan to spend on the study?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: This is an initial phase of the study. Some \$9 million from the feasibility study will help us, enable us, give the information that we need moving forward to continue on this project.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay, that's for the feasibility study. So for this government my question is, what's the ballpark? What price would be too high to spend on this proposed tunnel under Highway 401? Is \$50 billion too much or \$100 billion or \$150 billion? Do we have a cap?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I believe the cost of not building is far greater than—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Good line.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: The cost of not building is far greater, because the data in itself shows if we travel the 401 stretch today, right now, we know that it is significantly slower than it was 10 years ago—the population growth, the capacity. We need to build, and if we don't build, in the next 10 to 20 years that travel time is probably going to double. We need a solution. We believe the solution to that is the tunnel under the 401, and that's what we would like to proceed with.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I find it fascinating that you believe that, but I'm glad to ask these questions. I think it was a year ago that we started talking about the tunnel, so it's interesting to see where we are and where we aren't a year later. But the sky is the limit; is that what I'm hearing on the tunnel costs? Ironically underground—the sky is the limit.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I think for many years, previous governments have lacked the vision to invest in infrastructure that looks beyond five to 10 years. I think this is a transformational project that we need to build to make sure that 20, 30, 50, 100 years from now we have the appropriate infrastructure. And if we don't, doing nothing is not an option for us, and so while we study the feasibility of this with the transit way, the three-level tunnel, we're excited because we believe we need it.

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Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad you're excited. I am dubious at best.

What will happen while we're digging this tunnel? Do the cars on the surface level—where do they go? Is it still drivable while we're digging?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I'll give you an example of the 401—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: No, no; I want that. I want to know, if we're digging under the cars, are the cars on top? I'm just curious.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: The cars above the 401 will continue to operate, absolutely.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay, just checking.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: And I'll give you an example: the Scarborough subway expansion, when we tunnelled under the 401 actively as cars were above. Obviously, safety is a key priority for us, but, absolutely,

that would be a priority of this project, to ensure that traffic on the 401—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: And I do look forward to the feasibility study and seeing all of those safety assurances. I'll pass the time to my colleague.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): There are three minutes left. MPP Begum.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you very much. Time is of the essence.

I'll stick to the cost of transit construction. The cost of rapid transit construction has skyrocketed, and we just heard both of you talk about that. The cost of the Ontario Line is a billion dollars per kilometre, which is nearly three times what the Toronto York-Spadina subway extension cost in 2017. A few months ago, transit expert Alon Levy said that the cost of building rapid transit in Ontario is now the second-worst in the world, after New York City.

Might there be a connection between Metrolinx's skyrocketing cost and its refusal to be transparent and accountable in how it spends its public dollars?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: The increase in the cost of transit is consistent with what the world has seen. We've seen significant increases in how much costs have increased. We're building in one of the oldest parts of the downtown core, one of the densest parts in the downtown core. And we're in this position because previous governments never built the infrastructure that we needed to have this vision of building additional lines. So Premier Ford, our government, have committed to that vision. We continue to build. But the increase in cost of transit is not unique to Ontario.

Ms. Doly Begum: I think I have a few seconds left?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): One and a half minutes.

Ms. Doly Begum: One and a half minutes.

So we are the second-highest in the world. How is that justified? We're not really in line with everyone else.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Look, there are a variety of areas in which we have passed legislation to expedite the process of building transit. The Building Transit Faster Act is one of those key landmark legislations that allows us to move quicker on permitting, allows us to exempt ourselves from specific EAs, that allows us to get shovels in the ground quicker and faster. The Ontario Line, for example, is a project that we have a shovel in the ground on every part of that line, which, when you compare it to projects started under previous governments, like the Eglinton Crosstown, was not—

Ms. Doly Begum: It was not a priority for them. We know that.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We continue to work on ensuring that we get these done quicker and faster, but the cost of transit has gone up all across the world.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thirty seconds.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: It's cited in many reports.

Ms. Doly Begum: Speaking of cost, my next question is, how many vice-presidents work at Metrolinx at the moment, including what's embedded—private consultants?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Well, look, we are embarking on the largest—

Ms. Doly Begum: Just a number, Minister, I have literally 20 seconds left.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: —expansion of public transit in the history of this province and the history of North America—

Ms. Doly Begum: How many vice-presidents?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: —and we'll continue to work towards delivering on that agenda.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much. That's the end of that round.

