

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2023–24 Budget Estimates

Melbourne – Wednesday 14 June 2023

MEMBERS

Sarah Connolly – Chair

Nicholas McGowan – Deputy Chair

Michael Galea

Paul Hamer

Mathew Hilakari

Lauren Kathage

Bev McArthur

Danny O’Brien

Ellen Sandell

WITNESSES

Ms Melissa Horne MP, Minister for Roads and Road Safety,

Mr Paul Younis, Secretary, and

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

Ms Samantha Cockfield, Head, Road Safety, Transport Accident Commission.

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

I ask that mobile telephones please be turned to silent.

I begin by acknowledging the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to them, their elders past, present and emerging as well as elders from other communities who may be with us today.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2023–24 Budget Estimates. The committee's aim is to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for the Victorian community.

I advise that all evidence taken by the committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, comments repeated outside this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

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

As Chair I expect that committee members will be respectful towards witnesses, the Victorian community joining the hearing via the live stream today and other committee members.

I welcome the Minister for Roads and Road Safety the Honourable Melissa Horne as well as officials from the Department of Transport and Planning – welcome. Minister, I am going to invite you to make an opening statement or presentation of no more than 10 minutes this morning, and this will be followed by questions from the committee. Your time starts now.

Visual presentation.

Melissa HORNE: Well, thank you very much, Chair. And I too would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathered and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. I thank you for the opportunity to address the committee on this year's Victorian budget. This year's budget has a number of initiatives that will contribute significantly to the safe and efficient way that Victorians use and interact with the road network.

Since 2014 the Andrews Labor government has delivered an unprecedented investment and reform program to ensure that Victoria's road network safely and efficiently connects people and freight to where they want to go. We have continued to grow the road network by investing nearly \$30 billion in almost 450 new road projects across the state. We have added more than 400 kilometres of new lanes to the state's road network since the beginning of 2016, and we have invested \$5.7 billion to maintain and strengthen our road network since coming to office.

Chair, key road and safety initiatives announced in this year's budget include \$2.8 billion over 10 years to maintain and strengthen our road network, including flood recovery works; the \$10 million free rego for apprentices initiative, providing cost-of-living relief for our hardworking tradies; \$3.1 million to protect and maintain Melbourne's iconic West Gate Bridge, ensuring all Victorians and our freight and tourism industries can continue to rely on this key link in our transport network; \$15.7 million to continue our commitment to the school crossing supervisor program; and \$61.6 million to improve safety and connectivity for pedestrians, bike riders and drivers through a series of road and shared-path upgrades.

This government recognises the critical role of active transport, and by that I mean walking and cycling, in providing real transport options for people and improving local connectivity. We are committed to improving the safety of cyclists and pedestrians across Victoria, with over \$61.6 million invested in safe walking and cycling projects in this year's budget. These projects will also make walking and cycling more enjoyable and support the government's climate change pledge of 25 per cent active transport mode share by 2030. The projects include \$32.8 million for the Eltham–Greensborough shared-user path stage 2, which goes between Montmorency station and Eltham station on the Hurstbridge line; \$1.2 million to install electronic speed signs along Centre Road in Clayton; \$2 million for a safer pedestrian crossing for Bentleigh Greek Orthodox church on Centre Road in Bentleigh; \$2 million to install new pedestrian signals at the existing school crossing on Hall Road near Rowellyn Avenue in Carrum Downs; and a \$2 million grant to Nillumbik Shire Council towards the construction of a new pedestrian bridge across Diamond Creek to connect the Diamond Creek Trail with the Wattletree Road. We are also trialling up to 100 kilometres of new and improved bike routes across inner Melbourne – in Darebin, Yarram, Maribyrnong, Moonee Valley and Port Phillip. These bike routes are making it easier and safer for people to ride to and from the Melbourne CBD and within their local area. We are continuing to take a flexible and collaborative approach to the rollout of the trial, using temporary infrastructure that can be adjusted, relocated or removed.

And let us not forget e-scooters. While not technically an active mode of transport, they share a number of similarities. E-scooters support alternative modes of transport and address some of our current challenges, such as carbon emissions and congestion. In April we made a decision to extend the e-scooter trial statewide for private and shared e-scooters for six months to make sure that we have got the best possible dataset to make an informed decision about the future of e-scooters in Victoria.

We are also asking our roads to do more, and we need to maintain them differently. A growing population and a growing and changing freight task are increasing the demands on our roads. We have more vehicles registered on our networks and more people driving on them. In addition, we have experienced more flooding in the past two to three years than in the past two decades. Road material, labour and construction costs have increased and supply chains are under pressure, so we need to do more to make our road network more resilient. We need to do it in a different way – a smarter, more efficient, more sustainable way. We can no longer apply year-to-year funding. We need a model that is fit for purpose over the long term, and that is why this government is delivering a new multiyear funding approach for road maintenance and strengthening works. We are investing \$2.8 billion over 10 years to maintain and strengthen our road network, including flood recovery works. This will take our total spend to at least \$6.6 billion over the next decade. In the coming financial year alone this will see \$770 million spent on rebuilding, repairing and repaving Victoria's road assets, building on over 2600 kilometres of work done in the last financial year.

We have made significant progress in the last year. We have used world-leading technology to map the condition of the roads across the state, bolstering our evidence base and providing a level of insight that we have never had before. We have reformed maintenance contracts to deliver contemporary performance regimes that focus on road user and safety outcomes while maintaining value for money for the state.

But we can always do more. We know that each of our rural and regional areas have a unique and varying road maintenance demand. Road maintenance is not one size fits all. In the Barwon region, for example, there are cooler temperatures and more extreme rainfall, which make the bitumen conditions different. In the Grampians regions roads crews are dealing with warmer, dry conditions, which indeed have an impact on our road network there. That is why I have written to the Secretary of the department seeking advice on how to apply this 10-year funding model so that it can deliver a more strategically planned maintenance program across the state.

Already this year 145 people have lost their lives on the roads, leaving family, friends, workmates and communities changed forever. Every life lost is one too many, and we need to do everything that we can to bring this number down. In 2021 we launched Victoria's new 2021–2030 road safety strategy and the first action plan in collaboration with state government departments, the TAC and Victoria Police. This strategy sets ambitious targets to halve road deaths and significantly reduce serious injuries by 2030 and set the state on a path to zero road deaths by 2050. We are working to end road trauma – delivering safer infrastructure and education across the state, investigating new policies, trialling new technology and investing in life-saving initiatives. This year the distracted driver road rules came into effect. These are so important, because we know that driver distraction can be deadly. I also recently announced the \$210 million Safe Local Roads and Streets program, supporting the development and delivery of road safety infrastructure projects on local roads. This

program will run over four years, working with councils to plan, design and deliver safety improvements on the highest risk local road intersections, precincts and schools.

