

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 6 - TRANSPORT AND CUSTOMER SERVICE

Tuesday 26 October 2021

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

REGIONAL TRANSPORT AND ROADS

CORRECTED

The Committee met at 9:30

MEMBERS

Ms Abigail Boyd (Chair)

The Hon. Mark Banasiak (Deputy Chair)

The Hon. Wes Fang

The Hon. Scott Farlow

Mr Justin Field

The Hon. John Graham

The Hon. Mick Veitch

MEMBER VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

The Hon. Peter Poulos

PRESENT

The Hon. Paul Toole, *Deputy Premier, Minister for Regional New South Wales, and Minister for Regional Transport and Roads*

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

Corrections should be marked on a photocopy of the proof and forwarded to:

**Budget Estimates secretariat
Room 812
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000**

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: Good morning. Welcome to the public hearing for the inquiry into budget estimates 2021-2022. Before I commence I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people, who are the traditional custodians of the land on which we are seated today. I would also like to pay respects to the Elders past, present and emerging of the Eora nation and extend my respect to other Aboriginals present and to those who may be watching online today. I welcome the Deputy Premier, Mr Paul Toole, and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of Regional Transport and Roads.

Before we commence I would like to make some brief comments about the procedures for today's hearing. Today's proceedings are being broadcast live from Parliament's website, and a transcript will be placed on the Committee's website once it becomes available. In accordance with the broadcasting guidelines, media representatives are reminded that they must take responsibility for what they publish about the Committee's proceedings. All witnesses in budget estimates have a right to procedural fairness according to the procedural fairness resolution adopted by the House in 2018. There may be some questions that a witness could only answer if they had more time or with certain documents to hand. In those circumstances, witnesses are advised that they can take a question on notice and provide an answer within 21 days. If witnesses wish to hand up documents, they should do so through the Committee staff.

Deputy Premier, I remind you and the officers accompanying you that you are free to pass notes and refer directly to your advisers seated at the table behind you. Referring to the audibility of the hearing, we have witnesses in person and via videoconference so I ask Committee members to clearly identify who questions are directed to, and I ask everyone appearing remotely to please state their name when they begin speaking. Could everyone please mute their microphones when they are not speaking. Finally, could everyone please turn their mobile phones to silent for the duration of the hearing. All witnesses will be sworn prior to giving evidence. Deputy Premier Toole, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn as you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament.

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ROBERT SHARP, Secretary, Transport for NSW, sworn and examined

DALE MERRICK, Chief Executive, NSW Trainlink, Transport for NSW, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

PETER ALLAWAY, Acting Deputy Secretary, Regional and Outer Metropolitan, Transport for NSW, before the Committee via videoconference, sworn and examined

ANTHONY HAYES, Executive Director, Community and Place, Regional and Outer Metropolitan, Transport for NSW, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

GILLIAN GERAGHTY, Head of Regional Project Delivery, Infrastructure and Place, Transport for NSW, before the Committee via videoconference, sworn and examined

BERNARD CARLON, Executive Director, Centres for Road Safety and Maritime Safety, Transport for NSW, before the Committee via videoconference, sworn and examined

BARBARA WISE, Acting Chief Customer Officer, Regional and Outer Metropolitan, and Executive Director, Transport Partnerships, Regional and Outer Metropolitan, Transport for NSW, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Thank you all for your time today. Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.30 a.m. to 12.45 p.m. with the Minister and departmental witnesses, with questions from Opposition and crossbench members only. If required, an additional 15 minutes is allocated at the end of the session for Government questions. As there is no provision for any witness to make an opening statement before the Committee commences questioning, we will begin with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Deputy Premier, welcome to the hearing. This is the first chance I have had to congratulate you publicly on your elevation to the leadership of The Nationals and subsequently to the Deputy Premier's role.

The Hon. WES FANG: Hear, hear!

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I am certain you will pursue that with enthusiasm and relish. Minister, can I ask you about Dunns Creek Road? It was an commitment made by The Nationals at the last State election. Where is the land purchase up to with that particular road?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: In relation to that specific road, I will have to ask if we can find it before the end of the hearing.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Absolutely.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Obviously, as a government, we are committed to delivering on all of our election commitments, whether that is road projects, bridge projects. That is something that we are very mindful of. I can tell you, as part of my team, we have regular meetings in relation to election commitments to understand the status and the position of those projects and where they are to be delivered. As the Minister responsible for regional transport and roads, I can tell you we have a very vigorous and rigorous process to ensure that they are being delivered.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That team you are talking about—that election promises team—is that within your office or is it within the department?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It is in my office but it is also in the department. Obviously, we are requiring certain steps to be undertaken for any road project. Sometimes with road projects as well there have been no councils that have had to do environmental studies. Obviously geotechnical work has had to be completed. There have been delays with some projects due to the fact that we have had bushfires, floods and all of that as well, so all of that is taken into consideration for these projects, but—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So you will take Dunns Creek Road on notice and hopefully get back to us at the end.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Beyond the land purchases, essentially if you could take that on notice, could we get a status report of where the construction of that road is up to?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes, we can follow that up and provide something at the end. If not, it will be on notice.

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The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I would like to talk about Brown Mountain. It is probably a road that you and I have travelled a bit going down south because it is how we get down there, and we probably will be travelling it a fair bit in coming months, I dare say. Brown Mountain is a productivity bottleneck. What are the plans to upgrade the Snowy Mountains Highway down Brown Mountain, and up Brown mountain too, I suppose?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I would have to take that on notice to find out exactly the status, but we have a number of road projects across the State, Mr Veitch, as you are very much aware. I think we have the biggest expenditure in roads that we have ever seen. Again this year in our record budget we have \$9 billion. That is the biggest expenditure we have ever had in Regional Roads and Transport.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Does Brown Mountain figure in that?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I will have to take it on notice as to where that particular road is up to in relation to your question, but you are always—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, could you attempt to get us that answer by the end of the session? Obviously, these are pretty important roads to their community.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: If we can; that is alright. Brown Mountain was one of those roads that actually has a lot of work needed in relation to slope stabilisation, so it is one of those particular roads that is a key focus, but it also has a lot of work that is required because of some of those landslips that we have seen on various occasions as well.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Part of the Brown Mountain issue is that whenever there is a slip or it is closed for whatever, the alternate routes have weight limits on them. As you would be well aware, that becomes quite problematic for freight movement up and down that Snowy Mountains route. Is there any work being scheduled to address the weight restrictions on the alternate routes?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I do not want to put any road in particular isolation, but I think what we have actually found with natural disasters is we are looking at trying to create and build resilience into our road network. Not only is that about trying to make sure that there are safe routes getting in and out of certain communities but we actually have probably seen the most extensive damage to our road network with floods. I mean if we go back to the start of the year when we saw those floods, I do not think anybody could have actually foreseen the amount of work that is required to bring those roads back to pre-flood condition. Not only have we had landslips but in some cases as well we have had the roads themselves that have actually failed underneath, so in some areas we have got the road—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Hopefully, some of those roads are improved above pre-flood conditions.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes, in some areas. As the Minister as well responsible for the importance of moving freight across the State, this is something that over the last couple of years with the pandemic—movement of freight has been a critical issue for all of us in Transport, to make sure that it continues to move. Whether it is that particular road or other roads, it is something we are very mindful of.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: But particularly the alternate routes when it is closed, because any construction work on that Brown Mountain is going to take a while.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So those alternate routes, if there are weight restrictions, become problematic for the movement of our freight. If you can take that on notice, that would be good.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I think Mr Graham is about to bowl into some other stuff.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister and Deputy Premier, thanks for joining us. I would like to ask you, firstly, about probably the signature promise that would have helped some of these communities—communities relying on the roads that my colleague has asked about—and that is the roads reclassification: 15,000 kilometres transferred from councils to the State. We have had the first round, the priority round, of that project, and a tiny number of roads were transferred or reclassified. Just five councils out of 128 had roads dealt with. Maybe 400 kilometres of council roads were dealt with. When will the first transfer take place, actually become legal? When will that occur?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It is a good question. I just want to point out that you are very much aware that this is a very complex process. There was an independent panel that was actually established to go and engage with councils, and I think they have done a pretty good job in going out there and engaging with about 91 per cent of council through that process. No-one would have predicted that they would have to deal with it during a period

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of COVID, so their online consultation has been extensive through this process. You are right. We have actually said that there are two rounds for this particular project. There would be a priority round and then there is a main round. So the priority round is where the independent panel recommended—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am aware of the process. The question is: When will the first road actually be transferred? When will it change hands? What is that date? That is what the Committee wants to know.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We are actually doing work now, and it could take a number of months for it to occur, Mr Graham, as well because, as I have said before, by the time it gets legislated and goes through the process it could take 12 months for that to still occur. But this is actually fixing—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I ask because the government response sets out the steps, and they are extensive, before this ever takes place. Could that be 12 months or could it be longer?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It could be 12 months because at the end of the day some of these roads as well— we are not stopping the work that is on them. Some of these roads, like Armidale, Kempsey, for example, they have had roadworks where they have got natural disaster funding. They have also got funding through our Fixing Local Roads. Transport for NSW have been assisting these councils in still bringing these roads up to a better standard for those communities, and they will continue to do that work. So I do not want the community to actually think that because the road is going to be transferred, the work is still not going to be occurring on some of those roads. We also know that with the priority—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, but there is a desperate need in the community for these roads.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I might ask you about a particular road.

The Hon. WES FANG: I was listening intently to the Minister's answer. I note that it has happened on a couple of occasions now. He is trying to provide a very detailed answer to what is a detailed question, and he keeps being interrupted. I ask that he be permitted to finish his answer in totality before the next question is asked.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: He is a grown-up; he can handle it.

The CHAIR: I am sure that Mr Graham will now pay more attention to that so we can allow the witnesses to answer the question.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I might ask you about a particular road, Minister. As I have said, a tiny number of roads were reclassified or transferred. One of those roads is O'Connell Street in Parramatta. What are you doing reclassifying roads in the city when this was a promise about the bush? This is the one hope bush communities have of getting roads dealt with, and your Government is instead dealing with city roads. What is going on?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We are actually looking at the classification of roads right across the State as well as that regional road reclassification process. We indicated at the last election we would be looking at taking up to 15,000 kilometres of roads.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, from the regions. This is news to—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes, that is correct. I have to say, Mr Graham, it is a bit rich coming from you when it was the Labor Government that dumped thousands of kilometres of roads onto councils overnight, and that has costed councils—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you for the history lesson.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: —millions of dollars with no support.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I will ask you about another road: Schofields Road and South Street—

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr PAUL TOOLE: What we are doing is providing support to those councils to be able to improve those roads in those areas, and that is—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, I am asking you about Schofields Road and South Street in Blacktown. As part of your 15,000-kilometre signature promise to the bush, why are you dealing with these roads in Blacktown? Why are they being transferred?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: No, Mr Graham, I will say to you—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, Minister.

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Mr PAUL TOOLE: No, sorry. What you did last time you were in government, you dumped—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am asking about your program now.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Point of order: Again, following on from the point of order taken by the Hon. Wes Fang, the Minister is trying to provide an answer to Mr Graham, and Mr Graham is constantly running over the top of him so the Minister cannot answer the question.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: To the point of order: Budget estimates have a tendency to be robust. The Minister is a grown-up. He is pretty capable of handling this himself. I do not think he needs any intervention from the gallery over here, so I suggest we keep going.

The Hon. WES FANG: To the point of order: To the point of the Hon. Mick Veitch, certainly we are not providing any level of cover. The Minister is very capable and very much across his brief. That is precisely why he is providing the detailed answers that he is able to provide. Mr Graham obviously does not like the answers, which is why he is talking over the top of him. I would ask him to stop and that you call him to order, Chair.

The CHAIR: I have heard enough. There have been plenty of compliments for you, Minister, in the course of that debate on the point of order.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Keep it up.

The CHAIR: My main concern is in relation to Hansard being able to record proceedings. If we could try not to speak over each other, that would be very much appreciated.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you, Chair. I might ask you about Edmondson Avenue in Liverpool. I will not be complimenting you for transferring that road when communities in the bush need help. Why are you dealing with Liverpool, Blacktown, Parramatta? This was a promise about the bush—15,000 kilometres. They have got almost nothing, but you are dealing with city councils. What is going on?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: This is about reclassification of roads right across the State. When we are looking at reclassification, we are not just going to give the panel an opportunity to look at reclassification just in regional areas. This is an opportunity to do a big piece of work on the road network right across the State. Our commitment still remains there of up to 15,000 kilometres of regional roads. The fact that some of those additional roads were put forward by the panel is part of that regional road reclassification work. What is important here is that we have actually started the process. We have identified through the panel—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But it is not going very well.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: No, sorry, the panel identify—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, this was a key promise. You must be the first leader of the National Party who is fighting for roads in the city. John Barilaro never would have accepted this. I accept that these were recommended to you. Why didn't you say no?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Because we have accepted the work that was put forward by the panel. The 391 kilometres of road transfers was put forward by the panel, and we have accepted the priority roads of that panel.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But, Minister, you did reject, to be fair to you—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: And you also know, and you are ignoring the fact—

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am trying to compliment you now, Minister.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: You know the fact that there is a main round where councils will have a further opportunity to now put forward their full list of roads for reclassification.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, you did reject some of these roads, though. You did reject three roads in Liverpool, but you have let through Liverpool, Parramatta, Blacktown.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I will put it this way. You come and say I rejected them. I actually accepted the recommendations in full that were put forward by the independent panel. I accepted the work that was put forward by the panel. If I had changed that, you would be sitting here accusing me of actually then tampering with the process.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Well, you did change it. The Government process did—