Now to the third party: MPP Watt, you have 15 minutes.

MPP Tyler Watt: The 401 tunnel: I have a hard time wrapping my head around this. I'm glad to hear we got some numbers today. We got \$9 million for the feasibility study. But when I look at page 73, under "Integrated policy and planning," the number here—the actual cost for the office—was \$7 million in 2023-24, and for 2025-26 those services are estimated to be \$18 million. So are you saying \$9 million of that is going towards the study?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Sorry. Could you just remind me, what did you quote there? My apologies—I didn't hear.

MPP Tyler Watt: The integrated policy and planning cost for 2025-26. Under "services," it's estimated to cost \$18 million.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: But you're not specific to the tunnel, right? You're just generally asking on policy and planning?

MPP Tyler Watt: Yes. I'm saying, is the tunnel study \$9 million of that?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I do not believe so, but I could ask our team if we could look at that.

Mr. Felix Fung: We'll ask Virginia, maybe.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I believe this is a contract that goes to WSP. I think the policy and planning division is—

Ms. Virginia McKimm: Hi—Virginia McKimm, chief administrative officer at the Ministry of Transportation.

That is where you will see the tunnel cost expenses, within that integrated policy and planning services line. The study is anticipated to be multiple years, however. Only this year's cost would be within that budget that you're seeing.

MPP Tyler Watt: Okay. And what's that number?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: The total value is \$9 million—

MPP Tyler Watt: Over the years, \$9 million—that's what we're spending on the study?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Yes.

MPP Tyler Watt: Okay. Gotcha. That's good to know.

If that study comes back with a number that's like \$100 billion, as we've seen from some experts in the news, is your government still going to move forward with it?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: MPP Watt, I don't want to get into hypotheticals, but I can tell you that we're committed to the tunnel because we know that we need to

build transformational infrastructure to move this province forward not just for the next four years or five years. These are transformational projects over the next 10 years. Whether it be the Ontario Line, whether it be any of our transit projects—

MPP Tyler Watt: For the 401 tunnel though, is there a number that we wouldn't move forward with this?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We're committed to building the tunnel. We believe that it is necessary. I believe there is probably over \$300 million to \$500 million of goods that travel across that section every single day, so it is not only critical from an economic perspective just for the movement of goods for Ontario, for Canada; it's North America-wide. It is one of the most critical arteries from an economic perspective, but ultimately for productivity. Gridlock costs us \$56 billion today. I'm sure you drive through that stretch trying to go back home to Ottawa. There is significant gridlock on it. So we need to find solutions, and we believe this is a solution to that.

MPP Tyler Watt: I agree. Gridlock is a serious thing, and it's only gotten worse since everyone has been mandated back to in-office.

I can appreciate that I can't expect you just to pull a number out of the air. I can appreciate that, but will you at least commit to listening to the experts who commission the feasibility study?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Listening to the individuals that have won the RFP? We're going to work with them, absolutely.

MPP Tyler Watt: Because they're going to say that the way we address gridlock is more public transit, not a fantasy project tunnel. It doesn't take an expert to know that—especially if it's \$9 million for us to hear that.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: What I would say is, when the Premier announced his plan on public transit, members of the opposition called it a fantasy plan, back of a napkin. But today we have shovels in the ground in every single one of those projects, be it Yonge North, be it Ontario Line.

The Premier has a vision. We have a vision to build for the future. A part of that project includes a transit line and the feasibility of a transit line under the 401 as well.

What I would say to that as well is, as a government, we spent almost 3 to 1 on public transit compared to highways—\$70 billion over the next 10 years to the \$30 billion that we see on highways and roads. So it's about optionality. It's about making sure that we invest in all modes of transportation, and that's what we're committed to doing.

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you.

I'm going to move on to the safety element here. Your government often talks about road safety, but we know that fatalities are rising. And the speed cameras are going away very shortly. Why are we spending more—\$10 million more, in fact—on ministry administration, rather than transportation safety programs?

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Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Well, administration from an MTO perspective is also very important to

manage our highway systems and to ensure that we continue to have the necessary policies in place. We've worked on significant legislation at MTO, whether it's with respect to impaired driving, stunt driving or the MOMS Act that we legislated. We have put significant work from a policy perspective and an administrative perspective into ensuring that we have safer roads, and we continue to do that and we continue to commit to doing that.