Chair, Smarter Roads is a \$340 million Victorian government program that keeps people and goods moving in Melbourne's west, east and south-east. Smarter Roads is carrying out the biggest review of Melbourne's traffic light network since signals were introduced almost 100 years ago. Our team of expert engineers is reviewing traffic light sequencing at more than 850 locations across Melbourne's west, east and south-east to optimise the performance on our roads. This work will reduce stop-start trips in the Smarter Roads zones by giving motorists a clear run through multiple sets of lights and creating a smoother journey. More than 700 live traffic monitoring cameras mean that we can now safely monitor incidents in real time from our transport operations centre. When an incident occurs, the cameras are used to support first responders like VicPol and Ambulance Victoria.

Chair, we have responded to climate emergencies, including the delivery of \$165 million in flood recovery works. On top of that, we are delivering a new long-term maintenance funding model, and we have the evidence base and better contracts to make this work successfully. This is a huge program of work. It has meant Victorians can get home sooner and safer, it has helped move our farmers' and our industries' products efficiently to market and it has supported thousands of jobs. Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister, for that. The first 8 minutes of questions are going to go to Mr O'Brien.

Danny O'BRIEN: Thank you, Chair. Good morning, Minister and team. Secretary, can I ask: the \$165 million allocated for post-flood road recoveries, which was announced in the VEFU, has that been fully expended?

Paul YOUNIS: It has not all been fully expended as yet. I have not got the update of the exact figures that we have spent today, but we have got some works to do. We have certainly done about 1600 kilometres of road on that, and we have got some rehabilitation works to be completed. One of the other challenging parts of that is the Bogong High Plains Road, which is still being completed and worked on. There is a significant amount of work still to be done on that road.

Danny O'BRIEN: So that will come out of that funding as well?

Paul YOUNIS: We are looking at the overall funding. The \$165 million was initially allocated to get us through some of those really early challenging areas we had. We use that across those flood areas to get the roads open and to do a range of repairs. Of course we are also working through insurance, so there will be insurance money that we need to look at and federal funding through the federal flood recovery program that we will be looking at. So there are other sources. Of course we need to get all the data and information to support those claims, and I expect it will be more than \$165 million spent on that program when we collect all of those funds together.

Danny O'BRIEN: Could I ask for you to take on notice how much has been spent up to now?

Paul YOUNIS: Yes, and I thought I had that figure here.

Danny O'BRIEN: What funding is available in the budget for flood recovery?

Paul YOUNIS: So overall our entire road program –

Danny O'BRIEN: No, I know what the entire road program is, Secretary. I am looking, and I cannot find anywhere where there is additional money for flood recovery going forward.

Paul YOUNIS: The whole flood recovery program is a part of our road maintenance program as well as our rehabilitation program. So we have still got the \$165 million expenditure to spend – and I have just been told that we have spent \$141 million of that to the end of May. We will expend that, and if we need more money for flood recovery, we will go back to government and request that, keeping in mind we know that there is federal funding and we know that there is insurance funding to come on top of that.

Danny O'BRIEN: The Victorian Transport Association, Minister, said a billion dollars was needed to fix Victoria's roads post floods. The MAV talked about \$320 million for local council roads alone. How can there not be any additional money in this budget for flood recovery works for roads?

Melissa HORNE: Thank you, Mr O'Brien. As the Secretary has mentioned, there is that money that is still yet to be expended. If I can just go through some of the –

Danny O'BRIEN: It is \$24 million, Minister.

Melissa HORNE: One of the things that we have done in this year's budget is that we have applied world-leading technology to go over thousands of kilometres of our road network to really understand –

Danny O'BRIEN: That the ARRB has had for five years – we know that – and now you are finally using it. Every other state has been using it for four or five years. The question remains: where is the additional funding for flood recovery works for roads in this year's budget?

Melissa HORNE: So what we have done is we have adopted a long-term strategy and a 10-year funding horizon for road maintenance, with \$770 million allocated in this year. That is on top of the additional money that is yet to be expended. But so far there have been 808 kilometres of pavement works that have been done. This ranges from clearing debris and pothole repair to much more complex treatments such as major patching works, resurfacing and pavement stabilisation.

Danny O'BRIEN: Minister, the question is still about what is in this year's budget for flood recovery. Can I maybe move to a slightly different question. The previous New South Wales government provided \$500 million for councils for flood recovery. Is it a fact that this government has not provided a single cent of additional funds for local councils for flood recovery?

Melissa HORNE: Without wanting to pre-empt the conversation that we have with me as local government minister, there certainly has been direct funding that has been provided to local councils as part of the flood recovery efforts, but maybe we will wait until that –

Danny O'BRIEN: Well, no, this is specifically a question about roads, not about your responsibilities as local government minister. There has not been a single cent for council roads since you cut the country roads and bridges program on coming into government. They are crying out for flood recovery funds, and there are none in the budget, are there?

Melissa HORNE: That is not true, but the Secretary I think has got more information.

Danny O'BRIEN: Well, for councils.

Paul YOUNIS: Sorry, the context of your question is the total funding, and I will go back – for councils we are working with DRFA, so there is also federal funding. So we are working with councils to understand the full extent, and we are putting together funding packages for them with the federal government funding, which is the flood recovery.

Danny O'BRIEN: Yes. That is the disaster recovery funding.

Paul YOUNIS: So we need to put that together. In relation to the funding for government – and I gave this advice to government in the preparation of the budget – we are not in a position yet to do the full assessment of all of our roads. And the full cost –

Danny O'BRIEN: The floods were in October, Secretary.

Paul YOUNIS: I will explain this because I think it is a really important element, and this is where we failed in our responses to floods and other disasters in previous times, because we have not had the data. What we did – we asked government, 'Can we go and do a full assessment of the road network and the structural integrity of the roads?', because what we do know is that what you see on the surface in the first days and weeks of a flood is not the impact that is on the roads long term.

Danny O'BRIEN: Secretary, it is eight months since the flood hit in northern Victoria.

Paul YOUNIS: So what we have done is 8,500 kilometres of assessment of the roads using the Australian Road Research Board iPAVE program, and that is new technology. It is only recent technology that has specifically been able to determine the structural integrity of the road. And we are working through that data with the Australian Road Research Board and analysing that data and doing the modelling to be sure that when we go to insurance companies, when we go to our federal funding, we have got the full picture of what the funding requirement is for our road network and recovery from the floods.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. I will move on from floods, Secretary. The \$441 million on page 310 for 'Road Asset Management', does that include the \$30 million in output and the \$50 million in the asset initiatives in this year's budget?

Paul YOUNIS: Sorry, which particular line item were you referring to?

Danny O'BRIEN: The line item 'Road Asset Management', budget paper 3, page 310. But then if you go to pages 96 and 102, there are the additional initiatives. Is that included in the \$441 million?

Paul YOUNIS: So the \$441 million – there are four parts to the road asset management program, and if you go to budget paper 2, page 16, it gives a summary of all of those things because it brings all of those elements together. You have got your asset funding – that is part of budget paper 4. In your existing funding and new funding, you have got your operations and maintenance funding, which is in budget paper 3, and this is a part of that, which is your ongoing funding plus your new funding. Collectively, that is put together –

Danny O'BRIEN: So that is the question.