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Mr PAUL TOOLE: What I did was—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, I have to stop you there.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: What I did was actually—sorry.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The Government process did actually reject some of these roads. Do you understand that?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: There is a—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Three roads in Liverpool were rejected. You agree with that, do you not?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Some of the roads also put forward by the independent panel, we are also saying that some of those roads should be considered as part of the main round. That is exactly what has been put forward through the panel, and as part of the main round they will be considered in that process.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Let me ask you specifically about Dungog—big promises to Dungog Shire Council.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I am glad you mentioned Dungog.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Big promises to Dungog Shire Council. They have not a single State road. They need help. Why have you prioritised Parramatta, Blacktown and Liverpool ahead of Dungog—the things that the department and the panel have recommended to you—ahead of a bush community that needs help? Why did Parramatta, Blacktown and Liverpool come first?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes, and I have met with the Dungog council and I have met with the Dungog mayor. I tell you, it is the hypocrisy of you guys that actually took away that road from that community. You actually made a decision to dump the maintenance costs back onto that council with absolutely no support. What we as a Government have done, we have provided to Dungog Shire Council, just in the last 12 months, almost \$22 million in roads and bridges.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: They are nowhere on this list, Minister. They are nowhere on this list.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We have also announced, only a few months ago, another \$25 million in roads. We as a Government are supporting councils at a level that they were never supported previously. You can come in here and you can actually accuse us of putting certain roads in and out, but you were the actual guys that made the issue and the problem there on these roads.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, I just want to know why you are the first leader of the National Party fighting for roads in the city. I have never seen it before.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Well, I can tell you there are communities like Armidale and Kempsey—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I cannot imagine John Barilaro doing it.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: —and Orange that are actually pleased with the decision that has been made.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The department is laughing at the fact that you have ticked off on these roads. These were already in the mix.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: No. Everyone tells me that Labor completely—

The CHAIR: Order! Hansard cannot possibly be recording what is going on here. If we could avoid talking over each other, if we could avoid the interjections, that would be very useful. Thank you.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, the original timetable for this had the full round opening in March 2021, closing in May 2021 and reporting in July 2021. It is now dramatically late. When will this actually be completed?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Look, as you are aware, we have had a little thing called COVID that has actually made it a little bit difficult—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: When will it be completed?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: —for the independent panel. As I said at the very onset, I think they have done a pretty good job in actually engaging with councils. I know that their preferred option would have been dealing with it with councils face to face. I think when you have a look at the opportunity where they have been doing online work with those councils and providing their feedback through that process, yes, it has been a little bit longer. But I also make the point here, until we actually—

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The Hon. MICK VEITCH: We just want the date, Minister, this week.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: So I make the point, until we actually knew some of the roads, we also then had to put a budgetary bid in through our processes as well. What is important here is the fact that we have also—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Any interest to declare?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Also, through the Government, we have \$250 million to support the changing of these roads. But that will also be \$250 million that will assist with those costs in actually bringing those roads up to a standard and ongoing maintenance that is required in those areas.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: We just want to know the date of the panel.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: So not only have we reclassified the roads, but we have also got significant investment to actually go along with the process.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Well, that funding is interesting. Last time you were in front of us, Minister, I helped you out with one of my GIPAs relating to the block and REPAIR grant, which apparently had been sitting in the department for about 12 months. The day it came to me was the day it went to you as well. Have you now had a chance to read that report, Minister?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I have. It does—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Are you able to provide a guarantee to the councils that they are not going to lose funding as a result of that report?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It is not in line with the Government's position and, therefore, no action will be taken in relation to that report that you and I have both seen.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Okay. Minister, you will have to remind me, were you the catalyst for the generation of that report or was that created internally within the department?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It was created internally. It was not something that I was aware of until it was raised very late. It is something that I have looked at, it is something the department has briefed me on, and obviously, as I said, it does not fit in line with the Government's position and it is something that we are not pursuing.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Have you made it clear to the department that it is not optimal for the Minister for Regional Transport and Roads to find out at a budget estimates hearing about a report that the shadow Minister is hanging onto?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Absolutely.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Is that embarrassing?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Look, you know, there are a lot of reports and it was done before my time as well. So I do make the point that it is something that the department very clearly understood, from my point of view, that I was—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It would have been nice to know.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: —disappointed but also the fact that it is not in line with what I want to do as the Minister for Regional Transport and Roads, and therefore it is something that is not going to be pursued.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: But you can guarantee that the councils are not going to be worse off as a result of that block and—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Councils will not be worse off, Mr Veitch. Councils are way better off. I mean, when I travel to every council across the State, what they tell me is, "Thank goodness for the investment that we are seeing. We have never seen so much money going into roads and bridges across the State." I have got councils that are actually struggling to be able to deliver the projects where they have received funding. I think that is actually a good thing to happen. It is supporting council workers, it is supporting the jobs in those local areas—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Those council workers are not going to lose their jobs, are they?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: —it is supporting contractors and subcontractors.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You can guarantee that those council workers and road crews, right across the State, are not going to be losing their jobs?

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Mr PAUL TOOLE: They continue with the jobs. Those road maintenance council contracts [RMCC], those grants, are critical for workforces in our regional communities. I have always put a focus on jobs in the regions. Even through the previous discussion on road reclassification, one of the things was always about having a high focus on regional jobs.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, the Fixing Country Roads program, you were talking about freight. We were discussing Brown Mountain. Eighty million dollars was transferred out of that program to Restart NSW, as I understand it. Why did you allow that to occur?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It is money that actually we will have back and we will be going out for a future round for Fixing Country Roads. That \$80 million—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So an internal loan, essentially?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Internally, absolutely. We will still be honouring that commitment of the \$547 million, which is part of the Fixing Country Roads program. We all know how critical that is. We know how important it is for that last mile and that first mile, the importance about moving freight. In some cases, it has been a great program. But we also know that, looking at the capacity of councils, we have got to be very mindful and very careful that they have got the ability to do a lot of the work right now. So it is about ensuring that—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Sorry, just to clarify. It sounds like there is going to be another round of the Fixing Country Roads which that \$80 million will go to. Is that correct?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Absolutely. That is right. We are not going to not have the \$80 million used. The \$80 million will be there for a future round and the opportunity will be again there for councils to apply for that particular funding, or industry as well, as part of it.

The CHAIR: Thank you. The Opposition time has expired. Mr Banasiak?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Thank you. Welcome, Deputy Premier. Can I just go to road funding for some of these roads that have been damaged by floods, particularly to Narrabri Shire Council for Mellburra Road. It has been 18 months since that first flood in February 2020 and no real work has been carried out. The mayor was on the radio in June 2021 and he stated that there were 50 claims that had been processed out of a total of 360 claims and the work could not be done on those 50 processed claims until all of the 360 claims were completed. Is that correct, that they have to wait until all of the total claims are processed before they can start work on the ones that have been?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I don't know the specific case in relation to the claims that they are putting forward. But I do make this point. Transport for NSW will actually—sometimes it has to be under natural disaster funding and there is a process there that councils, Transport, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services has to escalate that up to the Federal Government. So sometimes there is a delay in relation to that natural disaster funding. What we try and do though is ensure that we get our team from Transport on the ground very early to try and assist those councils, understanding that in some cases that funding is going to be forthcoming.

Sometimes we will actually internally give funding to those councils to make those roads usable for both residents and for freight movements as well. It is sometimes a process. I am not sure in relation to where their particular application was held up. But, importantly, it was a pretty big task when we saw those floods. Yes, look, we want to support councils in actually getting those roads back up and running again. But, in some cases, it is an extensive amount of work and sometimes when you look at the amount of road work that has been damaged, it is going to take quite a time for some of those councils that have multiple roads as well. I could probably get Mr Hayes—I know he has done a lot of work in relation to support for councils—to maybe add a little more there as well.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Sure. Mr Hayes?

Mr HAYES: The only thing we should add to the point made by the Deputy Premier is that recently, within the past few months, we set up a task force to look at better working with all of the local councils to distribute the natural disaster funding. We acknowledge that there were some roadblocks early on in the process and what we are trying to do now is work much more closely with councils to get the money out the door to make sure that we are in fact providing that support wherever we possibly can and as quickly as we possibly can.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Perhaps on notice, Deputy Premier, would you be able to give us an update about the 400 and 360 claims? Where are they up to with that?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Which council was it again?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Narrabri Shire Council.

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Mr PAUL TOOLE: Can I just say too, do not ever wait for estimates. Come and see us if you ever need us well beforehand. The door is open; you can always come and see us as well.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Will do. You spoke about the complicated process of national disaster funding. Would that have held up the council in submitting the claim? Because you had the floods in February. They did not actually submit the claim until nine months on. Obviously there is some extensive work they had to do taking photos, et cetera. Is that an average time for submitting a claim? It seems a fairly long period to submit a claim. I would hope that Transport for NSW processes are not that complicated.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I would say that, for a lot of councils that I meet and have a look at when there are natural disasters, that does seem like a very extensive period and certainly in my experience it does not normally take a nine-month period for applications to be put forward. Again, whether it is the length of the road network—but I would have thought that they would have had the opportunity to put forward applications even in different stages for various roads before that nine-month period was up. But, again, we are happy to help councils through this process. We know that some councils find it overwhelming, when there are natural disasters, to be able to deal with the situation that is in front of them. What we will do is try to assist those councils to get their applications in and assist them to get the road up and running as quickly as possible.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: The mayor on the radio insinuated that having Resilience NSW as part of the process over complicated it. Do you have any comment on that? Is that the first time you have heard such a critique?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We work with Resilience NSW as well. That is probably an important question but it is probably not really appropriate for this portfolio today. But what I want to do is make sure that we have processes in place to be able to assist councils as they put forward their applications. I think we all understand that when a natural disaster occurs some councils are not prepared; they are caught on the back foot. So what we want to do is to be able to assist them to provide the necessary measures to reopen those roads as quickly as possible. The communities rely on it. There are residents that are stranded and there are council operations that potentially cannot occur within those areas.

It is also about prioritising the roads that have been damaged and which ones need to be opened as a first priority compared to those that may have to wait a little bit longer. I know we would all like the road network opened up straight away but unfortunately the damage that we saw with some of those roads was just enormous. When I travelled it—and I am sure you have as well—in some of those areas it was incredible just to see how much road was taken away in some cases and even in those landslides. Sometimes people think that it is only getting a couple of bulldozers in there and cleaning up the mess but just the slope stabilisation work that is required, and having to make sure that there are no trees that are creating a risk to public safety, also includes a lot of complexities in relation to that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: In the extensive work that has to be done, does Transport for NSW keep a record or keep a track of where each of those projects is up to, so there is a bit of oversight? You do not just throw the money out and say, "Go for life." There are some measurements?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: There are—and I will get Mr Hayes to answer in a moment—transparency measures if there is funding that is given by Transport. Sometimes it might even be support upfront and then we will get the money when it comes back through as national disaster funding, so it is about trying to ensure that those roads open up quicker in some of those cases. Obviously, yes, there has to be transparency. We need to make sure that taxpayers' funds at the end of the day are spent in a responsible manner.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Mr Hayes, do you want to add anything?

Mr HAYES: Yes, that is exactly right. The paperwork required by Resilience NSW is very formal. It is quite strict but that is, of course, to protect taxpayer funds to make sure that the money is spent appropriately. What we have done is we have put on an additional five fixed-term positions to help councils, to work with councils and to liaise with Resilience NSW to make sure that we are getting the paperwork done more efficiently and we are getting it through the process as quickly as possible.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: That is probably a good point to make. I might point out as well—we put five targeted positions on across the State to assist councils because we knew that they were not sure where they had to go. So we had an engagement officer that has been set up as part of Resilience. They are the go-to person for councils to be able to work out the processes that they have to go through in putting forward funding applications.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Do those five people have set geographical boundaries?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: They do, yes. Each of the councils are aware of who those individuals are. We picked that up from when I did a tour up north to talk to a number of councils that were just struggling with the

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process. So what we did was had an individual person that they could be assigned to that could assist them in the process.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I might just go to a particular road. I note that some funding was announced for the Yarrie Lake Pilliga Road. This is a road near the Pilliga Wee Waa Road where there are four floodways which, before Pilliga, have been destroyed. I might get the secretariat to give you some photos. This just came to me yesterday so I have not had a chance to pop into your office. But I thought the pictures might help paint the picture a little bit. I have had representations from people that the four floodways before Pilliga have all been destroyed. Cars have become airborne, there are two-feet deep potholes and the school bus has to lift to maximum height setting and still bottoms out or scrapes. This is a road that sometimes is closed for the school bus for up to six weeks and then relies on parents with four-wheel drives to go in and out. Obviously, it is a productivity issue as well. Perhaps on notice, could you take a look at what is happening with that road and whether there is any intent to fund or fix—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Go for a drive on it, Mr Toole.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Hairy legs like that, mate. Someone's photos—I don't know.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: They're not my legs. I recommend you drive slowly, though.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We will take it on notice and come back to you, if we do not have it at the end.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Yes, sure.

The CHAIR: I do not think my questions will be as entertaining, unfortunately, and there are no pictures. I just wanted to ask you, Minister, about the new proposed rail trail for New England in, I understand, the Glen Innes area. I just wanted to ask you when we should expect to see legislation being proposed for that and whether there has been consultation on that with local councils?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: The only part I have under rail trails is the closing of lines. It sits in my new portfolio as the Deputy Premier and Minister for Regional New South Wales. Rail trails sit under that particular portfolio. That consultation would all need to take place. My responsibility as the Minister is the closing of the rail lines but I would have to take it on notice to see what is in the pipeline in relation to that particular project.

The CHAIR: Thank you, that would be very useful. To something completely different, I am aware of a number of people across different parts of the State expressing concern that a lot of the community and point-to-point transport services have declined during COVID. Do you have any data as to what that decline looks like and any plans to make sure that people are able to get from A to B by community transport or by taxis or some other method?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I might ask Ms Wise in a moment to add some additional information here as well, but there is no doubt that the point to point industry for us during COVID was still critical to operate. What we had done was put a lot of measures in place to ensure that the community had confidence in using these services. Whether it was community transport, whether it was taxis or whether it was looking at innovative ways around courtesy buses providing transport in our communities, we wanted to make sure that those services continued. We also had vehicle sanitisation bays that were established around the State to put in additional cleaning. I know that a lot of our operators did that as well. But we did see pretty good use of those services even during COVID because, you have got to remember, there are a lot of folk in our communities in regional areas that still rely on those services. They still rely on those services for medical appointments, to go shopping, to actually—I suppose we had less social outings but, where there were those events that occurred in those communities, it was something that we wanted to make sure that we supported the industry with.