That being said, if you want to look at the numbers of the government on, for example, other elements of safety within our highways, our commercial vehicle enforcement officers have increased by 92% since 2017. That is a historic increase, and just this year, we've got about a 45%-plus increase in the amount of inspections that we've done since January—

MPP Tyler Watt: Yes, I can appreciate all that, but I was originally talking about the administration costs being that much higher. Why do we need more administrators when operating and capital costs have gone down?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Capital costs have continued to increase because of our investments. We've got a \$28-billion investment into highways, and we've got a \$70-billion investment into public transit. Year over year, we continue to increase. Across North America, you will not find a jurisdiction that has more investment into public transit or highways than under this government. As we continue to grow, we have the resources to support that growth in a responsible manner.

MPP Tyler Watt: Sorry; you said that operating capital costs have gone up?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Capital investment into our projects has continued to increase, whether it's investing in roads, bridges or highways. It can vary, with respect to our previous conversation around which parts of the project we might be at, but there's been no one that has invested more into capital infrastructure on our highways, roads and bridges than this government.

MPP Tyler Watt: All right. Back to the safety aspects: With everything that's gone on with the speed cameras, there's been a huge public outcry about it. I don't think it's absurd to want our kids to be safe when they're going to school, at the very least. I know that municipalities and city staff are looking at how much it's going to cost to undo the ASE program, and this province has spoken about how they will support that. Is there any funding specifically allocated within the estimates that is going to help municipalities with that financial burden?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We will be, in the coming weeks, announcing that financial commitment, and as the program evolves, we continue to work directly with municipalities to deliver on that program. In the very near future, you will see more details of that coming.

MPP Tyler Watt: Okay. Thank you. Looking forward to it. Is it going to be helping with funding speed bumps, for example?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Traffic calming measures could be from speed bumps to other measures that the city may find useful—policing; whatever they see

fit. We'll have a general fund that we will work with our municipalities on deploying, which will help meet the needs of our commitment to supporting them in this transition.

MPP Tyler Watt: I'm sure municipality governments and city staff will be relieved to know that the government and you all have committed to helping them through that.

I know there are a lot of numbers in here, and I'm more so talking about operations versus ministry administration. On page 34, it clearly shows that capital expenses for transit alone are set to decline 4.6%, or \$451 million, but you keep saying the opposite, so I just want clarification on this.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Maybe I'll ask you, Felix or Jamie, to once again explain that a bit more.

But to the point earlier: Where you have projects that have completed the majority of their civil elements—Finch West and Eglinton being those examples, as they turn into the testing phase of it. Every project is in a different phase, but, James, if you want to elaborate on that?

Mr. James Pearce: That's right. To the minister's point, the life cycle of a project is such that you may be spending less in the final years of that project on capital. To the minister's point, the ECLRT and Finch West LRT are nearing their final stages, so we're spending significantly less on capital on those particular projects, where a new project in the earlier stages of planning and design may not have reached a peak of capital investment, which is why you might see a fluctuation in the year-over-year expense that might be incurred in the capital program.

But the overall capital program on a 10-year basis is substantial—to the minister's point, nearly \$70 billion.

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you for that clarification. Why, then, have operations for capital expenses tripled since 2023-24? It has gone from \$50 million to \$150 million.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Maybe repeat that? Sorry.

MPP Tyler Watt: Knowing that, why have capital expenses tripled since 2023-24? It has gone from \$50 million to \$150 million.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: The expenses of it? So as we invest more in capital—

MPP Tyler Watt: For operations.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: As we invest more into some of those projects, it would increase? Is that what you're asking?

MPP Tyler Watt: Yes. I'm asking why it has tripled.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I believe, given just generally the more investment, but James, you can kind of—maybe I'm just confused on the question but—

MPP Tyler Watt: I know I'm making you work hard.

Mr. James Pearce: No, no, it's fine. Would you mind just pointing to the page and the line item? That might help me answer your question more directly.

MPP Tyler Watt: Page 34—hold on, I'm going to have to find this myself now.

Mr. James Pearce: Page 34—are you looking at the transit line two lines down?

MPP Tyler Watt: It is, yes.

Mr. James Pearce: The \$1.06 billion?

MPP Tyler Watt: The capital expense and then operations.