Paul YOUNIS: So if you are asking how much we are spending on roads, I know that we are budgeting \$770 million to spend on our road asset maintenance next year.

Danny O'BRIEN: So how do you get to \$770 million when the 'Road Asset Management' budget line item says \$441 million and there is \$80 million in additional outputs and assets?

Paul YOUNIS: So as I said, there are four parts of the budget where the asset – and this is the way that Treasury put the budget together. There is the existing funding, or the base funding, for roads, which is on BP3, page –

Danny O'BRIEN: Page 310?

Paul YOUNIS: No, it is past that – so it is on page 340-something.

The CHAIR: Apologies, Secretary. I am going to cut you off there. Mr O'Brien, your time has come to an end. We will go straight to Mr Hilakari.

Mathew HILAKARI: I am going to continue on road maintenance, but thank you, Minister, and thank you, officials, for making some time for us this morning. I refer to budget paper 3, page 310, and go to that \$770 million, the number that has just been mentioned, and I would like you to just outline how that is going to keep getting Victorians where they need to go. What does that actually do in a practical sense?

Melissa HORNE: Thank you very much, Mr Hilakari. Maybe this will provide some clarification, because as the Secretary was saying, the way that Treasury have applied the different components to this gives us, over 10 years, \$6.6 billion in total of road maintenance, but this page speaks to part of our \$2.8 billion investment in road maintenance and flood recovery over 10 years. This will keep the roads that we use every day up to scratch – those important connections for households and communities.

We have got to keep in context just the sheer scale of our arterial road network. It is 23,000 kilometres, to be exact, and this investment will support vital work to repair, rebuild and resurface roads right across it. We have got a proud track record of investing in our road network to ensure that the network connects people and freight to where they need to be safely and efficiently. As I mentioned in my presentation, we have invested almost \$30 billion with almost 450 new projects, and we have added 400 kilometres of new lanes across the state's road network since the beginning of 2016.

But we know it is not just about the dollars, and that is why we have needed to take a different approach and have a strong evidence base and those new contracts that we have got in place to make sure that this funding is a better delivery model than we have had in the past. It is making that funding work harder and go further, because we need to get that value for money. It is not just about keeping on filling up potholes, it is about strengthening our network and securing its longevity in the longer term. In effect what we are seeing coming out of the floods is about building back better. We know that road materials, labour and construction costs have increased and supply chains are under pressure, so, as I said, we need to do it in that smarter, more efficient way.

Since coming into this portfolio I have been talking to stakeholders right across the state, and what they have been telling me is that no two roads are the same, and I am sure Mr O'Brien can tell me that roads in Gippsland are built differently and carry different movements than roads in, say, inner-city Melbourne. On top of that we are seeing our changing climate and weather hitting different parts of the network in different ways. For example, the roads in the south-west are seeing more extreme rainfall events, which makes that bitumen stiffer and presents challenges with expansive clay in wet soils. So we can no longer apply that year-to-year funding. When I was down in the south-west recently I was talking to one of the contractors who was out working on some of the roads there, and I said to him, 'If you had a magic bullet, what would it be?' and he said, 'I would like to have year-on-year funding. We can't just deal with funding for one job followed by another job, but to have that continual funding so that we can strategically plan with our partners in DTP exactly how we manage the repair and rebuilding of the road network is fundamental.' So they are some of the things that are being addressed in the budget which, as you can see in the footnote, take it to \$770 million next year.

Mathew HILAKARI: If I could just take us to the flooding from October 2022, could you outline some of the repair to flood-affected roads and how that is reconnecting businesses and communities? We have spent a little bit of time on it already, but it is important to spend a bit of time, I think, on this particular issue.

Melissa HORNE: Look, when the floods hit, and they were devastating, my friend and colleague the former Minister for Roads and Road Safety Ben Carroll wasted no time in securing that \$165 million to get an emergency repair blitz out on the road network and out on the road network that we can access, because I think what it is important to remember is that many of these roads were under water for a significant period of time. The damage that that did was substantial, as we found through the world-leading technology that we then deployed. But as of May, as I said, we have completed nearly 1700 kilometres of flood recovery activities. That has been getting debris off the road and drainage and rebuild and repair works. We have been able to do more than 500 kilometres of roadside recovery works, 73 kilometres of drainage works and 9 kilometres of full road pavement rehabilitation. And more than 116,000 potholes have been fixed.

Bev McARTHUR: Have a look at the Glenelg Highway, Minister. Look at that. You have not fixed one – not one pothole.

The CHAIR: Mrs McArthur.

Melissa HORNE: The way that we approached it was to get out and make those roads safe immediately.

Bev McARTHUR: You just put 'Slow down' signs on them – nothing else. We go slower in the country outside the tram tracks.

The CHAIR: Mrs McArthur, it is too early in the day to be grandstanding.

Bev McARTHUR: No, we cannot endure this spin all the time.

The CHAIR: Please be respectful towards the minister.

Mathew HILAKARI: Mrs McArthur, I have got further questions and I would like to hear the answers, and I will do the same for you if that is okay.

Melissa HORNE: With works underway, more than 3 kilometres of the Prairie-Rochester Road will be entirely rebuilt as part of a \$7.8 million package of works. That is targeting roads in the state's north and west. This was one of the last state-managed roads to reopen in Victoria in the wake of those devastating floods, and it was due to the severe damage caused to the surface. We have also delivered major repairs on the McIvor

Highway at the Axedale bridge and landslips repair at Axe Creek in Longlea. All of these works are about ensuring that connectivity and making sure that our roads are fit for purpose. Thank you.

Mathew HILAKARI: I will take you back just to the previous answer that you gave around engaging with contractors and the Victorian road maintenance contract in particular. If there is a concern that they are not getting that longer term ability to think about roads beyond regular floods, beyond regular maintenance, how are we actually starting to deal with that?

Melissa HORNE: The former Minister for Roads and Road Safety provided the scaffolding, really, through these new contracts to be able to establish that long-term road maintenance that we can then use, and this contains a performance regime that really focuses on customer and safety outcomes. Previous contracts only had about eight to nine KPIs in them. These new ones have got 23. That will be able to deliver better outcomes for local communities.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you so much.

The CHAIR: Apologies, Mr Hilakari, we are going to Mr O'Brien.

Danny O'BRIEN: Thanks, Chair. Secretary, a quick question: where is the funding in the budget for the \$210 million Safer Local Roads and Streets program? I cannot identify it anywhere.

Paul YOUNIS: I will have to –

Danny O'BRIEN: Can you come back to me on that?

Paul YOUNIS: take you up on that and find that in the budget, sorry.

Danny O'BRIEN: Sure. Minister, as you indicated, we have had, tragically, 145 lives lost on our roads – 35 per cent higher than this time last year. If you go to budget paper 3, page 319, Minister, the 'Road safety' output measures there, you will see that 'Kilometres of road treated with tactile line marking' has dropped from 653 kilometres two years ago to 3 this year. 'Kilometres of safety barrier installed' is going this year from 220 kilometres down to 23.5, and the number of 'Road safety initiatives' is going from 47 down to 30. How are those cuts to those critical road safety infrastructure improvements helping to improve our road safety outcomes?