Even probably six weeks ago, again I actually met with community transport to talk to them about how they were going and what things they may need for support. We know that some of it is under the Federal Government support that they receive. But they are a critical service in our communities and, yes, we may have seen a decline, but on top of that as well we also saw that they were a critical service to continue to operate. I do not know if Ms Wise has any data or information in relation to where they may be at that point in time. But we do know that, with people trying to move around and mobility increasing, there is an increase in both of those services at this point in time and it is continuing to grow.

The CHAIR: Perhaps I could ask Ms Wise. What I am trying to get a handle on is the numbers of particularly taxi drivers in rural areas who found that they were unable to continue operating during the COVID lockdown and making sure that they are now able to reinstate their services. Do you have visibility over that?

Ms WISE: Thank you very much for your question. I am Barbara Wise, Executive Director, Transport Partnerships, Transport for NSW. I can speak more closely to community transport. In saying that, community

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transport providers do actually partner with taxi businesses in pretty much all locations around the State. Between 10 per cent and 20 per cent of all community transport work is actually contracted out to taxis via vouchers or other arrangements. In terms of community transport, the number of trips declined by about 40 per cent over the last year compared to pre-pandemic numbers, obviously before people were vaccinated. Community transport does tend to serve clientele that are in vulnerable demographics by age or Aboriginality or other things, so their demand for community transport certainly decreased as people were not moving and, as the Minister indicated, were less social and so forth. But certainly during the periods of stay at home essential trips were taking place.

The other thing that the data does not show is that community transport providers were doing things like doing the shopping for their clients and delivering it to their homes. So the assistance was still very much occurring; it was just not occurring in the manner that was being provided previously. The thing I would say about assistance due to COVID—the Minister mentioned sanitisation stations. We also provided access to supplies of personal protective equipment [PPE] and masks, reimbursed cleaning costs for community transport and a number of other things. We have had a few sessions of support and advice with the providers around what they can do for drivers and their communities. Even other things that the community transport providers have been doing include assisting people, particularly our vulnerable community members like Aboriginal community members, to get vaccinated, particularly over the course of the last couple of months. I have heard lots of stories around that kind of arrangement.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I might follow up on that again a bit later.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Just before I hand over to Mr Graham—as we have all been learning this week, disclosure is very important and the member asked some questions about rail trails. I should disclose I am a patron of Rail Trails for NSW. I will just put that on the record.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Congratulations.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, it is budget estimates. I might ask you a question about the budget.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: That is novel.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The cluster budget for Transport this year is \$35.3 billion. Can you give us a division of that for public transport and for road-related expenses?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Are you talking about the whole cluster?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The whole cluster, yes.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I might have to ask Mr Sharp if he has that there. I know it is \$35 billion for the whole cluster but it is \$9 billion in our space for roads and transport in regional areas. I might ask Mr Sharp if he has that information in front of him.

Mr SHARP: I will have to take that on notice in terms of the breakdown for roads specifically. Do you want that for regional?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am happy for you to take it on notice. Could you give us the breakdown for public transport and for road-related expenditure of the cluster budget? Minister, I think you have answered another question that I had. What you have just given us is the regional breakdown of that cluster budget—that \$9 billion figure that you just referred to?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Correct.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That \$9 billion is the regional breakdown?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Regional roads and transport, yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I presume that is regional areas as defined by the Restart NSW Fund Act—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Correct.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —which is generally the division. Minister, that is just 25 per cent of the money spent on Transport. As a National Party leader, as the regional transport Minister, why is it not higher? Are you embarrassed that it is just 25 per cent? Again, John Barilaro has made a hero of himself in the bush fighting for a third of all the funding. Why is this just 25 per cent? Why have you accepted that?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I tell you what, I am pretty pleased when it is a record investment in regional roads and transport. This is the highest investment that we have ever seen in regional roads and transport. It is something

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you guys could just dream of. You were never even close to actually delivering this amount of money into the regions. When I am talking about \$9 billion—last year it was around \$8 billion and what we are seeing here is an increase in the funding for our regions. This is going into roads, bridges, public transport and our services in our communities. This is investment for road projects that we are delivering. These are State highways. These are local roads. These are local bridges—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think you have made your point, Minister. But you accept that it is just 25 per cent of that cluster budget?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Well, it depends on the profile as well because sometimes it will fluctuate with the projects that we have got. Sometimes we have big projects in the pipeline—as to how they are being scaled over the coming years as well. And some of those projects will scale up with the investment that is required in future years.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I accept that point, Minister. On notice, could you give us the profile over each year of the forward estimates of that proportion of rural expenditure as a proportion of the cluster budget expenditure?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Sure. We can do that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I might turn to the issue about mobile speed cameras, which has received some attention in the media and the Parliament. This is the issue where one of two contractors who commenced as the number of mobile speed camera enforcement hours jumped up to 21,000 from 1 July this year—one of those contractors, it turns out, had few cars and few cameras but they had employed Troy Grant and they have struggled to deliver the hours they were contracted for to the State. When did you become aware of this issue? Were you briefed? When were you briefed?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I was made aware of it after it had already occurred. I have to say, I was quite disappointed that I did not actually find out earlier. In the southern part of the State, the speed cameras were not in operation. I know that, in relation to that particular point, I was quite disappointed when I had actually heard that had not been occurring.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: When did you hear that in the end?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I cannot recall. Several months ago now—a couple of months ago it might have been.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Perhaps you could take a more specific date on notice.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes. I will take it on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: When this was raised at budget estimates, departmental officials called this "rotating enforcement". They said this was part of the "anywhere, anytime" detection process. They called it a random allocation of mobile speed cameras across the State. Do you agree with me that that is wrong? When we have seen speed camera fines drop to zero in Queanbeyan or Wagga or Bega or almost zero on the Princes Highway, this is not rotating enforcement, is it? That initial description was wrong.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: In hindsight, upon finding out how it occurred, I would have probably initiated it very differently. But I do want to make the point that these cars are out there trying to save lives, at the end of the day. These are actually trying to get people to slow down. We know that speeding is the number one killer on our roads, and therefore I actually—in expressing my disappointment to the department, they also know that it should have been considered in a different format to ensure that an equitable spread was given, to ensure that those areas also were protected.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Given that it is crucial and this is a signature road safety program, I gather you are concerned that fines were zero in Wagga, Queanbeyan and Bega. Meanwhile in Bathurst and Lithgow, for example, they are at record highs. That is of concern to you, I take it?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes. Do you know what? I actually wish they were zero everywhere, even if there were cars there. I just wish people would actually do the right thing on our roads.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Not zero enforcement, surely. You hope that people would not speed, but you do not hope for zero enforcement. But that is what has happened.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Do you know what? I would actually hope that we would not collect one fine, at the end of the day.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Your hope has been delivered, Minister.

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Mr PAUL TOOLE: I would be happy to go to Treasury and actually say—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That has been the result of this failure.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: You mentioned other areas, but do you know what? I would rather go to Treasury and say, "I need money to actually go into additional funding for roads", or whatever, "for safety works." At the end of the day, it is about saving lives. When I hear some of those stories of people that have actually been involved in crashes, when I hear some of those stories of people that have actually been involved in incidences or where they have had family members that have been lost due to speeding on our roads, these are pretty horrific stories.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: For all those reasons, it is important to get the program back on track. I put some questions to your office so they would not come as a surprise. We are told this will be back on track.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: In the south of the State in the Acusensus contract region, how many fines were issued in each of July, August and September?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I will hand over to Mr Carlon in a moment, but I will say that the fatalities during July to September 2021 in the southern regional area of the State have been three times lower than the previous three-year average. The delay in—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But that is no reason to stop enforcing speeding, is it, Minister?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: If I could finish, the delay in the delivery in the first few months of the program has not realised any short-term negative road safety outcomes. Ninety-nine per cent of people are doing the right thing, with an average of only 1 per cent of drivers detected speeding when they pass a mobile speed camera. All other camera programs have continued to operate to protect the community from speeding drivers, and 14,462 speeding fines were issued by New South Wales police in the mobile speed camera [MSC] districts operated by Acusensus during the three-month period from July to September 2021.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, I welcome you putting that on notice. I have done you the courtesy of putting these questions to you ahead of time, so I expect them to be answered.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: And I am very happy to. I will pass to the expert, Mr Carlon, as well. He can actually elaborate a little bit further in relation to your question.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Mr Carlon, how many fines were issued in the Acusensus contract region in July, August and September?

Mr CARLON: Thank you for the question. I have a more detailed outline of what has actually been delivered, if I could read through that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I do not want a more detailed outline except on notice. I want an answer to the question I forwarded a week ago to the Minister's office.

Mr CARLON: I have the answer to that question, if I could just go through this information.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, I would like the answer to the question, please, Mr Carlon.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: He has got the answer; he just said that.

Mr CARLON: I would just like to clarify, as well, the statement made earlier. In the previous budget estimates we did clarify when we came back that in fact the reason for the supplier not being able to deliver in that region was because they were affected by their supply chain in actually being able to establish centres, have vehicles, do training and get the people on the ground due to the COVID restrictions that were in effect at the time. I just want to clarify that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Mr Carlon, I will draw you back to the question: How many fines were issued in July? Let us start with July.

Mr CARLON: Additional enforcement to protect the community from speeding drivers was delivered in the north of the State, as you know. There were 7,000 hours of enforcement in August and 7,000 hours in September by the contractor Redflex. As at 24 October, Redflex has delivered 6,000 hours of enforcement for October. Redflex is on target to reach their contracted hours of 12,700 per month by the end of the year to protect the community from speeding drivers, as the Government announced. Due to the impacts of the COVID Delta virus and also lockdown, Acusensus were significantly impacted, delaying the rollout of their enforcement. They

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were able to commence enforcement in the southern Sydney region from the beginning of July, the southern region in August and the south-west in September.

As at 24 October, Acusensus have delivered over 4,000 hours of enforcement for October. Hours of enforcement for September had reached 2,700 hours. By the end of September they were operating at a rate equal to the enforcement levels for the southern areas of the State in recent years. More than 11,000 penalty infringements have been issued for offences in the southern areas since July. Acusensus is on target to reach their contracted hours of 8,300 by the end of the year, as announced by the Government. The penalty notice data which is available at the Revenue NSW website, which I understand is updated each month, is the best reference point for data as Revenue finalise the penalty processing data. I do have the latest information, which may be subject to change. That is that 884 penalties were issued in July, just under 4,000 penalties in August and over 6,500 penalties in September for enforcement hours delivered by Acusensus. That is 11,000 penalties issued in that three-month period from July to September.

In July most of the enforcement was in Sydney south, at 854 penalties issued, while 30 penalties were issued to drivers in the southern region. In August 3,860 motorists in Sydney south were issued with speeding fines, while 135 penalties were issued in the southern region. In September almost 6,000 motorists were fined in Sydney south, 292 motorists in the southern region and 280 motorists in the south-west region. I believe these numbers are close to final although, as I mentioned, they may be subject to change. On the hours delivered, which in your question you have requested, Acusensus delivered 1,400 hours in August and 2,700 hours in September. Additionally, I can advise that up to Sunday 24 October they had delivered 4,000 hours so far in October and will deliver more than double September's hours by the end of the month.

There has been a significant rebalancing of hours across the regions, and so Acusensus has delivered more hours in each region so far in October than were delivered in June under the previous contract. The southern region is up from 502 hours to over 1,200 hours. In the south-west region, Acusensus has delivered over 800 hours compared to 178 hours last month. This demonstrates significant progress in coming out of lockdown and the impacts that lockdown had on their capacity to deliver under the contract. Just to make it clear again, it has been announced on several occasions that for the mobile speed camera program the hours would be ramping up over the six-month period to reach the 21,000-hour total by the end of the year.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Great, thank you for that answer. That does answer the questions I have put to the Minister's office, and I thank you for that, Mr Carlon. Will you just repeat the one I missed in that long list of numbers, which is the actual penalties in July that were issued by Acusensus?

Mr CARLON: Yes, let me just find that detail here for you. In July most of the enforcement was in Sydney south, at 854 penalties, and 30 were issued in the southern region.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Right. So having run through that data, you agree now, Mr Carlon, that there was no enforcement in the southern region of the State or the south-west of the State in the month of July and there was no enforcement in the south-west region of the State in August?

Mr CARLON: Yes. As stated at the previous estimates, where we clarified that due to those impacts on the supply chain for Acusensus they were unable to deliver enforcement in those regions—they were unable to establish their depots because of the restrictions. That is the case, yes. As I have clearly identified, they are on track now.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, my concern about this is that in applying for this contract that required them to demonstrate that they could do the job, that they had the capacity and that it would be a smooth transition. Instead they started with few cars, few cameras. They did have Troy Grant on the payroll. Are you satisfied that this process has been appropriately followed?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I will go back to what I said before. I was disappointed when I found this out. The individual you spoke about in relation to being involved, I have had no conversations with him in relation to this particular matter. I do make that very clear as well.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I have met with him on water issues but nothing in relation to this particular program. I just want to put that on the record as well.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I have noted your meeting with him. I appreciate that clarification. To be clear, what has been publicly reported about his role is that he is employed to engage with road safety and enforcement agencies. That is the capacity in which he has been engaged.