Mr. James Pearce: In the capital expense section, \$9.277 billion dollars, which is reflective of that decrease in \$451 million.

MPP Tyler Watt: Yes.

Mr. James Pearce: That's exactly the response I provided with respect to the actual capital cost that is incurred on a year-to-year basis being lower this fiscal year than it might have been in the prior because of where a project is at in its life cycle. But that's a capital expense number.

MPP Tyler Watt: Okay. Thank you. I'll move on from this.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You have a minute and 20 seconds left, just to let you know.

MPP Tyler Watt: Okay, thank you. I guess just with all of these numbers and millions of dollars, what independent oversight exists to ensure that the billions of dollars that are being spent on highway construction aren't inflating costs through sole-sourced or politically motivated contracts?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Every one of our infrastructure projects is procured competitively, whether it's the Bradford Bypass—the central east portions of that are. The RP is closed and will be awarded very soon, but those were all competitively procured.

When you talk about the Yonge North subway extension, we announced the successful proponents of that after a very competitive process for the tunnelling, the North End tunnelling group that won it against many other individuals that were bidding on it.

We strive to have projects that are competitively bid because that helps bring the price down when there's more competition. Through many of the investments that this government has made to support and instill confidence in our infrastructure players that we are here for—

MPP Tyler Watt: But are there any actual measures—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you. I'm afraid we're out of time.

MPP Tyler Watt: Okay.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): We'll now go to the government side for 15 minutes. MPP Babikian, you can please start.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you, Minister, for your exhaustive presentation. Thank you to your staff, the hard work that you're doing. After all, it's not easy, after the previous government ignored the public transit sector for 15 years, and I don't think anyone will have the magic wand to address all these issues which were left accumulated over those 15 years. But you're doing an amazing job. What do they say? The eating is in the pudding.

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We see the projects that you are already accomplishing. By the way, it's not only Brampton that was left ignored, but the city of Scarborough also was ignored for a long time—

Ms. Doly Begum: I agree.

Mr. Aris Babikian: We agree on something, right? Thank you.

I was pleased to be with you at the groundbreaking of Scarborough Centre subway station, which is another milestone. The other issue that you addressed is the Stouffville GO line, which the track of was doubled, and we have two brand new, state-of-the-art stations. These are all giving the residents of Scarborough hope and encouragement that there is a government finally listening to their needs and trying to address it, and they appreciate that.

Of course, the other thing that helped the residents of Scarborough and other regions is the One Fare program, which was an important milestone trying to save the residents of Ontario—especially these days, where the cost of living is increasing. That's another important program.

I wanted to ask you, by bringing the One Fare program, how much do residents, or the transit riders, save under this program?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: That's a great question, MPP Babikian.

I want to start by first thanking you for all of your leadership on the transit file. You've been a great advocate for transit for Scarborough, for Toronto, so thank you for all that you do. I know we have a big project that we're going to undertake in your neck of the woods, which is the Sheppard extension, so I'm looking forward to delivering that with you as we move forward on that project as well.

When we talk about One Fare, I think one of the big successes of that has been the customer savings. We've seen \$123 million of savings to customers to date as of the one-year program completion in February of this year. We noted an increase in transfer trip growth of over 14.5 million rides, so that tells you the program is working. When we eliminated that part and made it more accessible, more affordable for people, I think it truly delivered some meaningful results.

I had an opportunity to speak to students at TMU not too long ago, and I asked them how many of them have benefited off of One Fare, and every single one of them put their hands up because many of them commute in. Some may commute in on the Stouffville line; some may commute in from Mississauga, Vaughan, York region, and they are all then able to connect onto the TTC and not have to pay the additional fare. So they're saving \$6 a day in some cases. The \$1,600 number that we often reference is just an average, but some people save more than that. It truly puts a lot of money back into the pockets of a lot of those people, but most importantly, it encourages and allows more people to get onto transit and makes it more affordable for them. So I think that's the big win in the One Fare program and it's something that the government and its members supported and ensured got done.

We've seen the transformational nature of that investment help and support transit growth, and as we continue to see that growth—because we see increased growth on our transit lines, on our GO expansion, and we know a lot of those people can then benefit off of transferring seamlessly onto the TTC, for example, and getting around the city.

So we're going to continue to build upon that, get more regions into that program, so they can ultimately also benefit from it.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you.