Melissa HORNE: Thank you, and these are important initiatives. So this output was created through the Safer Road Infrastructure program, the targeted road safety program and the road safety programs 1, 2 and 3. And with the end of the safer roads program and the Commonwealth Road Safety Program tranche 3, that work has been done.

Danny O'BRIEN: So is there no need for any more tactile road marking?

Melissa HORNE: Look, this includes the delivery –

Danny O'BRIEN: 3 kilometres.

Melissa HORNE: of audio tactile line marking on many Victorian roads.

Danny O'BRIEN: Well, it may have, but there is 3 kilometres to be done this year. Where is the additional funding to replace the end of those programs?

Melissa HORNE: The Commonwealth guidelines and funding for this financial year and next financial year are in review. As a result of the Commonwealth's review process we have reduced –

Danny O'BRIEN: So it is federal Labor's fault.

Melissa HORNE: Sorry?

Danny O'BRIEN: So it is federal Labor's fault. Because these programs have not been funded in the federal budget, you are not funding them in this budget and there is going to be a significant reduction in infrastructure spending on road safety.

Melissa HORNE: Look, as you would appreciate, they have got a review underway, and –

Danny O'BRIEN: That is on infrastructure projects; it has nothing to do with road safety.

Melissa HORNE: We have installed audio–tactile line markings to 11,000 kilometres of road –

Danny O'BRIEN: There are 23,000 kilometres in this state, Minister, and next year you are going to do 3, because of budget cuts. That is the reality, isn't it? Can I ask about the Road Safety Fund. Perhaps the Secretary might be able to explain – budget paper 3, page 312. The Road Safety Fund was underspent this year by \$126 million, and this year is also down by another \$48 million. Can you explain to me what that Road Safety Fund actually is? Because it appears to be where the TAC moneys are receipted.

Paul YOUNIS: I will have to get back to you on this one, Mr O'Brien, because some of that is funded by the TAC, and the TAC funding is actually allocated separately. That program is funded through that program.

Danny O'BRIEN: Well, why is it literally \$126 million less than budgeted last year?

Paul YOUNIS: I will have to take that on notice, Mr O'Brien.

Danny O'BRIEN: And likewise it is down \$48 million from the budget last year to this year. Is this where we are missing out on the road safety improvements?

Paul YOUNIS: Road safety improvements are funded by the federal government, by the state and by the TAC. I will have to come back to you on the detail of that program.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. Minister, the questionnaire, page 98, and indeed the budget papers as well, indicate that the Road Smart program, which actually provided driver training to year 10 kids and was an election commitment of the Labor government, has ended and has not been re-funded. Why are you not focused on helping young drivers get better trained for the roads given the road toll we have got?

Melissa HORNE: That is not entirely true in terms of – we are focusing very much on schoolchildren.

Danny O'BRIEN: Well, that program has been cut. It finished at the end of last year, and there is no funding for it this year.

Melissa HORNE: There is a planned replacement measure for senior secondary road safety education, and that will be implemented later this year. And all schools will be eligible to receive the new program for free. We have still got a number of –

Danny O'BRIEN: Where is the funding for that in the budget, Minister?

Melissa HORNE: That is part of the department's appropriations.

Danny O'BRIEN: So how much is it?

Paul YOUNIS: We have got a range of programs, Mr O'Brien, for our whole program. We have got our Safe Routes to School program, which is a part of our community safety grants program; there is one and a half million dollars in that. There is a bike education program that we have got in another part of our appropriations that we provide to schools. We have got our Road to Zero program, which is continuing, which provides a total of nearly 5000 students access, visitations and support around them. We have got our Road Safety Education website, which provides information and support. We have got our Road Smart program. So if the question is: 'Are we providing support for younger people in our road safety program?' there is a range that we have. There is our learner mentor program, our TAC L2P program, which is funded by the TAC, and many of these programs funded through the TAC are still programs that are running.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. Minister, you have talked a bit about \$2.8 billion additional for road asset management. To be honest, when there is \$1.065 million in the output and \$1.25 million in the asset, I do not know how you get to \$2.8 million – maybe you could explain that. But, in any event, it is all back-ended. This year there is \$30 million for output spending and \$50 million additional for asset spending, and all the

additional money – a quarter of the money over 10 years is in the next four years, so bugger all. Do you not understand that we need our roads fixed now, not in 10 years time?

Melissa HORNE: Mr O'Brien, I think the clearest way to understand is, as the Secretary pointed to, in budget paper 2, which pulls together all the different accounting treatments that Treasury have used for road maintenance. But of course what you are saying is not entirely correct in that we have got \$770 million allocated to road funding, to road maintenance –

Danny O'BRIEN: Well, your own budget paper, on page 310, says \$441 million, a 25 per cent reduction. Then you have got the asset initiatives – there is \$30 million and \$50 million in output and asset. That is for this year. That only gets us to \$521 million for this year. That is still a reduction on what you even spent in the last year, let alone two to three years ago.

Melissa HORNE: Mr O'Brien, that is –

Danny O'BRIEN: Do you not understand that we actually need a billion dollars in road funding now, not in 10 years time.

Melissa HORNE: So, Mr O'Brien, as I have explained, what we have done is we have got the new contracts in place that provide that long-term strategic way of being able to manage our road network. I have written –

Danny O'BRIEN: We have had five-year contracts before. That does not make any difference. The roads are still absolutely crap.

Melissa HORNE: I have written to the Secretary to ask how we now use this long-term –

Danny O'BRIEN: He is sitting beside you. You could ask him.

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien, your time is up. We are going to go to Ms Kathage.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Chair, Minister and officials. Minister, I would like to refer to budget paper 4, page 87, which refers to the 'Road Safety Strategy'. Can you please outline how the government is addressing road safety challenges?

Melissa HORNE: Thank you very much. Without a doubt, we have seen a really terrible start to this year. Indeed two other people lost their lives overnight, and my heart goes out to the communities that have lost these loved ones or colleagues or workmates. I think it is important to say when it comes to road safety that what we are seeing in Victoria is a trend that we are seeing across the country. It is a challenge that we really need to come at from all angles, and whether it is policy, infrastructure, technology, enforcement or education, these are all levers that we have got and these are conversations that I am having with my fellow colleagues across the country. We are working very hard, and I know we have got Sam Cockfield here today from the TAC, who is doing a power of work to be able to try and address many of these things in the focus of education.