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Mr PAUL TOOLE: That is my understanding but I just have to double-check with Mr Carlon if that is correct.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Well, that is a public report. I do not—

Mr CARLON: If I could respond—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I do not think, Mr Carlon, you need to respond to that. It is not a question. I will ask you this though, Minister. Putting aside this catastrophic failure of this scheme in the south of the State, the tripling of fines—your predecessor, Duncan Gay, would have been horrified at what is going on with the removal of warning signs and the tripling of speeding fines in the bush. Are you comfortable with this Government's program? Are you committing today that it will continue?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I think the message is very simple. People can be caught anywhere at any time. I think when you have a look at it, what is concerning to me is the number of people who think it is okay to speed on our roads out there across the State. Not only are you putting your life at risk but you are putting other motorists' lives at risk and you are putting other passengers in vehicles lives at risk. I think that is the fundamental issue that we should be looking at. When I sit there and I hear stories from individuals who have actually got brain injury. I talk to people who have lost limbs. I walk through hospitals and speak to people who have been involved in accidents. I tell you what, it actually goes to show you that we all need to be advocating for road safety and working towards zero. I can tell you right now, as the Minister—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you for that answer. I am going to hand to my colleague.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, that is very important stuff but I just want to go back to this—I think to be accurate—\$80.3 million that was transferred from the Fixing Country Roads program to Restart. Where did it actually go within Restart? Which program? I am happy for you to take that on notice.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes, I am happy to take it on notice.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: When will it be transferred back to the Fixing Country Roads program?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It is imminent.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So before the end of this financial year?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It will be in the near future, we will be going out for another round. But what is important here is the fact that we will go out for another round of funding and, as I said to you, that \$80 million that is actually still committed will be delivered as part of the Fixing Country Roads program. I think it is a great program and when I see the benefits on the roads—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Why was it transferred, Minister?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It was actually just an internal decision at the time that was made but it was actually done in relation to also looking at capacity of councils in delivering projects. If I went and gave another \$80 million out there today, I would have councils struggling to deliver those road projects now. We need to make sure that we have got the capacity to deliver them for those regions and those areas.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Is that the principle used to stop the submissions for these? I am told by councils that submissions under the Fixing Country Roads program stopped in January 2020 or thereabouts and they have been told that they will have to resubmit for future rounds. So their applications will not carry over and they will have to resubmit. Is that correct?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I cannot remember if it was at the start of the year now or at the end of last year, but I did announce a smaller round of funding for some councils across the State in relation to that project so, again, what is important here is it will be delivered.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: But they will have to resubmit though?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: That is my understanding at this point. They will be reassessed because, you have got to remember, some councils also will need to put applications in where they do say it is dependent on receiving equal funding from the Federal Government. So they will have to also submit to the Federal Government for some of that funding. It is not only entirely reliant on State Government putting funding forward. They also, in some cases, are reliant on going to the Federal Government for some of that funding as well.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Maximising their opportunities and possibilities.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Absolutely. I think that is a good opportunity.

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The Hon. MICK VEITCH: But do you accept, Minister, that having councils resubmit is actually adding to the workload that you just talked about giving consideration to?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I think in a lot of cases they will probably be resubmitting the same road. A lot of that application and a lot of that work has already been done. Therefore, many councils will not be starting from scratch again when they are putting forward an application for funding through that Fixing Country Roads—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So you are saying there is not a lot work?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: An application still needs to be put forward and be transparent and ensure that it is accountable for the funding that is being provided by the Government to ensure that it is spent in the right way, and it actually meets the requirements of the Fixing Country Roads program, which is, as you know, under Restart.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: But you do acknowledge that each time a council has to make a submission for any program, there is a body of work they have to undertake? Previously you said you were mindful of the level of work that councils are currently under. You and I have both been on council—we highly recommend it for everyone—so we have an understanding and appreciation of the workload that is required. Would that be correct?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Absolutely. I understand exactly what is required from councils. That is why we have streamlined processes as well through a number of our grants programs to try and make it simple for councils to be able to put forward their applications. But there are still measures and checks and balances that need to be addressed as part of any application put forward by those councils. Again, it could be dependent on where councils may be at the time of the cycle in relation to funding from other sources as well.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Those councils that made a submission back in, say, January 2020 have been told they have got to resubmit. Have all of the councils received that advice in writing or is it just going to be a general request?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I would have to double-check if we have actually sent a letter to them. It would be my understanding but I will double clarify that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I might move on to the rail works depot at Nyngan that my colleague Roy Butler has been following up with your office. What line of sight did you or your office have with UGL's tender? My understanding is they actually put in the tender that they would be shutting. Were you aware of that before the tender was successful?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: For any tender it is appropriate that the Minister is actually not engaged in the process. What I do understand is when we are talking about the country rail network, we are talking about maintenance of that rail network for the next 10 years and safety has got to be the number one priority. So it was a competitive tender. There were a number of players that put forward their submissions. That is assessed by Transport. What I will say is, as part of the requirements for that particular tender, it actually put a strong focus on regional employment. I understand that, after the tender had been put forward and considered, there were a number of changes that were going to be made at Nyngan.

What is important here is the fact that there were I think 295 employees under John Holland and UGL was required to take them all under the umbrella of UGL. My understanding is around 225 of them will work under the country rail network and the other 70 or so will be redeployed under UGL. Some, however, might take a voluntary redundancy. But in relation to the Nyngan site I think there was—I am only just guessing approximately—about seven workers at that particular depot. I think three have indicated that they wish to move on. I know one of them is looking at relocating and moving to Dubbo. I think that was that individual's home already. But what is important is the fact that we are seeing more jobs going into the regions under the UGL contract. I know that Mr Butler might talk about Nyngan but I also know that Mr Donato will be very happy that the UGL control centre is going to be moving to Orange and that is going to provide 80 jobs. Having that headquarters or that control centre now moving into a regional centre for the first time is also going to be an important step forward for regional employment.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: You would agree, as a former teacher like myself, the impact of seven families leaving a town and what effect that has on staffing of schools, even the local economy—the flow-on effect can be—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Absolutely. I know that Transport have spoken with UGL about their operations and where workers may be engaged and employed through the process. But again it is a tendering process. If I as the Minister was to interfere then you would be asking me very different questions today as to how that tender process was awarded.

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The Hon. MICK VEITCH: If he didn't, we would.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I get it and I understand that, but what I also focus on is the fact that there are more regional jobs coming out under the UGL contract for the next 10 years to administer and maintain the country rail network.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: There was never a contract variation considered to shore up those seven people remaining in Nyngan to some degree?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Obviously Transport raised concerns and I know that the mayor, Mr Ray Donald, has written about that matter. But at the end of the day it is a private company, UGL, to still determine as to where they need to position their depots, where they need to position the staff to best maintain the network. What is important here is we are talking about what is required over the next 10 years for a safe and efficient rail network.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Sure. Can I follow up on some questions from last estimates around feasibility studies for railway lines. In response to some of the questions you took on notice, you stated that three of the five feasibility studies have been determined to be feasible in certain circumstances and merit further work and/or investigation. They included Cowra, Gulgong to Maryvale and Kandos to Gulgong line reinstatement. Perhaps this is going to be on notice as well. What are those certain circumstances or prerequisite conditions that would be required for those lines to be feasible?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I know about \$1 million has been put into looking at that Blayney to Demondrille line. With that particular line, it is doing the work now that is required. We know that the project itself may not be feasible for another five to 10 years, but we are doing the work now that is required, looking at what the costings might be to bring that line up to a standard where it may be used for freight movements once again. That might mean as part of the study that we have to look at the amount of freight that could be used on the line. It is about having the project shovel ready at a future date when it is required. When we had the fires it showed me that main western line was impacted under huge constraint because it had limited movement. There will be an opportunity going forward to go south to be able to move more freight and that line is going to be important too.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It should never have been closed. It should never have been suspended. I publicly spoke against it at the time.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: There is a lot of work. I have walked the line with the mayors in that particular area. It is an extensive amount of work that will be required to open that line. I want to make sure that the work is done. It will take a good 18 months probably to do, but it is about making sure that the project, when it is feasible, is ready to go. Then we can look at opening it up and have the work done that is required.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: The other two that were mentioned, the Gulgong to Maryvale and the Kandos to Gulgong line reinstatement, any comments on those?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I do not think I have those here. I know you asked me last time.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I am happy for you to take it on notice.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I will take them on notice.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Also in terms of previous estimates questions on notice you raised the \$56 million to improve the safety of regional students through the rural regional bus seatbelt program. That had a completion date of 2021 in terms of replacing old buses that needed seatbelts installed and essentially replacing seatbelts in other buses. Where are we up to with that, given that it is two months out? Obviously COVID might have had an impact on that as well.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: The briefing I got from the department only recently says that we are still on target to reach the seatbelt instalment program by the end of the year. Those dedicated school bus runs with the seatbelt retrofit program are on track to be delivered. Even if it is not at the end of the year, it would be early in the new year, but it is still looking on target, which is promising.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I will start with some questions about Tamworth Regional Council and their role as a road maintenance council contract [RMCC] contractor. Over the years the department has received emails or correspondence from constituents about Tamworth's inability to adhere to standards around roundabouts and intersections, particularly around placing things that block line of sight. You might not have seen some of this because it happened in 2015 and 2019, but it seems we continue to have this issue where Tamworth council is placing hazards such as high hedges and large trees blocking line of sight. What role does Transport for NSW have in making sure that a local council adheres to Australian standards when it comes to traffic device construction?

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Mr PAUL TOOLE: There are standards that we would require councils to fall under. The issue around certain plantings on roundabouts is again going to be a matter for the local council. I have seen instances where the wrong type of plants are put into a roundabout which grow too high and impact on people's vision when they are entering those particular roundabouts, potentially causing an incident. Again, in many cases it will come down to the individual council to look at the appropriate measures to ensure there are safety works undertaken at those roundabouts to ensure people can have a good line of sight when entering them.

We have standards, but at the end of the day it will come down to each individual council as to plantings of trees or hedges within those areas. We cannot force a council to plant daisies, for instance. We cannot say to a council you must not plant this type of a tree. It will still come down to each council to determine what is required. I have had a similar argument in other council areas as well as to different plantings. I think the community very well loud and clear make the council aware that this is an issue and something that they need to address.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I appreciate that but when a traffic device like a roundabout is installed, signs are in place and fines are applicable, it does fall on Transport for NSW to a certain degree in terms of a level of responsibility to make sure it meets Australian standards.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: There would be requirements as part of the design, but what goes forward is still a council decision about plantings. Astroturf might be the best thing there for them by the sound of things.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: We might get to some of the design problems in a minute.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Thank you, Minister, for your attendance today. It is good to see you.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I had to come. I did not have a choice.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Minister, I do not know if you know that I live on the South Coast in the Shoalhaven.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I did not. I thought you were an inner city person.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I am not an inner-city person, straight from central Queensland to the South Coast. The community down there does appreciate the level of investment in the Princes Highway upgrades over a number of years. It has certainly made my travel to Sydney safer. But there is some growing concern about some of the future bypass proposals, both the Jervis Bay to Sussex, Milton, Ulladulla and the Moruya bypass. I have been asking some quite detailed questions of you through questions on notice, particularly about the Wandandian proposal. The answers that have come back have been less than useful and almost look as if I am getting the palm, "Don't ask me."

The community feel consultation has not been adequate. The preferred options that have been put forward, in particular for Wandandian and Moruya, the community feel do not reflect the considerations and are the most costly and environmentally damaging proposals. Questions were asked about how those options were chosen. Largely we have not got any answers. In the first instance, why the barrier to answering some simple questions about those preferred corridors?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: First of all, with the Moruya bypass, obviously the preferred strategic corridor was selected in May this year. It is the Orange route, which runs from the east of town over the river to provide better access to the preferred site for the Eurobodalla Health Service and improved flood resilience. Transport for NSW is conducting further environmental assessments and geotechnical work to determine a preferred option.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: The hospital is one of the key considerations and concerns of the community. If you are coming from the north—which mostly you will be if you are coming from Batemans—you have to go two kilometres past Moruya, get off the new bypass and then come back a kilometre and a half to get to the hospital. That is not what they consider to be the best option for access to the new hospital, which is a real concern. There are also concerns about the environmental impacts. The way some of this could be sorted out is if the actual inputs into the preferred corridor outcomes were made available. I have asked specific questions about the value management workshop that was conducted for Wandandian and also the *Moruya bypass Strategic Corridor Options Report*. The background documents that were considered at that workshop—what were the judgements made for each of the criteria that they had to assess? None of that information is in the publicly available reports, but in answers to my question you just point me back to the publicly available reports. Will you undertake to provide actual answers to the questions that have been asked by the community and by me about these projects?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We can take what you have asked on notice.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I am asking for an undertaking that you will actually provide specific answers to these questions.

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Mr PAUL TOOLE: We will provide an answer, yes.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I am not sure if this question is for Ms Geraghty or whoever within your team. Are you able to tell me, for example, who participated in the Wandandian bypass value management workshop?

Ms GERAGHTY: I might pass that question to my colleague Mr Hayes.

Mr HAYES: I am afraid I would have to take that on notice as well. I am not too sure who was involved in that specific workshop, because there were a number of workshops. I am going to have to take that on notice, I am sorry.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: That is okay. I will put these on notice as well. Another example is that the strategic corridor options report says that the rationale for each of the ratings against all of the criteria was documented by the participants, but none of that rationale is provided in the strategic corridor options report. Will you provide those justifications, which it says were made in writing? Will you make all of those public?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We will go away and see what we can do to provide those and assist you with those queries.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Thank you, Minister.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I will comment; that is fine.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: There was also a preliminary environmental assessment. I know it was done for Wandandian and I suspect it was also done for Moruya. Will you make those documents public as well?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Mr Sharpe.

Mr SHARP: Mr Field, are you asking about the environmental impact study? That is still underway at the moment.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: No, there was a preliminary one done in advance of the strategic options report. I assume it informed consideration of the corridor options. That is specifically referenced in the strategic corridor options report. It does not say it is underway; it says it was done. I am asking for a copy of it.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We will take it on notice.

Mr SHARP: We will take it on notice as well.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: It is one thing to take it on notice, but I am actually seeking an undertaking, Minister, in this hearing today that you will make that document public. Why would it not be available for the public to see?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I just need to see what the status of the actual report is, Mr Field. If it is not complete then I am not going to give you a report that is not complete. I need to understand exactly where it is at, at this point in time—if it is being reviewed or if it is actually being further assessed. We just need to have an understanding as to exactly where it is at, but I said I would get you an answer.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Is there a willingness to reopen consideration of the strategic options for these bypasses if you can see that some considerations may not have been fairly weighed up in the development of these preferred corridors?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: That is what we are doing. We are actually discussing it with the community right now. We have preferred options that have been put on the table. We have had a number of corridors in some of those areas that have been looked at. With the Milton Ulladulla bypass, there were a number of options that were considered. We have said that this is the preferred option. We are still engaging with communities around Burrill Lake and Tabourie, so we will continue to do that. The communities will also help to shape what is going to be the best outcome in those areas. I have got the Milton Ulladulla community that is actually quite pleased with the route that is chosen right now, but there are other communities. We need to consider their thoughts and their considerations as part of any major road project.