The other issue that I want to raise with you—and I appreciate if you can enlighten us further on the Gardiner Expressway. The project was supposed to take three years to accomplish, but the project was accomplished and finished earlier than what was expected—if I am not mistaken, a year earlier than what was planned.

Can you shed some light on how that happened? What were the mechanisms behind it to expedite that process, which bodes well for other projects that you are initiating?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you. Great question, MPP Babikian.

Look, when we first heard that the Gardiner would have to be shut down for three years and two lanes would be taken away, there was serious concern around that, given how important the Gardiner Expressway is to the city of Toronto—and not only the city of Toronto, but to Ontario and to Canada. It's got to be one of the most travelled expressways in the province.

If you look at the Gardiner, I think about 120,000 people travel it every single day. The DVP has similar numbers. So you've got 240,000 people on that stretch every single day between the two of those. The significant increase in time that it took for people to get into one of the economic hubs of North America was concerning to us.

When we heard the original timeline, that it would take three years, we knew that that would be too long and too counterproductive to getting people into the city—detracting people from coming into the city. So we stepped up to the plate with the city of Toronto and said—and to the credit of Mayor Chow and her team, we worked very well with them on this project to execute a \$73-million agreement. One of the conditions of that agreement was that they go 24 hours on the construction of this project, and as a result, deploy, also, additional resources to that project with respect to staffing it. And we saw a very successful outcome of that, that being 18 months ahead of schedule, the Gardiner opened up. We're very proud of that investment. It's money really well spent. The productivity loss was calculated at over \$200 million if we had not fixed it.

So the investment we made is truly going to make a difference to the people of this city and to the others who are coming in and out of the city as well. We're very happy with that and look forward to using some of the learnings from the Gardiner to see how we can deploy those across our other projects as well.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you, Minister, and thank you to your staff for the work that you're doing on behalf of the residents of Ontario, improving their quality of life. Instead of wasting their time in traffic gridlock, they can spend that time with their families and loved ones. Thank you very much. The residents of Scarborough also appreciate what you're doing because they see the light at the end of the tunnel.

I would like to pass my time to my colleague Deepak.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Anand, you have six minutes.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Knowing what the minister is doing for Ontario, I think six minutes is too little, but I am going to try to ask him a few of the questions that I have in my mind.

We all know trucking is a big industry in my riding of Mississauga–Malton and across Peel region. We have seen that in the province of Ontario.

Madam Speaker, truck drivers—when they leave home, their family looks to them to come back, so their safety is extremely important.

We all want safer roads. I mean, it's not just the truck drivers. If there is an accident, there's somebody on the other side. Many times, it's not their fault, and they also have to face the consequences. But so many times, we've seen the trucking industry is putting families at risk.

Minister, I would like you to tell the committee and the people of Ontario about the changes that you have brought recently to driver's licence eligibility and speak to how these reforms will improve road safety while ensuring fairness to all the drivers.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I think the first point that I'll start off with on this is our significant increase in transportation enforcement officers, which was a commitment that we made through the last couple of years to really focus in on ensuring that we have more individuals on our roads. That started in 2018. We're up 92% with respect to that. In the north, we had 17 TEOs, transportation enforcement officers, when we took over; now we have 50, and more coming. So it shows you that, across the entirety of the province, we have more enforcement officials on the road.

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To date, if we look at the 2025 numbers, we had 94,000 inspections that our transportation enforcement officers conducted on commercial vehicles versus last year's 63,000 inspections that were undertaken. That's a 47% increase in the number of inspections that our transportation enforcement officers have undertaken.

The other positive impact of that is, even though inspections are up, charges are down by approximately 35% compared to the 2024 levels. That tells you that the increased enforcement on our roads is ensuring that anyone travelling through Ontario knows that they will be held accountable by our officers if they do not follow the rules or maintain safety to the standards that MTO officers require. So we have brought a strong approach to that.

With respect to licensing, we did announce, just a couple of weeks ago by now, that we will be introducing measures to strengthen that, with respect to ensuring that we are looking at eligibility of individuals to work in the province before issuing licences, keying those licences to the necessary permits that are required to work in the province; that we are introducing mandatory driving experience before moving onto driving 18-wheelers; and ensuring that we're continuously cracking down on those who are getting licences in a fraudulent manner through our mystery shopping programs and other such approaches. We have a strong commitment to that

We've also added, for the first time ever, X-ray technologies to some of our weigh stations. I was at a Gananoque weigh station where, for the first time, I saw our X-ray machines that were deployed which would help identify unsecured loads in commercial vehicles and other instances of safety infractions. And our continuous investment into our inspection stations: We've got six inspection stations now that have new technology to scan for trucks or defects, which helps our officers identify some of those challenges beforehand.