Just recently I sat down with the assistant commissioner for police Glenn Weir and I sat down with Sam and also with the head of Road Safety Victoria to really understand what can be better done and what is causing the tragedies on our roads. From these conversations I can tell you a few things: speeding is a factor in around 26 per cent of fatalities, fatigue is a factor in 22 per cent of fatalities, alcohol is another factor in about 19 per cent, and drugs are a factor in around 30 per cent of fatalities. Distraction accounts for 11 per cent, and, as inconceivable as this is, not wearing a seatbelt is a factor in 11 per cent of fatalities on our roads. That is why in this year's budget we have over \$60 million to help make our roads safer, and whether that is shared paths or pedestrian-operated signals or electronic speed signs, it comes back to that \$2.8 billion investment in road maintenance and flood recovery over the 10 years.

We have also committed to the school crossing supervisor program. Now, that is an investment of \$15.7 million that is on top of the \$11.5 million in recurring funding, because, let us face it, we are building more schools, so we need more school supervisors out there on the network. So this is a total investment of \$27.2 million. And it is all these initiatives that add up to make sure that we are doing really all that we can.

The TAC has also invested \$1.4 billion since 2016 to deliver life-saving road safety initiatives under the *Towards Zero* road safety strategy. That strategy is underpinned by the safe system approach that highlights the need to invest across multiple areas to influence road safety. We need safe people. We need safe vehicles. We need safe speeds and we need safe roads. And that is what that strategy outlines over a 10-year vision. It aims to reduce the road toll by 50 per cent by 2030 and to eliminate all road deaths by 2050.

In relation to the safer local roads and streets program, we have just announced the \$210 million safer local roads and streets program, and that will run from July 2023 to June 2027. And we are working with local councils to plan and design and deliver safety improvements on some of the highest risk local roads, intersections, precincts and around schools as well, because local government are responsible for approximately 87 per cent of Victoria's road network. The program will help build a clear understanding of what local governments' road safety needs are and kickstart the delivery of safety improvements on those local roads.

I think it will be a real help to local governments. Certainly these are the conversations that I have had either with local government peak bodies or with councils themselves to be able to plan, fund and deliver road safety improvements on those local roads. I know just in the last sitting week that the Murray River group of councils were in talking to me about just what they needed for that long-term strategic view of their local road networks. So much of their local road networks had been under water for really considerable periods of time, and indeed there were people in their organisations that have not had a break until now because they have been so busy trying to be out there classifying the asset and documenting the damage that was done in order to be able to improve their local roads. So I think this program will really make a difference to those councils.

The other thing I would like to focus on briefly is around the TAC advertising campaigns, because behavioural campaigns work, and the TAC, I think, it is a world leader in delivering some of the most emotive and effective campaigns that we have been able to see. To date the TAC has invested almost \$14 million in public education campaigns in the last financial year alone. In 2021–22 the TAC invested \$13 million in public education campaigns. And they run a number of public education campaigns. They use multiple sources of data such as claims in order to be able to design the campaigns that they run, such as claims data, police incident reports, police enforcement data, emergency department admissions and specific demographic analysis. I understand they are market tested in specific stages, so the concept stage, post-production and prelaunch stage and then in tracking what the outcomes are after they have delivered it.

Some of their recent campaigns have included mobile phone and seatbelt detection cameras – that is important because our road rules have changed – the Lucky Ones Get Caught, which is a holiday enforcement campaign, Drive Safely for Everyone and Anywhere Anytime Anyone, but recently I have been talking to the TAC about reverting to that highly emotive, hard-hitting advertising campaign.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We will go to Mr O'Brien.

Danny O'BRIEN: Thanks, Chair. Secretary, just going back on the reduction in roadside barrier installation, which is going down this year from 220 to 23.5 kilometres. Has the government stopped installing wire rope barriers?

Paul YOUNIS: No. We are still installing wire rope barriers. We install them. We did quite a few down around the Allansford way in the last couple of years.

Danny O'BRIEN: Mrs McArthur would be loving that.

Paul YOUNIS: We are still installing them. We are particularly installing them as part of any upgrades of programs rather than a separate program. We have reduced the rollout of a major separate program, and most of those are funded by the TAC, but we are still rolling them out as a part of the upgrade programs.

Danny O'BRIEN: Could you provide, perhaps on notice, how you make the decision between wire rope barriers and the old Armco barriers?

Paul YOUNIS: Yes. It is to do with the roadside treatment, so depending on how far and close there are obstacles. It is based on a road safety assessment of the road, particularly in relation to the barriers on the side. If you have got a steep drop-off, for example, at a culvert, then most likely the assessment would show that the

Armco barrier is a much more solid impact and stops people directly, which is not as safe as a wire rope barrier for the person in the vehicle, but if there is room for the crash to occur, it will bounce back.

Danny O'BRIEN: Yes, okay. Minister, budget paper 3, page 104, has funding for the delivering better local roads program and likewise there is funding for the road blitz to get families home sooner and safer. There is \$61.8 million and \$694 million in total. The delivering better local roads program is entirely in metro areas and entirely in Labor seats, and the road blitz to get families home sooner and safer is entirely in Labor seats. Are you using the roads budget for your own personal pork barrel?

Melissa HORNE: Sorry, which budget paper was this?

Danny O'BRIEN: Budget paper 3.

Melissa HORNE: Budget paper 3.

Danny O'BRIEN: Page 104 is one of them, and the other one is 102; well, they are all on 102 one way or the other. We are talking about, Minister, \$750-odd million, and not a single cent of it is being spent in a non-Labor-held seat. Can you explain how you are not treating this as your own personal pork barrel?

Melissa HORNE: These were election commitments that have been made that I am happy to say we are out there delivering.

Danny O'BRIEN: Did you not make any election commitments in Liberal or National or Greens seats or independent seats?

Melissa HORNE: I was not the roads minister at the time. These are all the election commitments that were made. Some of these seats – I am not sure whether we held them at the time.

Danny O'BRIEN: I can assure you, Minister, every one of them is a Labor seat. I have been through it. Can I maybe ask, given that you cannot answer that, budget paper 3, page 315, has the road asset management performance measures. The road area resurfaced or rehabilitated regional is down by 3500 square metres on what was promised, apparently due to increased costs. Irrespective of why, outer suburban Melbourne went up. Is it true that the government is focused on metro roads and is letting regional roads deteriorate even further, as your own figures show?

Melissa HORNE: Mr O'Brien, I am sorry, but that is simply not correct. As you can appreciate –

Danny O'BRIEN: That is what your own figures show. The rehabilitation is actually 3500 square metres less than what you even proposed to do last year.

Melissa HORNE: As you can appreciate, many of our regional roads were really impacted by the flood event. As a result –

Danny O'BRIEN: But you just said you put a whole heap of money in to fix it.

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien, the minister is quite clearly trying to answer your very important question. This committee would like to hear her answer. Thank you. Minister.

Danny O'BRIEN: The point is, Minister –

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien, I have just asked the minister to respond to your question, thank you.

Danny O'BRIEN: If we were fixing roads, how has it actually gone backwards?

Melissa HORNE: As I was trying to say, Mr O'Brien, many of our regional roads, because of the impact of the floods, need a lot more preparatory work. The cost of materials has escalated.

Danny O'BRIEN: But yet metro went up. So how can it be read any other way? The metro area went up. You fixed more roads in the metro area and less in the regional area. The figures are there in black and white – your own data, Minister.