This is important, and I know you acknowledged at the start that our investment in the Princes Highway is substantial. What I want to do is to make sure that we continue to do that. The way in which we have transformed the journeys for those on the North Coast and the Pacific Highway, I want to do the same on the Princes Highway. I think we have come a long way with that investment, and we will continue to do it. But for major projects like this there will be community engagement, and we will continue to have strong community engagement throughout the process, too.

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Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Thank you, Minister. Just to confirm, it is not closed. There is still room to move around those options.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: There is plenty of opportunity, yes. There is plenty of opportunity in this major project for the community to still have its say. There are different phases for projects where community can come forward and have input into design, looks—can shape the whole project itself. There is still opportunity for the community. What is important is the fact that, as you are aware, the community itself—the Jervis Bay Road intersection was another project where we listened to the community for the grade separation flyover there. That was the community. Transport had done the work, so we listened to the community about their preferred option. Transport had done the additional work, and it came back as being the most preferred option in that community.

Anyone knows when they are travelling down the Princes Highway that around congestion and safety, that is going to make a world of difference in that particular area. The community has been engaged along the way. They will continue to be engaged, and that gets us a better process and a better road design at the end of the day for those communities—and not just for the locals. It is important for locals, but we have also got visitors. We have also got freight movement and holidaymakers that use that particular road throughout the year. It is important that we consider all those factors as part of any design of any particular road.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Thank you, Minister. I will lodge these questions on notice with you. I appreciate it.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, have you met with Michelle Bott?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Mate. Michelle Bott—no.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Do you intend to meet with Michelle?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I do not know who Michelle Bott is.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: This is to do with the railway level crossing campaign.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Have you met with her?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: No, but I do know the level crossing and I do know the family.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Okay. Her name is Maddie Bott, for a start.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I am sorry. It is Maddie Bott.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I am sorry, but her name is Maddie Bott. I have met with Maddie Bott.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I apologise for that. It is Maddie Bott.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I have met with Maddie Bott on several occasions. I have met with her face to face. I have met with her fiancé's parents, as well, and we have actually sat down. Their story is very sad. It is a very sad story, and I know that that incident occurred on a private crossing. What I have committed to do, with Maddie, is to ensure that level crossings are a priority for me as the Minister but also for the Government.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: When you say it is a priority, will you walk us through what you intend to do with railway level crossings, particularly crossings of this nature?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes. Having met with Maddie, there are a number of things. We have been having conversations with the Deputy Prime Minister in relation to level crossings across the State.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The current Deputy Prime Minister?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: The current Deputy Prime Minister and the former Deputy Prime Minister as well. We want to make sure that this is a focus—to improve our level crossings. When I see a fatality at our level crossings, I consider that to be part of the road toll. If we are going to get towards zero, we also need to make our level crossings safer. It is quite complex because it has got industry that is involved, it has different levels of government involved and you have got private companies that are involved. There is a whole piece of work that needs to be undertaken to look at it in a bigger picture.

What is important, as well, is the fact that—when I sat down with Transport and had a conversation around how we can make our level crossings safer, we went out to the team for Transport and we had a number of people who were passionate, who put their hand up, who wanted to make a difference in this space. We have also already been engaging with industry. We have been engaging with various stakeholders. We held a working meeting only recently where we had operators from Canada and New Zealand, and Australia as well, putting forward some of their innovation and initiatives. We know that we want to look at improving a number of

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crossings, whether it be with boom gates, the LED lights on those areas. But I have also said that technology is going to be the way to drive the change in the most significant way.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, these private crossings, anyone that has been in the regions will know that farmers cross—there are roads, internal farm crossings, almost informal level crossings in some places. How do you intend to try and make them all as safe as we possibly can?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: There are a number of ways. It is also about talking to—trying to ensure that the trains themselves are more lit up so they actually stand out more for people when they are crossing them, even if they are on a private or public crossing, right? But also to look at technology. I mean, we have apps that actually alert you when you go into a school zone. Can we develop technology where we can have apps that alert you to a level crossing? Technology, I believe, is going to be a much more effective way of getting and communicating to the community about where these level crossings are.

We should also be looking at opportunities to close them in some areas where they may not necessarily be required. Because in some cases they might only be just up the road, on the same property, so is there actually a need to have two private level crossings on that individual property or is it more suitable just to have one? They are some conversations that we will need to have with private landowners to be able to look at closing some of those crossings as well.

The CHAIR: It is a very good discussion and I am very loath to interrupt. According to the resolution of the House, we are obliged to have a 15-minute COVID-safe break at this time. Please do make use of it. We will recommence at 11.15 a.m.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back. I hope your 15-minute break was COVID safe. I am still not quite sure what that means, but I am sure we were all very COVID safe during that time. We will go back to questions from the Opposition. Mr Veitch?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Thank you. Minister, before the COVID-safe break we were talking about railway level crossings. As you can tell, it is a pretty serious matter and I am certain all people in the room are of a view that we need to do something about this issue. Minister, did you by chance see the *Landline* program on Sunday?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The Western Australian National Party has come out in a very strong way in regard to safety at railway level crossings. Do you concur with their views?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I think what I find promising is the fact that there is also a commitment about having national visibility on trains across the country. I think that is important as well, because we need to make sure that there is a standard nationally for trains right across the State so that they are visible. I think that is promising. What is promising is the fact that those conversations that I have already had directly with the Deputy Prime Minister showed that he has a commitment to doing something in this space. As I said before, there are a lot of players in this space as well. You have got Australian Rail Track Corporation [ARTC], Transport for NSW and private industry involved. So it is important that we actually all work together. What I am really pleased about is that we actually have been able to bring everybody together and we have got everybody working in the same direction to achieve the same outcome. I think that is where, in such a short period of time—when I first had this matter raised with me by Maddie Bott, to actually bring industry and everyone together in such a short period of time has been important for achieving an outcome at the end of the day.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It is a very important campaign that Maddie is running.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It is an important campaign. I acknowledge the hard work that Maddie has done in relation to this to get a number of signatures. But I was not going to wait for a petition to come to Parliament to even act upon it. That is why I have had those regular meetings with Maddie, to provide her an update as to what we are doing, what things we are trying to manage in this space as well, but also trying to bring other stakeholders along the journey with us. As I said, rather than wait for that petition to come into the Parliament and then talk about it, I wanted to make sure that we acted beforehand. I have even had conversations with the NSW Farmers around this matter. I spoke about this at a rail conference that I attended a number of months ago. I have also spoken to the Country Women's Association about the importance and that the Government is committed to working in this particular space.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: One of the issues that is raised with me is around the basic maintenance at some of these railway level crossings. I appreciate this is difficult for the, I guess you call them, informal crossings

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that are sometimes on a farm, but things like just keeping visibility—so mowing the grass, keeping the weeds down and that sort of stuff. Have you had discussions with the maintenance agencies around this very point?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Well, some of it is ARTC. I think, at the moment, we have just made them very much aware around it, because it is visibility in a lot of cases. I think you know that well over half of these crossings are on private properties. So we need to make sure that they are visible because, at the end of the day, this is about trying to save as many lives as possible at these crossings. I tell you what, when I get a message from the department to tell me that there is a fatality, you know, it is pretty heartbreaking and it is pretty heart-wrenching, especially when I sat there with Maddie listening to her individual story and listening to Ethan's parents. You just could not imagine it. Everybody that has been involved in a situation like this previously, it is heart-wrenching to actually listen to their story, but also to understand that we also want to make a difference in this space. I think everybody needs to make sure that we do not trivialise it. We also should not politicise it. Because I think, at the end of the day, we should all work together to try and achieve an outcome on improving level crossings and safety at them around the State and across the country.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, does that lend itself then to you developing a program where you will request additional funds to help look at some of these—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes, and we have also been speaking with the Commonwealth about having a joint program together to be able to deliver this. So not only have we already got a program in improving level crossings across the State but we are looking to try to even speed up those that have been identified over the next few years, trying to make sure that we bring them forward but also to work with the Commonwealth to actually have additional funding. Even as a State, we will put in additional funding to try to speed the process up of improving safety at these level crossings but, as I said before, to me, some of that technology is already out there.

When you actually talk to what is being led around the world in other countries, technology is a big player here and I think technology is something that we need to embrace to ensure that we provide safer level crossings. Yes, it is something I am committed to and I think we will continue to see some trials that will happen early next year, or happen next year anyway, in some of the innovative ideas that have already been put forward. Industry have probably been doing a lot of this in their space already. We probably just have not capitalised on it. So what I want to do is to make sure that we capitalise on it. There are a lot of good things out there that industry have shared already and what we need to do now is to actually put into a trial phase and trial it out and then roll it out as aggressively as we can for level crossings.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So essentially there is a degree of urgency or impetus around leadership in this space. Railway level crossings—and to be fair this has not been a new issue. There have been issues in the past. During the break, the Hon. Wes Fang and I were talking about Five Mates Crossing and that sad story there. So railway level crossings have been an issue for a while. It is a pretty harsh interaction between vehicular movement and rail movement. Trains cannot stop on a dime. So you would agree there is a degree of leadership required here because of—

Mr SHARP: Just to perhaps add to it, the transport secretaries from each State actually meet regularly. I can confirm there is a program specifically being developed in that forum to look at the national coordination around level crossings and how do we address some of these issues that have been raised by the Deputy Premier. We are pulling forward some work as well. There are 29 crossings that we are upgrading over the next two years to make sure we are continuing. Importantly, from a policy perspective, we do not want to see new crossings. So when we are developing new infrastructure and new railway lines, we are not wanting to see level crossings. We are also liaising with Inland Rail and ARTC on their network in particular to ensure that we are minimising the risks around those crossings. So there is quite a lot of coordination nationally on this.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: When you say no new crossings, does that mean you are looking at either underpasses or overpasses—

Mr SHARP: Correct.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: —in certain places so as to remove the interaction completely?

Mr SHARP: That is the agenda.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: On the inland rail, determining where those locations are is pretty important to those local communities. So obviously there is a degree of consultation?

Mr SHARP: There is a lot of consultation. Inland Rail see it as a pretty key issue for them and as they are going through each of the communities they are liaising on that particular issue. As a user of ARTC's network, we are obviously lobbying into them as well to make sure that this is on their agenda. What I am seeing is that each

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State sees it as a priority, the coordination does seem to be occurring and that is a positive move because I think visibility, technology and some of the solutions can be shared.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We have also reduced the speed limit at a number of our level crossings. So rather than being 100, they have actually dropped the speed limit to 80 kilometres when you are approaching a number of these level crossings already. That has been rolled out to about 15 already at this point in time as well. So that is another initiative that we have actually been rolling out.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Okay. There is a program for railway level crossing upgrades in any case. Are you looking at bringing a lot of those works forward off the back of this campaign?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: That is what Mr Sharp just said—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So you are pulling it forward.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: —irrespective, to try to bring them forward but also looking at what new technology can be used to actually increase and do a lot more than what is being proposed.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: One last question before I hand over to my colleague on this matter. The maintenance at this particular level crossing where this accident took place, have there been works done there now to address some of the issues that Maddie has raised—for instance, the visibility issues?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Having met with Maddie and her family, they also spoke about dust as well. So there are a number of factors that were put in. When there is an incident, the Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator [ONRSR] needs to do an investigation. They had an investigation into what happened and obviously that report is important but, again, there are many factors—time of the day, visibility, dust. It is just a horrible list of circumstances that they came across at that particular time. If we can make them safer—obviously there are other players here that have to have a responsibility, even with ARTC. They have got a responsibility here in this space as well.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Before I hand over, I just want to apologise to young Maddie again for getting her name wrong. It was a terrible mistake and I really apologise.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I think we both agree it is an important issue.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: In ARTC, we can probably find out an update.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I think that would be really good.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It is them so we would have to find out exactly what they have done as well.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I think that would be really good. Thank you.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I might turn, Minister, to the New Intercity Fleet. Last estimates, there were a number of questions asked. A number of them were taken on notice and the answers were somewhat cursory. I would like to just return to a couple of those issues, just to get some more detail. The first of those is the time line for when the New Intercity Fleet will start operating on the Blue Mountains and the South Coast lines. I will give you the answer that was given on notice just to get you stated:

A timeline for when the trains will start operating on the Blue Mountains and South Coast lines will be determined after more trains are delivered and further testing completed.

These communities obviously want to know some more detail. Can you give us some idea of what the time line here is?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I might get Mr Sharp to comment in relation to it. As you are aware, it obviously does impact in a certain part of my space but I did indicate previously that it actually sat under the auspices primarily of the other portfolio Minister. I also know that we are very keen to have those trains operating on places like the Central Coast line and out on the western main line, and obviously there are some issues in relation to those trains being operational. We do have some nice, shiny, brand new trains that are just sitting around in yards at the moment that are not being used. I know that there are a lot of community members that are disappointed that they cannot be put onto the tracks and used at this point in time. But I will get Mr Sharp to elaborate.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Let us get Mr Sharp to answer this one and what we might do is then, after you have indicated that, we might take some of these other issues up in Transport more generally. But, Mr Sharp, if you did have some information, that would be helpful.