So we are committed to ensuring that we have a full round of support to ensure our roads are safe.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): One minute.

Mr. Deepak Anand: That's incredible. Another thing which we always worry about, because the winter is fast approaching and driving in the north could be troublesome, especially in the storms—can you please talk about the investments we are making in the northern highways?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Yes. We've deployed close to 1,400 pieces of equipment on our highways for winter maintenance. We have the leading standard in all of Canada on clearing roads across the province. Just in the last couple of years, we've deployed an additional 100 units of equipment just to specifically target the north, and we've restructured our contacts to be more prescriptive, not only from a staffing perspective on winter maintenance contracts but also on how they are cleared quicker and faster.

We'll work with our law enforcement officials and individuals to ensure that we are using, whether it be technology or—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you, Minister. I'm afraid we're out of time for this round.

We have eight minutes left and it goes to the official opposition. MPP Begum, you can begin, please.

Ms. Doly Begum: It's my lucky day. Thank you very much, Chair.

Minister, I want to turn your attention to GO expansion, but it relates to Metrolinx. I'm not obsessed; I wish I wasn't, but people ask for it.

A massive contract for the operation of the expanded GO rail network collapsed in secret. This collapse had major implications in terms of the service that Ontarians will receive. They were promised something for over a decade in terms of European style; instead, they will get incremental improvement—something of status quo.

This was a major, major policy change, but people learned of this through leaks to the media. This is the biggest P3 contract that Metrolinx has. Why did Metrolinx try to keep this a secret?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: The contract that you're referencing was a contract which the counterparty did not meet the specific needs of Metrolinx and the standards that we had set. So we moved forward on termination of that contract to ensure, from an operational perspective, that we can continue to move forward. It has had zero impact on service levels. In fact, two weeks ago, I announced additional services on many of our lines across the province.

From an operational fleet management perspective, that was a contract, and we continued to use our existing provider moving forward on that. But from an accountability perspective, that individual company was not meeting the standards and requirements of Metrolinx, and so we did terminate that contract.

Ms. Doly Begum: Based on the leaks, actually, we know that Metrolinx reduced the scope of the promised European-style regional express rail service standard and replaced it with, Metrolinx said, "minimum viable product."

Will Metrolinx provide this committee with a briefing note providing a description—you just mentioned that there was a new contract, a new agreement. Can I get a commitment to providing that briefing note with a description of its new, rescoped service plan for GO expansion, including the planned frequencies for each line, where service improvements will occur for each line, the estimated timing for electrification of each line and whether a vehicle will be electric or diesel?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Just two weeks ago, I provided an update, as the minister, on additional services that we're going to be providing, whether it be the Kitchener line, whether it be the Stouffville line, the Barrie line, as I did a couple of months before that. That's continuously what we will do.

I announced the API agreement for Kitchener that allows us to build dedicated tracks that will then facilitate further services, enabling even higher levels of service between Kitchener and Union Station. That's what we'll continue to do, as we have. Since 2018, for example, on the Kitchener line, we've made significant, significant progress.

Ms. Doly Begum: I appreciate that, Chair, but I would like a briefing note to this committee from Metrolinx on the actual rescoping of this plan: what change took place as well as the service improvement that will occur, the frequencies as well as the estimated timing for electrification.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Well, you can continue to look at our schedules. On November 23, we announced that our—

Ms. Doly Begum: Can we get it from Metrolinx, Chair?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: It is on Metrolinx's website. Our service increases and our service changes that are going to take effect on November 23. We'll continue to work through our plans, whether it be on the Kitchener line, whether it be on our expansion into Bowmanville. Those are projects that we continue to undertake through our expansion plan and our investment of \$70 billion over the next 10 years into public transit.

Ms. Doly Begum: I'm just really concerned, Chair, that Metrolinx specifically says, "minimum viable product." And yet Metrolinx is not going to give us an actual briefing note of what that looks like, and somehow the minister will be okay with us not getting that.