Melissa HORNE: As I was saying, Mr O'Brien, there is much more intensive work that needs to occur in regional Victoria. Sorry, Secretary.

Paul YOUNIS: Yes, and I think those figures – you are right to say that there has been a shift from the inner metro. The outer metro areas required more treatment because of the cost of treatment of these roads because of the floods, particularly in outer metro – and outer metro is that whole growth area and those areas across that – and the regional areas were impacted the most by the wet weather and the impacts of the roads. So what we did is shifted some of the funding from inner metro into that outer-metro area to compensate somehow in relation to the impacts of the roads.

Danny O'BRIEN: But regional Victoria still went down. Anyway.

Paul YOUNIS: The challenge for us across this whole network has been, and I think this is an issue that we have felt particularly across the whole eastern seaboard – I have been talking to my colleagues in New South Wales and Queensland – over the last two or three years as road managers across the country there have been significant issues impacting in floods and fires across the network. We have had to reset all the work that we have been doing –

Danny O'BRIEN: Thank you, Secretary, but the point remains that there was more area resurfaced in outer metro and less in the regions. Can I ask you another quick question?

Paul YOUNIS: Just to be clear with that, Mr O'Brien, the less is because we shifted money from the inner metro to outer metro, not from regional to inner metro.

Danny O'BRIEN: No, I know. Can I ask another question? The questionnaire, page 56, question 13 asks about savings and efficiencies, and it says that the savings target for the department is \$54.7 million. The explanation on that page indicates that the savings targets will be achieved by reducing:

... corporate and back office functions as well as further road safety enforcement activities.

Do I read that as to mean that you are going to attempt to try and fine more people to actually cover the savings needed to cover the cuts in the budget?

Melissa HORNE: We do not do fines.

Danny O'BRIEN: That is literally what it says:

... reduce corporate and back office functions as well as further road safety enforcement activities.

Paul YOUNIS: What we will be doing in relation to our budget savings required for the department is going through a review of our structures and a review of our performance. We are consolidating a lot of the programs. We have, as a part of the MOG, incorporated planning –

Danny O'BRIEN: I am going to run out of time, Secretary.

Paul YOUNIS: but the question is where am I going to get the savings from: it is from those duplications of functions that we have in the department now and getting more efficiencies. That is where I will be providing the savings in funding across the department.

Danny O'BRIEN: Your questionnaire says 'as well as further road safety enforcement activities'. Is that what it is – more fines?

Paul YOUNIS: What I can say is that what we will be doing is getting our savings not from income – we cannot get the savings from income –

Danny O'BRIEN: Well, that is what it says.

Paul YOUNIS: Treasury will not allow us to do that.

The CHAIR: Apologies, Mr O'Brien, your time is up. We are going to Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Good morning, Minister and officials. Minister, I would like to ask you about active transport, and I refer to your presentation as well as budget paper 3, page 318. The government has a goal for 25 per cent of all trips to be made by active transport by 2030. Could you please outline some of the initiatives that you are proceeding with in order to achieve this?

Melissa HORNE: Sure. Thank you very much. And this also, Mr Galea, builds on the statements provided by the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure yesterday, who outlined extensively how with all of those Big Build projects we are also building in that componentry for active transport. So we have got over \$60 million into the number of active transport projects, which is about getting people walking and cycling across the network. That, as you pointed out, was 25 per cent of all transport trips being active transport trips by 2030.

Some of the projects that I have outlined in my presentation, but also additional ones, are the \$32.8 million for that Eltham to Greensborough shared user path stage 2, which I know people up in the north are very excited about. There is \$1 million for a grant to Monash council, which is to widen and improve Scotchmans Creek Trail, which is near Warrigal Road and Blackburn Road. There is a million dollars in output funding to develop designs for a pedestrian and cycling underpass for the Anniversary Trail at High Street in Ashburton. We have got \$1.5 million in output funding for a grant to Monash council, and that will improve the Waverley rail trail between Mount Waverley and Jordanville stations. That will include things too like lighting upgrades and Parkiteer bicycle facilities – very important. \$1.4 million in asset funding will install electronic variable speed signs for road users, cyclists and pedestrians outside of Gembrook Primary School, and there is \$1.25 million in asset funding for electronic speed signs along Centre Road in Clayton.

The list goes on. There is \$2 million in asset funding to deliver and implement a safer pedestrian crossing at Centre Road in Bentleigh, which is outside the Greek Orthodox church, and \$1 million in asset funding to install pedestrian-operated signals at Fletcher Road in Frankston. I do not know if you have been down there at all recently, but with the redevelopment of the station and the TAFE down there it is a really busy section down there. There is \$100,000 in output funding for traffic action plans for roads around Port Melbourne Secondary College, and that is focusing on improvements to infrastructure, signage and pedestrian access. In addition, there is \$1.4 million to deliver works to improve traffic safety around Port Melbourne Secondary College and around the JL Murphy Reserve. Now, I am not entirely sure what sport they play there, but I am sure there are lots of kids that go to and from it.

As I mentioned, there is \$750,000 in output funding for planning and upgrades to improve safety at the intersection of Station Street and McLeod Road in Carrum, as well as \$2 million to install new pedestrian signals at an existing school crossing on Hall Road at Rowellyn Avenue in Carrum Downs. Nillumbik Shire Council, I know, is delighted that they will receive up to \$2 million to construct that new pedestrian bridge across Diamond Creek that will connect Diamond Creek Trail and Wattletree Road to improve access to the Eltham North dog park and men's shed. Finally, there is \$5 million in output funding, which I am sure will make Mr Hilakari happy, for traffic management action down in the Wyndham community to really optimise traffic flows and maximise safety.

But this builds on investment. It is investment of hundreds of millions of dollars to deliver hundreds of kilometres of new and upgraded active transport infrastructure and programs. My predecessor invested \$13 million to deliver 100 kilometres of new and improved cycling routes across Melbourne for that ongoing pop-up bike lane trial. That has been quite important, and I have seen some of that directly in action. Also, in 2021 we put in place laws to make it mandatory for motorists to keep at least 1 metre distance when passing on roads with a speed limit of up to 60 kilometres per hour and 1.5 metres on higher speed roads. This is so important for keeping cyclists safe on some of our busy roads. But look, of course there is always more to do, and I will continue to work with my stakeholders to improve active transport.

Michael GALEA: Thank you for that fulsome list, Minister. A few projects caught my attention in particular, especially those around the outer south-east in Carrum, Carrum Downs and Frankston, which you mentioned. Could you talk a little bit more about those projects?