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Mr SHARP: Yes, I can confirm that there are nine fully commissioned trains. They will initially head north. There are actually 19 trains in New South Wales at the moment in various stages of testing. There is a testing regime and we also, for those southern lines, need to then have the national rail safety authority sign off on those. At the moment we have the sign-off for the northern operation. There is an open industrial relations negotiation occurring, which is around the enterprise agreements and that is still ongoing. That has some implications in terms of the timing. But we have nine fully commissioned trains. So there are quite a few train sets. It is now a case of rolling them out once we resolve these industrial issues.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I might return to that with you, Mr Sharp, next week when we see you at Transport estimates.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Do you want any more on it? If you want any more, I can get Mr Merrick. He might be able to offer some more as well.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I do in a week's time, but I want to ask you about this, Minister. On 12 February this year you announced along with the department that UGL had been successful in its tender to operate and maintain the Country Regional Network.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Correct.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The concern in the community is what this means for job losses. You have made quite a strong statement on this:

Under the deal with UGL, there will be an overall increase in jobs in the regions.

The concerns, though, are that jobs are going in Nyngan with seven jobs relocating or made redundant, 50 job losses in Dubbo, 21 lost in Tamworth and 10 in West Wyalong. Also, people have resigned, obviously knowing there will be change. Some people have resigned, maybe up to 40 of those key resignations. There are jobs being created but they are being created in Bathurst or in the neighbouring electorate of Orange. Overall, the community concern is we are losing jobs in the regions. What do you have to say to that community concern?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: What is very important here is the fact that this was a tender and I think I had that question earlier in relation to UGL. This was a tender that came up to maintain the network for the next 10 years. UGL have been awarded that tender over the next 10 years, which is about a \$1.5 billion contract to ensure the maintenance, safety and the efficiency of the network. What we put as part of the requirements for the tender that went out was that there had to be a strong focus on jobs in the regions. What is exciting is the fact that there are going to be a number of areas that are going to see an increase in jobs within the regional areas. Seventy one jobs are predicted to be available at the control centre in Orange. UGL are going to move their headquarters or control centre to the town of Orange. As I was saying before to the Hon. Mark Banasiak that of those 295 jobs, about 225 are going to be deployed in relation to working on the network. UGL are also looking at taking up other workplaces to put into the operations of their existing business. What Transport for NSW has been doing is working with UGL to ensure that this a smooth transition. I have asked the department to make sure that it keeps a close eye on that, so when we do start up next year with the new operator, that things change over as smoothly as possible.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: There are jobs, as you have acknowledged, but they are jobs in your neck of the woods. Jobs are being lost elsewhere. There were 370 people working for John Holland, there is now less than that working for UGL—either 225 as you are saying or 295, depending on how you count it. How does that square with your claim that there will be an overall increase of jobs in the region?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: When you talk about 350 frontline jobs, you are talking about 350 frontline jobs when John Holland started their contract 10 years ago. There has been a change in the way in which their operations have run. In some cases they have technology now, so instead of having individuals who walk up and down lines, they are using things likes drones. There are new operators that come into play for doing that kind of work.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: My number was 370, how many jobs—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I said 350, 10 years ago when the contract was given.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: How many now?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We are talking about 295 jobs that will be going into UGL and 225 of those will work under the network.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: What happens to the others?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I said previously, that UGL have other operations.

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The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You are going to move them around.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Absolutely. Some will take a voluntary redundancy, I understand that, and some of them want to take a VR due to the age of the workforce in some areas.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is my concern. That is not an overall increase in jobs in the region, is it, if people are walking out the door or taking—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: As I said, it is a tender process. I am not the one who tells or determines where UGL's operations are going to be placed. It is appropriate for UGL to determine where they need to put their depots, where it needs to put the workforce to be able to look after the network.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The reason I ask about it, Minister, is there are quite strong government commitments that there will not be jobs to go in the regions. You have made a very strong statement that there will be jobs to go if people are taking a VR and that job in the bush is not replaced. Is that what is going on here?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We have said 80 per cent of the jobs have to be in the regions and they are going to exceed that target. That is exactly what we put as part of the requirements for the tender that went out and UGL are going to exceed that. That is what is important here. I cannot say to you that I am in the best position to determine a private company's position to actually put—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It is your commitment, that is why I am asking.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Absolutely.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think that is not an unfair position to put, but you have made a very strong commitment—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Absolutely. It is about regional jobs.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The community cannot see how it is being delivered.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: This is about regional jobs.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order: I am appreciative that Hansard will be struggling to record that last interaction. I ask that the Hon. John Graham ask his question of the Minister and allow the Minister to respond.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I will agree less vociferously with the Minister next time.

The ACTING CHAIR: As Deputy Chair of the Committee, I will be the Acting Chair until the Chair returns. There was some equal banter going back and forward. It was not as robust as previous sessions.

The Hon. WES FANG: I am pleased that the Hon. John Graham is learning; however, I reiterate my point that Hansard will struggle.

The ACTING CHAIR: Can we leave a few seconds gap between each other.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: The Secretary, Mr Sharp just wants to add a little bit more.

Mr SHARP: We talked specifically about the seven roles in Nyngan. For clarity, two of those positions have been vacant for some time, three it has been confirmed will become part of the CRN workforce, and the other two I can confirm are actually being offered redeployment to other related entities within UGL so they will be continuing to work. There will not be an VRs in Nyngan for those specific roles that you mentioned.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I believe our time is up.

The ACTING CHAIR: Deputy Premier, before I threw to the Opposition we were talking about non-compliant track devices. I draw your attention to Calala Lane roundabout in Tamworth. Your office has received some concerns about it, my office has received some concerns about it and even Mr Veitch's office has received some concerns about it. Significant case law exists where councils and transport departments are held liable for non-compliant traffic devices. Given that some of those issues raised with all of our offices are now starting to materialise with this roundabout that is now 70 per cent complete, does it concern you that your department may be held liable for any damage, injury or death because of this non-compliant traffic device?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Of course I would be concerned if that was going to be the case and I would be ensuring that Transport is providing appropriate input back to the council as well. Of course I would be if we are liable for any particular matter.

The ACTING CHAIR: Are you aware there has already been two accidents on this roundabout even though it is not complete?

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Mr PAUL TOOLE: I am not aware but I would hope—and do not forget that as part of traffic committees, there is an opportunity in those particular forums that we have established with councils, community representatives and local members who have representatives on those committees as well, to provide input into those issues that may be raised from a local level from time to time.

The ACTING CHAIR: Do you know whether the Transport for NSW representative on that committee did raise concerns about this particular project?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I am not aware. We would have to take it on notice. I do not think we would be aware until we saw the minutes.

The ACTING CHAIR: Perhaps on notice too, the minutes are a little bit unclear but they seem to suggest that the Transport for NSW representative was not there when the final decision was made to proceed with this project. Perhaps, you could check whether the representative was there?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes.

The ACTING CHAIR: Specifically some of the concerns that are now materialising, it seems that the design includes pedestrian ramps on and off the roundabout, which is fine, but not through the centre of the roundabout. The on and off ramps are actually on the rim of the roundabout. That means a mother with a pram has the choice of either pushing her pram out in front of the car or taking a hit herself. Would that concern you if that was part of the design?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: If that was part of the design and it was not our required standard, then that would concern me as to the roundabout that had been put forward as it would have a safety implication. Again, we can take it on notice and provide the council with advice around standards in relation to the construction and building of roundabouts in their particular area. You have actually put a focus on Tamworth council here and we can ensure that that information is provided around appropriate standards.

The ACTING CHAIR: While you are taking matters on notice, other issues: a 40 centimetre circumference wooden power pole on the rim of a roundabout—these are those power poles that cut cars in half, so they are substantial poles; ingress and egress from residential premises straight onto the roundabout; a bus stop literally three feet after the exit of a roundabout, so creating a blind spot—

The Hon. WES FANG: Is that one metre?

The ACTING CHAIR: Three feet, one metre, yes.

The Hon. WES FANG: Using decimal as opposed to imperial.

The ACTING CHAIR: Thank you. I have got the maths teacher to the right of me. There are obviously significant concerns. My understanding is the successful tenderer has gone back to the council and said, "We are not even happy building this thing." Perhaps on notice, can you get a response from Tamworth council about these concerns? Obviously, as we have said, the council has a liability potentially to the department. More importantly, there is a local school there and a residential community for over 55s. So the potential for death or injury is quite significant.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I think the council should be concerned about it as well, if there are issues around design and they are not meeting those standards. Let us have a look at it, and we will put something through appropriately and raise it with the council.

The ACTING CHAIR: Sure, thank you. That is pretty much it from me.

The Hon. WES FANG: No more roundabout questions?

The ACTING CHAIR: I know more about roundabouts now than I thought I ever would.

The Hon. WES FANG: What about Tamworth? No more Tamworth questions?

The ACTING CHAIR: No Tamworth questions for the moment. Maybe when we get to mental health.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I have got some answers to some of the other questions asked previously.

The ACTING CHAIR: Yes, that might be good now.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Do you want me to just go through those couple that were raised?

The ACTING CHAIR: Yes, sure.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Dunns Creek Road, we committed \$27 million to the project at the election. This is about improving connections between the high-growth area of Googong and Canberra. That funding was to

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allow Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council to begin land acquisition, planning and design. Transport is engaging with the council on the progress of that work. Specific questions would need to be directed to the council, which is responsible for land acquisition for the project.

Brown Mountain and alternative routes, Transport has been working to improve the resilience of the Snowy Mountains Highway at Brown Mountain. Earlier this year they completed a \$2.2 million slope stabilisation works project. It includes installing soil nails into the slopes, which are then tightened against the slope, with steel mesh and erosion matting to prevent further slips. This is part of the broader work we are doing in Transport to improve the resilience of our road network to natural disasters. Slope stabilisation work between Wattle Road and Buckleys Road on the Snowy Mountains Highway at Brown Mountain was completed in July 2021. It is not possible for B-doubles to pass on that road. One of the two options we are looking at is for performance-based standards [PBS] vehicles that could safely navigate the road at longer lengths, which means better productivity. We are looking at PBS vehicles there. Yarrie Lake Road, Narrabri, we know that this is an important freight road. In fact, we have announced about \$2.9 million for Narrabri Shire Council towards sealing Yarrie Lake Road to Pilliga Road under round three of the Fixing Local Roads program. That was probably about two months ago.

The ACTING CHAIR: The question was about Pilliga and Wee Waa Road, though.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Okay, we might come back to that. I understand the mayor welcomed the news. It was part of a \$45 million investment from round three into local roads, principally west of the Newell, and was one of the biggest projects in that \$45 billion. All up, round three funded \$153 million in funding projects. We will come back to you on that other one. Fixing Country Roads, Mr Veitch, is one of our older programs. I understand the application process is going to go over to SmartyGrants. That is in line with other grants programs that councils are well familiar with, like our Fixing Local Roads and Fixing Country Bridges programs. It is actually to simplify the application process for councils into the future. Councils will be notified by email blast and web update.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Is that a refinement of the IT process?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes, that is right. That is how councils apply now for a lot of their Stronger Country Communities Fund, Fixing Local Roads and Fixing Country Bridges grants. It is bringing it in line with a similar platform across the board.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr Acting Chair, I am happy if you want to use some of the Government's 15 minutes to congratulate the Minister on a great number of projects and a job well done.

The ACTING CHAIR: No, I will let you do that after you question Mr Carlon.

The Hon. WES FANG: No, I just thought you might want to.

The ACTING CHAIR: No, after you question Mr Carlon you can congratulate the Minister. I will throw back to Opposition questions.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr Acting Chair. Minister, I might return firstly to the answer you just gave us about Fixing Country Roads and the shift to SmartyGrants. You say it is about simplifying the applications. Those applications from councils have already been put in, have they not? They are having to reapply through the SmartyGrants process.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: They will have to go through the SmartyGrants program. As I indicated to you, councils are very familiar with this particular process and they are very familiar with SmartyGrants.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So it will be a simpler process, but they are doing it twice. Do you agree with that?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: They are very much aware of the process and the requirement for that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: They are very much aware because they have done it before.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: That is right; they have done it before.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Specifically for this program, but you took \$80 million out of it.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: And some councils may have already received funding for those roads that they may have even considered previously. This is an opportunity for those councils that may not have even put an application in before to put one forward now. Some councils, as I said, may have already got funding and may have already done the work. This is appropriate, allowing everybody the opportunity.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Again. We have had reports across a range of regional centres that people wanting to book in for a driving test have had the test repeatedly deferred. I am interested, firstly, in whether you

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believe this is a problem. Obviously this is relevant to Service NSW and Minister Dominello. Acknowledging that up-front, I am interested in whether you have had reports, as we have, that this is starting to be a problem. It obviously impacts on a range of particularly young drivers' access to work or being able to drive in the bush.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes, and I do know that the Minister for Customer Service, who is appropriate to answer the question, was asked at question time last week. Service NSW centres have opened up and are looking at additional hours to try to deal with that backlog. Obviously in our regional communities, for people wanting to get to work or maybe potential work into the future, it is important that that happens.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It is crucial.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Absolutely, so we agree.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Good. Acknowledging that answer, clearing that backlog really needs to be prioritised. That is certainly the view we have come to.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You would join in making that call.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Absolutely. The Minister did acknowledge that, in fairness, last week. He did acknowledge that in question time when he got a question on that particular matter last week. I welcome that because I have had individuals in my electorate, young people my daughter's age, who are looking at trying to get their licence testing done now. I do welcome that announcement to try to increase it and put in more resources, longer hours, to be able to address the backlog.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, I want to go to the issue of taxis in country New South Wales. The Country Taxi Operators Association is clearly quite concerned about the survival of a number of taxi operators. Will you outline what the Government has been doing to assist country taxi operators to survive? It is pretty important for a lot of those communities, as you and I and the Hon. Wes Fang would know, where the only public transport in the town is the local taxi.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Absolutely. I want to acknowledge the incredible work that our taxi operators have been doing over the past two years, because I think it has been very challenging for them as well. We also know that the New South Wales Government has had a number of assistance packages in the past for taxi operators. They have had a hardship policy, but we have also been talking to the industry about providing an assistance package in relation to them. We want to make sure that taxi operators continue to work in regional and rural parts of the State. As you said, in some cases they are critical. In some cases they may be the only point-to-point service provider in that local town or community.