Why do you think Metrolinx is entitled to keep secrets from the public, who actually pay for these projects, as well as the CEO, Michael Lindsay, and those of the 118—which is what we have in record; I didn't get an answer from the minister on how many people actually work

there. But the CEO as well as the 118 vice-presidents—they're all on the public dime.

Why is it that Metrolinx thinks, or why are we having the ministry let Metrolinx keep secrets from the public when they are the one that pay for these projects, and pay for the individuals who are working for Metrolinx?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We continue to improve service on all of our GO lines. Just last summer, we increased services by over 300 trips per week across many of our lines. You see the progress that we're making on all of our expansion plans, whether it be on Kitchener, weekend service, the API agreement that we signed to build dedicated tracks on the Kitchener line. Significant progress is being made on all of our Kitchener lines. The Niagara line is up, over a 133% increase—

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you very much, Minister. Unfortunately, I don't have any more time left.

1730

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP French, you have two and half minutes.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you. Quick question: Is the public on the hook for the cost of breaking the operations contract with Deutsche Bahn?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Well, as a part of our plan to continue moving forward—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Are we on the hook for the cost of breaking the operations?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: As per any contract, the terms of the contract will be fulfilled as per the terms of it—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Well, the contract can't be fulfilled. The contract was broken. So, are we on the hook?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: It would follow any sort of regular termination process that occurs.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay. And how much will the public be paying Deutsche Bahn to not operate the GO rail system?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Well, as a part of every contract that that is issued, once those discussions have completed, we'd be happy to—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you.

And I have a question. As an MPP, I've been doing this for 11 years and I've never actually had to file my own FOI, but Metrolinx has put limits on our research team, so I'm doing it all by myself.

Weeks ago, I was contacted by a whistle-blower who said that Metrolinx was covering up a material error in its financial disclosures. I sent an FOI request for records of the CEO, of the CFO discussing any error and got back a response from Metrolinx saying that there is a "large volume of records."

Is the minister aware of this material error in Metrolinx's financial disclosures—to Treasury Board, I understand? And, if so, will he tell the public what this error is?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We have audited statements that are before the board, verified by auditors. So, if there's a material error, that would be noted in the audit. But that has not been put forward to us—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay. I promise when I get those records that I will share it with you—and probably the province.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): The member has 60 seconds.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay. Last question—and I know we don't have time to get into the bike lanes and safety camera stuff, but will the minister pass a regulation to allow the city of Toronto to install bike lanes on Parkside Drive so that more people don't die? It would have to be in regulation, since we're here.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I'm sorry. What street?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Parkside Drive. The bike lanes are part of the city's plan for traffic calming, but they would require, now, a regulation since they've been banned. Can they have that to keep people safe?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Our position is if it removes a lane of traffic, then no.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Time?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Twenty seconds.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Twenty seconds. Okay, in that case, does the minister know what the government will say to the family of the next person who dies on Parkside Drive?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Oh, my goodness.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I'm not going to answer that question.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Okay. We're out of time, but thank you very much everybody.

This concludes the committee's consideration of the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Transportation. Standing order 69 requires that the Chair put, without further amendment or debate, every question necessary to dispose of the estimates. Are the members ready to vote? Okay.

Shall vote 2701, ministry administration program, carry? All those in favour, please raise their hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. Vote 2701 is accordingly carried.

Shall vote 2702, transit, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. Vote 2702 is accordingly carried.

Shall vote 2703, transportation safety, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare vote 2703 is accordingly carried.

Shall vote 2704, transportation infrastructure management, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare vote 2704 is accordingly carried.

Shall vote 2706, integrated policy and planning, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare vote 2706 is accordingly carried.

Shall vote 2707, operations, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare vote 2707 is accordingly carried.

Shall vote 2708, oversight and agency governance, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare vote 2708 is accordingly carried.

Shall vote 2709, commercial transportation safety and enforcement, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare vote 2709 is accordingly carried.

Shall the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Transportation carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. It shall carry.

Shall the Chair report the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Transportation to the House? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I shall report the estimates to the House.

That concludes our consideration of this ministry's estimates. I'd like to thank Minister Sarkaria and everyone here today for their participation.

There being no further business, this committee stands adjourned until 10 a.m. on Thursday, November 13, 2025, when we will consider the estimates of the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism. Thank you, everyone.

The committee adjourned at 1735.

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