Melissa HORNE: Of course, and thank you very much. In relation to that million-dollar investment down in Fletcher Road in Frankston, that operates signals near the Frankston Magistrates Court and also to the Chisholm Institute's Frankston campus. Now, having been down there – and I know you have been as well – it is so busy. I think the activation of that area with the new station has really made it a hive of activity. On top of

that, there has been some enormous investment in the beautification of the area down there as well. But the intersection at Station Street and McLeod Road in Carrum, as you can appreciate, is a really complex intersection, because you have got the railway station there and also a high volume of vehicles and pedestrians. I think the thing that we need to keep in context is that our city is growing and our regions are growing, and so on our road network, where we have got so many different competing priorities – whether it is people on bikes, people on e-scooters, people delivering goods across the network or people just doing that daily commute – coupled with more public transport services, we need to make sure that all of those intersections and those busy pinch points are working as safely and efficiently as possible. That is why that investment down at Station Street and McLeod Road in Carrum is so important. Finally, there is that \$2 million –

The CHAIR: Apologies, Minister. I am going to go to Ms Sandell.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you, Chair. Good morning, everyone. I also would like to ask about flood recovery and infrastructure. My understanding from what councils tell us is that when roads are fixed or replaced due to things like floods, really they are only given the option of a like-for-like replacement. Can you talk to us – perhaps it is for the Secretary – about whether that is the case and whether some of these flood recovery works will be for the betterment of that infrastructure to help make communities more resilient to future disasters?

Paul YOUNIS: Yes. Traditionally this has been a challenge for both local government and ourselves in the replacement of infrastructure that has been flood related. The Commonwealth disaster recovery flood funding currently is like for like, but – and we experienced this in floods 10 years ago – that does not actually upgrade the roads to the current standards that are required. That fund is jointly funded by the state and federal governments and is administered by Emergency Management Victoria. We are in discussions currently and I know Emergency Management Victoria are in discussions currently with the federal government to modify – to change – the criteria for that. It is not betterment we are after, just replacement – a contemporary replacement program. That conversation is still happening. We do understand that further conversations I think last year with the Queensland government were successful in some modifications to that program, and we are hopeful that that program will be modified to update the criteria for like for like.

Ellen SANDELL: So even though it is partly funded by the state, you have no control over the criteria?

Paul YOUNIS: It is a federally funded program across the Commonwealth, so all the states contribute to it.

Ellen SANDELL: So the criteria are solely set by the federal government?

Paul YOUNIS: They are set by the Commonwealth in relation to their disaster recovery program.

Ellen SANDELL: And would you be advocating for betterment – and by betterment I do not necessarily mean gold-plating these things, just making them so that they are more resilient to disasters in the future, given that with climate change we know we will have more disasters?

Paul YOUNIS: Yes. There are a couple of answers to that, in that, yes, it is not betterment we are after, we are just wanting to provide a contemporary replacement program.

Ellen SANDELL: Not just contemporary, but I guess resilient to future disasters.

Paul YOUNIS: Part of that also is we have been working with the Australian Road Research Board and our contemporaries in Queensland and New South Wales to do a lot of research in relation to standards, and we have upgraded our standards. We are sharing this with local government as well – because they manage nearly 130,000 kilometres of roads; we manage about 23,000 kilometres of roads in particular – to upgrade the standards, particularly using materials that are far more flood resistant and fire resistant. We have upgraded our standards to do that, so a part of that will allow us to use those types of materials. Some of these are not more expensive, but it is a different way of treating our pavements. We have been doing a lot of work in relation to that program.

Ellen SANDELL: Okay. Thank you. I appreciate that information. I also want to talk about active transport, following on from some of the conversations we had yesterday. If we look at, for example, budget paper 3, page 318, we have gone from eight cycling projects completed this year to just two as the target for next year,

and looking at pedestrian projects we have gone from four completed in 2021–22 to just two this year and then one next year – so from four to two to one. Why are those targets reducing?

Melissa HORNE: It is to do with just the cycle of the projects. We have had the pop-up bike lanes trial going in a number of different council areas, but simply this is because there were a number of cycling projects that were completed.

Ellen SANDELL: But eight is not a lot, and then only two next year and one for pedestrians seem like not very many.

Paul YOUNIS: Ms Sandell, I think it gets down to the way they report it in the budget and talking to government about changing the reporting, because what we are doing is building a lot of our cycling and active transport programs into existing projects.

Ellen SANDELL: So that is not included in those targets?

Paul YOUNIS: No, they are not included in those targets and they are not included in those numbers, because they are included in the output funding for the major projects. For example, if it is the West Gate Tunnel, all the cycling improvements are included in that.

Ellen SANDELL: So these are just standalone?

Paul YOUNIS: These are just standalone, isolated programs. That is not actually how we do a lot of our programs. We incorporate them into a much more integrated program of work. It is a much more efficient way to do it, and you get much more value out of it.

Ellen SANDELL: It sounds similar to the problem we talked about yesterday.

Paul YOUNIS: It is actually a problem with reporting, yes.

Ellen SANDELL: I guess in terms of congestion and how we want to plan for transport in our state in the future, if we look at the environment effects statement for, say, the West Gate toll road, which is not actually a tunnel in my area at all, we are just going to save 3 minutes on 2016 travel times. It is a lot of time in construction and a lot of cars being funnelled right into the inner city, which really goes against good transport planning around the world. How can we justify a project like this?

Melissa HORNE: Well, as you can appreciate, the West Gate Tunnel Project is being delivered by the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, so –

Ellen SANDELL: You will have to deal with the problems, though, of all those cars coming right into the inner city.

Melissa HORNE: Well, Ms Sandell, as you can appreciate, I live in the electorate that is directly impacted by and will benefit from the West Gate Tunnel Project. It will take thousands of trucks off my local roads. It will provide better connectivity. It has got acres of open green space being associated with it. We have been working closely with community groups to be able to deliver a neighbourhood fund. For every tree that has been removed, five are being replaced. On top of that there is, and I cannot remember the true kilometre extent of it, a world-class veloway that is also being delivered as part of this project.

Ellen SANDELL: Minister, I think there are some issues with that as well, just in terms of safety on that veloway. A lot of people will probably not use it, just in terms of the design of it. But, anyway, I will take that up with the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. I just wanted to ask, perhaps for the Secretary, a little bit more about some of the stats around bike lanes. Do we know how many kilometres of separated bike lanes currently exist in Victoria?

Paul YOUNIS: We do. I have not got that number there, but we have got data in relation to the bike lanes that are separated. We have mapped all of these across the network.

Ellen SANDELL: Is that publicly available or something you can provide on notice?

Paul YOUNIS: I am sure we can provide it. What we are doing, and a part of the congestion management program, is updating all of our data and data collection and management of those areas, so we have got that information. I have not got it on me, and I cannot recall the numbers.

Ellen SANDELL: Are you able to provide it on notice?

Paul YOUNIS: Well, I will provide you what we can in relation to the extent of the network.

Ellen SANDELL: And additional to that, how many additional kilometres of separated bike lane we expect to be delivered over the next four years, if that is possible.

Bev McARTHUR: None for Geelong. Nobody wants them.

Paul YOUNIS: Once again, that is a program that we will be rolling out, and I will give you the information.

Ellen SANDELL: I think bike riders who want to get to work alive probably do want them, Mrs McArthur.

Bev McARTHUR: They do not in Geelong.