We also know that in some areas some of those taxi operators are quite elderly. They are wanting to exit the industry, and they have not been able to get a buyer. I meet with the Taxi Council probably every quarter. Only last week I met with the Taxi Council and the regional representative for country taxis, again discussing what kind of an assistance package could be provided for the taxi industry. There has been a consultation paper that has gone out to the industry seeking their feedback. Again, there are some things there that we will have further conversations about regarding how we can provide assistance and make sure that there is that point-to-point service in our communities. I have even asked Transport to have a look at what risks there might be as well. If we have a taxi operator who decides to move out, what communities are potentially at risk? They will not have a point-to-point service, so who is going to fill that gap?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I am certain you could close your eyes and visualise communities in your own electorate where if the taxi operator leaves town, that is it. There is no public transport.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: That is right. We have done some work around that looking at where gaps might be potentially and to have that filled if someone decides to just close and move on.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It is a pretty critical issue in a lot of the smaller country towns.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Absolutely. It is also looking at making sure if there is a gap that community transport is going to be able to fill the gap. We are also looking at courtesy buses that are provided in communities and how they can help fill the gap. We have also got taxi operators that are being innovative and looking at new initiatives and ways of trying to reinvent themselves. Even in my backyard, the guys there have been running a tucker food thing, where people can—a bit like Uber Eats, locally. So they have been reinventing themselves as well for the opportunity to try to—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Survive.

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Mr PAUL TOOLE: —survive. But to do things differently as well, as part of a changing point-to-point industry.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Would you agree that there is clearly a need for additional help? I am not going to attack all the city taxi operators. I am pretty keen just on the regional ones. But is there a need for an assistance package tailored just for the country? And then there are two or three tiers. There are the centres like the Bathursts and the Waggas, but then you get to the Youngs, the Tumuts, the Cowras and even further into the Temoras, for instance. Different size populations have different needs.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Absolutely. I think it is critical. That is part of that discussion paper that went out, to try to engage with industry about opening up the dialogue to talk about how that package could look and how it could provide assistance to industry. The industry talks about using the passenger service levy [PSL]. In 3½ years I think we have raised \$210 million through the PSL. They are talking now about wanting it to be potentially a lot larger than that and looking at a full buyout. Well, if that is the case, we are probably looking at 2058 before that assistance package would be complete. We will continue to have the dialogue with the taxi industry about providing assistance, because I do not think there are a lot of country taxi operators that want to wait until 2058 before they get some assistance.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You and I would both agree on that. That is too far out.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Absolutely. They know that they want to work within the PSL. But I think we want to continue the dialogue and the conversation with the taxi industry about that assistance package, which is important. The dialogue is still continuing. I said to them last week—there were a couple of things that they raised concerns about. I admitted the couple of things I was not particularly happy about as well. So we will continue to work through that together before any legislation or any bill is brought to this Parliament.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Was one of those concerns around the operators that may have more than one taxi?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes. Absolutely.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: And the fact that in regional New South Wales there may be an unintended consequence on—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes. Absolutely.

The ACTING CHAIR: The majority of multiple plate owners are in our regions.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes. I think that is a fair call. Because I know that the department went out and I thought it would be something that would get raised pretty much as well. But there was consultation that clearly showed that was an example of a concern from the taxi industry, that if you own more than two plates then why are you capped at two if you have potentially got 10 or even 15? I am not saying it is going to be 15 for everybody, but there may be a greater number than the two. I think that is a very fair call and something that I have asked the department to make sure that we factor in before we go back and look at numbers as well for assistance for the industry.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Just remind me, Minister, is there a time frame on that information to come back—what you are looking at now?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: No. We would always like to have had a position where we could take legislation to the Parliament this year. I am not going to rush it. I want to get it right. I want to make sure that at the end of the day we can come up with a package that will be acceptable in relation to using the PSL. But how that looks will still be an ongoing conversation with the taxi industry.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: One last question before I hand over to my colleague, who is busting for his topic. The communities that are at risk of losing their taxis, are plans being put in place so we do not have a gap between when the taxi operator departs or leaves and something is put in place?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Work is actually being done so—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Transport for NSW has done the work.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So those communities are not—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Transport has done work around those areas that we see at risk, looking at the potential so there is not a long gap in between. It is looking at other providers coming in. Now I hope that does not happen, because I know that our taxi operators are important. But I also know that there are a number of taxi

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operators that want to get out. They have put it on the market but they have not had any buyers. So it is hard to gauge what market value is for some of these plates in some of our regional areas—and rightfully so as you said before. That is why we have gone out and had zones in some of those areas like your Waggas and your Bathursts and metro areas and some of those smaller regional or country towns as well.

That is why zones have been classed for those areas about potential licence values of when they entered the market with those plates. That is the conversation that is still being had in relation to some of those shifts and some of those areas. Someone may have paid several hundred thousand for a licence, but then someone else might have entered the market and only paid \$20,000 or \$30,000. So there is a big difference here as well. I think we are just trying to work out how we can deliver a fair and equitable assistance package for both the lower end of the market entering versus those that came in at a higher end.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I am glad that body of work has been done around the areas at risk. Are you able to provide that to the Committee?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: That is internally, but I will have to have a look where that document is. Okay?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Okay.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: But we have done it, so, yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Thank you.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I welcome the fact you are looking at further assistance. I think there is just no question that is required. Rewinding to the Additional Assistance Payment Scheme originally promised—that \$142 million—\$42 million of that was spent. Is it still the case that \$100 million of that original assistance package has not been spent?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: So there was the hardship package and then there is the package that is available there through the PSL. We always said that the PSL would be used to raise up to \$250 million or five years, whatever came first. We know that, potentially, we may have to look at extending the PSL time frame but, again, that will have to come to Parliament for a legislative change for that to occur.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. So you are talking about future assistance—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Correct.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —and the structure of that. I am asking about the previous assistance. The Government said \$142 million was in the Additional Assistance Payment Scheme for drivers, to compensate them for hardship. Of that \$142 million, \$42 million was spent. Is the \$100 million still sitting in your bank account? By "you", I mean "the Government's".

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes, I was going to say, not mine. Not mine.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No. An important clarification.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I might ask if Ms Wise knows but my understanding is you are right. The hardship assistance package, \$42 million of the \$142 million has been used. So I would have to just clarify as to exactly where the \$100 million is. I would say I believe it would be in the bank. But I might see whether Ms Wise has an answer?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you. Ms Wise?

Ms WISE: I am sorry. I do not play any role in the administration of those funds.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We will take it on notice. We will find out for you and get you an answer.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I would appreciate it. Let us look at future assistance. One of the problems here is that, of the money that was originally allocated, more than half of it, \$100 million, was not spent at all. That is one of the key issues you have in dealing with the industry, is it not? That is one of the reasons—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Absolutely. I mean, I think—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —there is a lack of trust?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Well, I do not think there is a lack of trust. I think those that came forward were probably not at the numbers that were expected in relation to hardship. Again, if there is funding there through hardship and obviously the PSL, I think we can have a look at that as part of an assistance package together. That will be something that I am sure when it comes to the Parliament you will have—

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The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Well, Deputy Premier, let me give you the numbers of people who came forward—1,258 applications were made. In more than half of those, 727, nil payments were made. Zero was paid out. That is the problem here. The Government promised \$142 million and stole \$100 million of it. That is what the industry thinks. That is what taxidrivers think. You promised one thing and you stole \$100 million of it. They want to know when it is coming back to the industry.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I would have to have a look. But I also note that the industry—which we have made representations for on their behalf—a lot of them got hardship payments and then had it taken away through social security payments.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Another issue. I agree, that was a second issue.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes. So in many respects where we gave them hardship payments those social security payments were impacted by the Federal Government. So, again, we acknowledged that and made representations—I know that the previous Minister and I both signed off on a letter to the Commonwealth in relation to this area.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I agree that was an additional problem with the labour fund restructure but the key issue that was raised was that the criteria were simply too tight. More than half of the people who desperately needed assistance were told, "You get nothing because you do not meet the very tight criteria." That is what happened. That is why there is \$100 million sitting in the Government bank account and not in the pockets of taxi drivers hit by this change. That is correct, is it not?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Well, you are right because there is \$42 million of that \$142 million that has been distributed and, you are right, we actually want to work with an eligibility criteria. We want to work with the taxi industry to provide an assistance package and I do not think we are not committed. It is about trying to work out what is the right outcome here for the industry and being able to achieve something a little bit earlier than 2058. I think that is important for—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But taxi drivers were promised this money. This was the Government's answer when they were under pressure and it simply was not delivered. Will you give a commitment that that \$100 million will be taken out of the account and put in the pockets of taxi drivers who have been impacted by these changes soon?

Mr SHARP: Mr Graham, if I could add some context there, there is a Taxi and Hire Vehicle Industries Assistance Panel that actually set that criteria and that panel did include the NSW Taxi Council and a number of government departments, including Treasury and Cabinet. But there was a set of criteria that was aimed at the circumstances at the time and there was industry input into that. Certainly from a Transport perspective, as we are going through this consultation period, we would be wanting to look at what is the appropriate criteria moving forward. Clearly not everyone met that criteria.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Mr Sharp, can you confirm whether the NSW Taxi Council was included as a full participant or as an observer on that panel?

Mr SHARP: I would have to take that on notice. All I know is that they were on the panel.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think their view is they were on as an observer and that is one of the reasons the industry has a concern that these criteria are too tight. Minister, given that that is the industry view—that these criteria were too tight—do you accept that the full amount as originally promised by the Government should be sent out the door urgently?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I will tell you this: I am prepared to continue to talk to the taxi industry. I am prepared for them to actually raise this as a matter and as something that we can actually continue to look at—and the criteria. I will continue to talk with them, as I did last week and as I continue to do each quarter.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Well, they have raised it very strongly. This is not news. They have raised it pretty strongly. What they want to know is when you are going to fix it.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: As I said, I will continue to talk to them about an assistance package. We are committed to that, Mr Graham.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I think they are pretty keen to get their money, Minister. That is my view.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I agree, but I am looking for your support when it comes through.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You have just got to get the money out to these taxis in regional New South Wales.

CORRECTED

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I am looking forward to your support when it comes up.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: We will see what it looks like when it comes up. I want to go back to the Inland Rail series of questions I started asking. It is on a different tangent. It is around consultation and some of the stakeholder groups. Minister, have you received representations from the NSW Farmers Association and the Country Women's Association [CWA] around their issues with Inland Rail? If you have, can you let the Committee know what your response is to their concerns?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes. There are a number of stakeholders that have raised concerns in relation to—and that is both CWA. We have had NSW Farmers and also a number of councils. Some of their concerns have been around consultation and I have made that very clear through my department and also reached out to the Federal Government about the consultation concerns that have been put forward by ARTC. I have actually raised that on their behalf. Another issue that has been raised is the fact around grade separation on some of those areas where rail interfaces with road. Obviously we have made very strong advocacy back to the Federal Government about the need for funding to be able to ensure that there is proper grade separation in those areas. We know that we have probably identified, I think, roundabout 22 of them. I know that the Commonwealth have now come forward with funding for five of them. But we also know that we are expecting them to actually provide a lot more than that because, again, when we are talking about safety between road and rail interfaces, it is critical that they actually understand that this is a key component and a key concern in our communities.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The consultation issue is raised a lot. It does not matter what side of politics. You have just got to go anywhere along that corridor and people will talk to you about the consultation. Generally the feedback to me is it has not been sufficient. When you raised the consultation mechanisms, did you suggest any improvements or enhancements in the consultation process, Minister?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Absolutely. Richard Wankmuller, the previous boss there—I have met with him and actually sat down with him at the time and told him directly what some of the feedback and concerns were from the community. They felt as though they were not being given a say. This is not a State project. I will make the point. So we are advocating on behalf of those communities, those councils and those various bodies.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It was not satisfactory.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Well, we made it very clear to them that we were not happy with it and that we felt as though it was in some cases being steamrolled through and that, therefore, adequate consultation needed to occur. We also raised through the former Deputy Prime Minister's office the need and the requirement for that to occur. I understand that was conveyed back to Inland Rail and I understand—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Have you asked them to go back and re-consult? There are particularly a couple of hotspots—I will call them—now along that corridor.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Absolutely. I will let Mr Sharp answer but we actually identified some of those areas of concern from those communities who were expressing a lack of consultation. That was expressed directly to Inland Rail but also to the former Deputy Prime Minister's office. Mr Sharp?

Mr SHARP: As secretary I have also met with the CEO of ARTC and conveyed these along with some other matters as well. But I can confirm the team has got an engagement point directly in with ARTC and that process of engagement has improved over recent months, so we will continue to advocate and we are doing so right at the most senior level of ARTC.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: And you can expect the complaints to your office to start declining? No? That would be the hope. Talking about the NSW Farmers Association, Minister, what is your relationship with them like?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I would say pretty good. I did a webinar not long ago with them—very grateful. I only met with them two weeks ago as well, so, yes, pretty good.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: In relation to the recent legislation that went through around the definition of "farm", you know, the 50 per cent income—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: The primary producer concession?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes, that is the one. They have got some pretty strong views around that. Did they convey this to you?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We have said that, before we go out, we will continue to work with them about the process and the forms that will be required as part of it anyway. I think that was something that we had committed to in the Parliament. You guys had raised it and we have said that we will continue to work with

CORRECTED

farmers before it commences. It will commence by the end of the year but we have also said that we want them to be part of developing and designing the process.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That legislation will commence before the end of the year? Is that what you promised?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I think it was 1 December, yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Okay.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: But it was important too that—this was actually about supporting genuine farmers as well through the primary producer concessions and making sure that those who should have been eligible for it are actually getting it.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: But, as you would be aware, sometimes off-farm income will change dependent upon season. So if you are just coming through a pretty hefty and long, deep drought, you look for income wherever you can. You may well find that the majority of your income is coming off farm because there has been no production on farm. This is part of the issue around definitions and around that 50 per cent threshold.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes. And I think too the biggest concern was the fact that there were sometimes, without naming any, other operators who actually were clearly not primary producers that were getting the concession, which caused some real concern. That caused concern to the Livestock, Bulk and Rural Carriers Association and also to NSW Farmers. It was something that we wished to address. I know there was an anomaly that went back 20 years and what we wanted to do was to make sure that we fixed it, got it right, and it actually assists those people that actually require it. We have paid them back for over three years as well—backdated—so going forward we need to change the system so it genuinely helps those that need it.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I have a quick question around the Dawson Street and Bruxner Highway intersection up in the electorate of Lismore—an election commitment in 2019, I think. Where is that up to, Minister? Those upgrades are pretty important to that community, as you would well be aware.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Absolutely. I would have to take it on notice, Mr Veitch. I know I have got it here somewhere but I will take it on notice.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Okay. If you take it on notice, could you let us know essentially where that project is up to and how many dollars have been expended to date against that project?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes, sure. Hang on, I have got something here. Here you go. Bruxner Highway, the Alstonville on-ramp is funded for \$5 million for construction. This project is an election commitment and the project will go out for community consultation in the coming weeks. Molesworth Street is funded for \$6 million for construction. This project is an election commitment. It is in response to community concerns regarding pedestrian safety in the Lismore town precinct. Transport for NSW is working with council to consider options for pedestrian improvements in the CBD as part of this project. A consultation submission report will be finalised by the end of 2021.