Ellen SANDELL: Okay, so you will be able to provide what you can.

Paul YOUNIS: I will provide you what information we have in relation to all of those programs.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Sandell. The last 8 minutes will go back to Mr Hilakari.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you so much, and I appreciate you mentioning the Wyndham roads plan earlier. That is indeed something of excitement and interest to me, but I would like to talk about Smarter Roads and congestion. I will draw you to budget paper 4, page 88. Can you please outline what is being funded in phase 2 of this program?

Melissa HORNE: Sure. Thank you very much, and it was really good to go out with you earlier this year to be able to see – where was it? – Wyndham –

Mathew HILAKARI: Sneydes Road, yes.

Melissa HORNE: and just to be able to see how precisely that Smarter Roads project is working to be able to change that signalisation so that instead of people waiting two or three light cycles to go through an intersection they could have much smoother flowing traffic.

This financial year we are spending \$9.3 million on Smarter Roads stage 2. That is part of that \$14.7 million that was announced last year, and it is in addition to \$340 million which was spent on stage 1. As we have seen post COVID, more people are using our roads than ever before, and roads are working harder than they have ever before, so through that Smarter Roads phase 2 it is important to deliver that traffic management reform program. That is made up of a range of initiatives designed to create a more consistent and safety-focused approach to how traffic management activities are planned and delivered, reducing those frustrating delays and also that congestion.

It also aims to streamline processes to make it easier for traffic management companies to do business with government. So to date the traffic management reform program has strengthened operational controls for contractors working on arterial roads, centralising and digitising the permit application process. This includes things like the introduction of the temporary traffic management accreditation program. That replaces a prequalification scheme and introduces further operational controls to ensure only properly qualified and experienced companies can operate on state-managed roads. Sorry, this is pretty dry stuff, but it does make a difference. There has been centralisation of the memorandum-of-authorisation permit processing. Now what that does is it ensures consistency in the application of legislation to all memorandum-of-authorisation permits submitted to the department. And there has been the launch of the road access permits portal, replacing

previous manual application processes to have that integrated, online system, which again unblocks that bureaucracy that sits behind it.

So we will continue to develop and mature the permit application processes and systems. We will continue to strengthen safety standards for worksites and introduce a national training framework for traffic management workers. They are some of the things that we have got going on at the moment.

Mathew HILAKARI: Well, it might be dry, but there were some excited engineers and technicians that we met with, and when you think about a couple of minutes saved – I know Mrs Sandell was mentioning just a couple of minutes – but when that is off across thousands and thousands of traffic movements, that collectively is a huge amount of time saved. You mentioned phase 1 and \$340 million. Could you go into some of what that program has delivered?

Melissa HORNE: Sure, and look, the data speaks for itself. What we have seen with Smarter Roads is reduced delay times at traffic signals by 5 per cent to 15 per cent during peak periods. This is sweating the asset harder. We have increased the number of incidents that have been attended on the arterial road network by more than 10 times; that helps clear any blockages that have been on our network faster. We have created those more reliable travel conditions as well as enabled faster and more effective identification and response to planned and unplanned disruptions, and in some cases those delays have halved. As I mentioned at the start of your question, Mr Hilakari, we have improved traffic flow at busy crossings and reduced unnecessary wait times for drivers. Secretary, you have got some additional details?

Paul YOUNIS: Yes, the Smarter Roads program, Minister, is really I think one of the most important programs that we have run across metropolitan. We have got nearly 4900 traffic lights across the network, and the Smarter Roads program is broken up into a number of different parts. There is our incident response, and we have increased our incident response – I cannot recall the numbers – by hundreds of incidents responded to. Unfortunately there are a lot of breakdowns on our network that are uncontrolled breakdowns, and getting onto them straightaway and being able to get them cleared makes a huge difference to the entire traffic flow network. With the extra 700 cameras we have got across the network, we are able to address those and see them coming. We used to rely on someone ringing us up and saying, ‘By the way, there is a problem here.’ We can now see them in real time, and we are out there as the problem is occurring and before it creates a problem 5 kilometres down the track and across every road – a really important part of the program.

The other important part, and the tech heads around the world will love this, is we are getting data collection from different sources all over the world. So we are not only relying on the data that we collect from our existing wi-fi networks, our traffic light networks, our bluetooth rollout of new systems, we are also securing data from car companies, many car companies – and there is a whole program around this – that collect data for maintenance of cars. They know when someone, you know, puts their wipers on. We are collecting all of that data. We are now able to provide across a lot of areas in Victoria a real-time understanding of real-time movements of traffic – and when I say real-time, it is within 1 or 2 seconds of exactly what is happening across our network. That is fed into a whole program of management of the network, and where there are alerts and when things change differently that is alerted to our traffic management centre. So we have had that complete upgrade of our traffic management centre, which responds to that. And it is types of things like if a lane slows down, we can know that a lane slows down and we do some artificial intelligence work to say, ‘Well, if that lane slows down, there’s going to be a problem back on the other part of the West Gate somewhere,’ and we can pre-empt a lot of those works. So this is a really exciting program. There is a lot to be done on it –

Nicholas McGOWAN: You re excited, as the engineers were – I can tell. Are you an engineer by trade?

Melissa HORNE: It is quite extraordinary, though, and maybe we should arrange for people to come out and actually see that, because you can see all the screens, and there are people working in the operational centre that can say, you know, ‘Here’s how we unblock the network.’

Mathew HILAKARI: And it means you can pick up your kids on time and get to work on time. That is the real outcome.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Nicholas McGOWAN: On a point of order.

The CHAIR: Mr McGowan.

Nicholas McGOWAN: Minister, can I thank you very much for your time here today. I know that road safety is something that you are passionate about and interested in, as am I. In my electorate of Warrandyte just recently, obviously given the recent events – and I could not let this session pass without mentioning it, obviously, with your indulgence, and your indulgence too, Chair – a number of sports clubs have been affected by that tragedy in the Hunter Valley. We had recently the Exford Primary School bus incident as well. So I for one am hopeful that out of today perhaps you might be able to share with us that we are looking at seatbelts in school buses. But that is not what I have taken the point of order for. I actually thought it would be an appropriate time, with your indulgence – and yours, Chair, and the committee's – that we just have a moment's silence because a number of lives, 143 this year, have been lost on the roads, but of course particularly in the Hunter Valley, and it affects the people of Warrandyte in my electorate as well. I would appreciate that, to say the least.

Melissa HORNE: Mr McGowan, having grown up in the Hunter Valley, can I say I share your pain, and my sincere condolences to your community.

Nicholas McGOWAN: Thank you.

The CHAIR: We will just have 1 minute's silence.

Thank you, Deputy Chair. That was a very important point of order indeed.

Minister, department officials, thank you very much for appearing before the committee this morning. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses are required within five working days of the committee's request.

The committee is now going to take a very short break before beginning its consideration of the portfolio of ports and freight – just a couple of minutes, please, before we kick off again.

I declare this hearing adjourned.

Witnesses withdrew.