Wollongbar to Goonellabah upgrade development funded only to gate one; major project estimated between \$300 million and \$350 million. There is no construction funding but a strategic business case for the project has been completed. Last cost estimate in 2020; current cost estimate is expected to be more than \$350 million. Cowlong Road, there is \$200,000 for investigations of minor safety improvements. This is an election commitment. The project is within the W-G section and is near Alphadale. Lismore to Casino, funding for planning for overtaking lanes. Lismore to Casino, there are two smaller safety projects: Tatham Road intersection, shoulder widening, \$1.165 million for development and delivery by 2023—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Sorry, by 2023, so at the start of 2023, end of 2023?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It is 2023.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That is 12 months, okay.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Northcott, pavement rehabilitation and shoulder widening—\$4 million development and delivery by 2022.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The main thing, so December this year, that Dawson Street-Bruxner Highway, so in coming weeks—we have not many weeks left in the year so can I safely advise the local member that by December there should be community consultation taking place?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Mick, we will come back to you definitely on that particular question.

CORRECTED

Mr HAYES: Deputy Premier, if I can jump in there, we have been working with council on the pedestrian improvements in Dawson Street, and the project went on display yesterday.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Okay.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: You knew that, didn't you? That is why you asked the question.

The Hon. WES FANG: The Minister is over his brief, let me tell you.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Deputy Premier, I might return to the road reclassification promise—your signature promise to the bush.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I had lots of signature promises, and I tell you what: They are all good and they are all being delivered.

The Hon. WES FANG: Well done, Minister.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This is your biggest.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It is not one; I had a multiplier effect of signature election commitments, and I tell you what: They are going great.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This is the biggest and the slowest of those signature promises that you are referring to.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Which you guys created, a problem for us to actually fix.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I want to quote to you from internal Transport documents. This is the asset management plan for the decade from 2018-19. It states about the change, "The financial implications of taking responsibility for some or all regional roads needs to consider the total life cycle costs as well as the agency depreciation cost impacts. In addition, there would be a requirement for an up-front capital injection to lift the standard of the transferred regional roads where appropriate." It then says, "The increased maintenance cost to the State would be partially offset by the phased removal of the annual block and repair grant programs to the relevant councils." Deputy Premier, isn't that the plan, that you are going to fund these roads by cutting the money from councils? That is what your agency says in a document that sits on your desk.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Mr Graham, as you know, we are actually providing more funding out there to councils than ever before, so I think when you have a look at the end of this—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You are not answering the question.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Hang on, yes I am, because this is a government also which actually has put \$250 million through our budgetary process as part of—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You are giving with one hand and taking with the other.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: No, sorry, we are not—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am asking about road reclassification.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We are not reducing the amount of funding through the repair and block grants. We are not reducing that. What we are actually doing is putting an additional \$250 million to allow roads to be reclassified through our process.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Well, you are.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: That is a quarter of a billion dollars—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Can I re-read you—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: That is a quarter of a billion dollars that you never had.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: That is a quarter of a billion dollars that you never put on the table.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. WES FANG: Chair, I am—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It is a bit rude to cut the Minister off.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: He was just getting warmed up.

CORRECTED

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, he was—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: A bit rude. He just cut you off!

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. WES FANG: I will now address two points of order, Chair. The first one is that the Minister was providing great detail about the \$250 million that he was providing to councils, and I was keen to hear more about it, but I could not hear him through the interruptions of the Hon. John Graham.

The CHAIR: And your second point?

The Hon. WES FANG: The second point is that while I was trying to raise the point of order in this forum—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The Minister kept talking over you.

The Hon. WES FANG: —the Hon. Mick Veitch and the Hon. John Graham are tag team talking over the top of me.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: The bushwhackers.

The Hon. WES FANG: I think that is wholly inappropriate. I would ask you to call both of them to order and allow the Minister to continue telling us about the \$250 million he is providing to councils.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Throw them out, Chair.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: A two-on-one tag match against the Hon. Wes Fang.

The CHAIR: I accept that second point of order. If members could not talk while points of order are taken, that would be fantastic. Please proceed in a way in which everyone can be heard.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you, Chair. I will read it to you again, Deputy Premier, because this is the department's plan. It states, "The increased maintenance cost to the State would be partially offset by the phased removal of the annual block and repair grant payments to the relevant councils." That is your department's plan. I am asking, is that still the plan? You are the Minister. Because you have not told councils that. Is this still the plan?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: You need to understand that transferring a road means that when it actually changes classification it no longer needs repair and block funding.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So the phased—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Let the Minister answer.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: That is exactly what happens when you transfer a road. You no longer need block and repair funding for that particular road. What I will also say to you is that we have got another \$250 million in a bucket over here to assist the process. We are also—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So it will all be gone from councils.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Let him finish.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I never said that. That must be the Labor policy.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, I am reading from the Transport plan.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: So here you are, you are putting a policy here. You are going to take funding away from councils.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: What happens to those road crews, Minister?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I cannot believe that you would want to take more block funding away from councils.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am reading your Transport plan.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: You are reading a policy.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I want to know what happens to those road crews when you do the phased removal—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Understand, when you transfer—

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr PAUL TOOLE: When you transfer the road, you no longer need block and repair funding because it has been reclassified so, therefore, it does not require—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Have you told those council road crews that? Minister, you have never been up-front with those council road crews.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: No, we have been very up-front, and you actually know that because we have always said that regional jobs has been a focus for us in the regional classification of roads, and you know that exactly.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: When you remove all those block and repair grants, what happens to those road crews?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: You know what? I'll tell you what: There's going to be better roads than what you did, and we are not going to have a situation whereby you just dump roads onto councils and provide no financial support. We are fixing a problem—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: They will be sacked one day. Those road crews in local councils will be sacked.

Mr SHARP: Mr Graham, we have talked specifically to the councils, and we are very aware of their concerns around the local maintenance workforces. We recognise that, and in fact the New South Wales Government has asked the Committee to look at the consideration of the actual funding, so this is quite complex.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I realise that, Mr Sharp.

Mr SHARP: The funding around this covers a number of areas. You have got the road classifications, the road transfers. There is road uplifts, there is road grant funding, and we have got maintenance contracts. Overlaying that, as a principle we want to maintain jobs in the local communities. So we have listened to the councils. We understand their concern. We actually have that complexity with the panel, and we have asked them to specifically look at that so we can work through what is the right combination of funding that actually achieves the right outcomes. That is underway at the moment.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Let me ask you about the time line then because this analysis was a high-level financial analysis—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: What is the document you are referring to?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I told you at the start; it is the—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: No, can you just refer to your document? What is it?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, it is the asset management plan 2018-19 to 2027-28, page 74. The high-level financial analysis in this document shows what this costs for RMS to implement this commitment, and it shows that it will not be complete until 2027-28. You are already two years later than the start date in your original asset management plan, so that takes us to 2029-30 before this takes place. Is that a realistic time frame, Minister, for when you will have actually completed this transfer?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I do not know, Mr Graham, but it took you guys 10 years last time to actually go through the process of reclassifying roads. Then when you got to the end of the 10 years you just dumped them overnight on the councils.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It was not a 10-year process last time.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I specifically remember being a mayor, and what you did was, we woke up with a press release finding out that these roads had been reclassified—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, this was your signature commitment a minute ago. I am asking about it.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: —and it was like, "Good luck, councils. Bad luck, go and find the money to actually repair it." We are actually fixing your problem. I point out on the record as well—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: When will this be fixed?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I also put on the record that even Mr Veitch, your partner there, acknowledges that this is a complex process and he has even said, in *The Armidale Express* on 31 January 2020, that this is a big task and it is critical that it is done well and with councils' interest at the heart of it.

CORRECTED

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I would agree with those comments, Minister, although I tend to agree with my colleague most of the time.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We also said at previous budget estimates—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, you have made your point.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: My turn. My turn.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

The CHAIR: I will hear the point of order. Is it the same one?

The Hon. WES FANG: No, actually, Chair. No, it is not. I think the Hon. John Graham does not like being criticised and when he is criticised by his own colleague through his words in *The Armidale Express*—and congratulations to the Hon. Mick Veitch on going to Armidale—

The CHAIR: Is this really a point of order, Mr Fang?

The Hon. WES FANG: It is. I just think that the Minister is clearly across his brief and he wants to provide a very detailed answer. I think the courtesy is upon us to allow the Minister to do that because he is providing a very detailed response, and I myself am very keen to hear it.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: To the point of order: The Minister is ranging freely. The issue I am struggling with in this hearing is if we could draw him back to the actual question that is being asked. I am happy to restate it, but that is the issue I am having in this specific instance.

The Hon. WES FANG: To the point of order—

The CHAIR: I have heard enough. I think we can allow the free-range Minister to continue answering the questions. If we could have a little bit of a pause between answer and question, that would be useful for Hansard.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The question was just about that time line. Your department's internal documents show that this was due to be complete 2027-28. It is now two years later than that internal document showed it would start. That takes us to 2029-30. You have never been up-front as a government about when this will be concluded. Is that the time line, 2029-30, as to when this 15,000 kilometres will be transferred?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I have just been told that the document that you are holding actually predates the work of the panel, so we might put that on the record as well.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, I think that is fair.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: So the asset document that you actually have predates the panel. It is not our current status or approval. I will also point out that we always said at the previous budget estimates that this would take eight years for roads to be reclassified under this process, and you know that. I have actually made that very clear here at previous budget hearings where you have asked me the question on numerous occasions. What I will say is this: I think—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, you have just answered my question.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Allow the Minister to answer.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Pause. My turn. What I will say is this: I think the panel under the circumstances that they have had to deal with community consultation and council engagement have actually done a pretty good job over the past 18 months by engaging with councils. Understand, there has been a little thing out there called COVID, which has made it quite difficult for them to be able to change the way in which they have engaged with councils. They have already gone out for priority rounds.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, you have actually just answered my question.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We are now in the process of a main round and that will actually allow councils by the end of the year—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But I think you have confirmed there, let me put this to you—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Let him answer.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: —to actually put forward their roads and their roads for consideration as part of the road reclassification review.

CORRECTED

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Let me put this to you because I think we agree on this. You say this will be an eight-year process, and from here that will take us to 2029-30. I think we are actually agreeing that that is the time line for this process.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: What we will do is we will actually stage it, like we have already announced. We have already started the process of actually taking back roads. Even when that main round has been completed, we will actually stage the next phase. So there may be multiple stages of taking roads back. We will need to make sure that work is done in relation to what roads are being put forward by the panel. We actually have to have a look at the status of those roads. We will have to look at what works are required to bring them up to a higher standard in some cases. Some may be relatively easy to actually transfer.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think we agree on this.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Some actually may require a lot more work that is required in investing—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, my colleague is on the record in the paper in Armidale.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I know what he said in Armidale. He said it is a big and complex process.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You know we agree on this.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You should read the full quote.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: So this is a holistic view here.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Taking into account this will not be done until 2030—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: No, you are saying 2030.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, I think we agree.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: You are saying 2030. If it was a Labor government it would probably be 2060.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Well, you can make that case.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We need to be clear here that—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The thing you never talked about before the election, as you travelled around the State giving country communities hope was that this would fix their roads, is that this would fix roads in Parramatta or Blacktown or Liverpool. Given the slow start and given the long time line until 2030, why are you rushing through road reclassifications or transfers in Parramatta, Blacktown and Liverpool? Why are you doing that as the Leader of The Nationals?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: You say we are rushing it, but we are not rushing anything. I am even saying to you indicatively it could be eight years. It could even be earlier than that. But seriously what we are doing is—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: How do you explain dealing with roads in Parramatta, Blacktown and Liverpool when bush roads—

The Hon. WES FANG: I am loath to take a point of order—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: The panel is doing it. It has to be considered carefully and it has got to be a considered approach when we are actually looking at roads for reclassification. What is important is the fact that the panel has done its work, the panel have asked for priority roads to be put forward by councils. They have now gone out to ask for the main round. We have got \$250 million on the table to actually begin the process. What we are seeing here is a real commitment from this Government in delivering on our election commitments, and that is actually improving roads in regional and rural parts of the State. That is not going to take away our commitment for what is identified in regional and rural areas, so you—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Are you going to count these roads in Parramatta and Liverpool and Blacktown—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: They are separate.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —in the 15,000 kilometres?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: They are separate to our regional and rural roads, and we have always said it is up to 15,000.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So these have been rushed through, but you will not count them in the 15,000. You are at least giving that commitment.

CORRECTED

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Do you know what? They are not regional and rural roads. Our commitment was for regional road reclassification.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am starting to ask exactly what your commitment was. That is why I am asking.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It is our regional road reclassification, but the piece of work that the panel will do will be also looking at classifications of roads in other parts of the State. It does not impact on the election commitment that was given by this Government before the last election.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So you have given these the rubber stamp, they are through, but you will not count them in the 15,000 kilometres.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: They are not part of our regional road reclassification.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, can I just go back—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: To *The Armidale Express*?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: We should read the full quote. It is probably pretty important. Mind you, *The Armidale Express* has not been mentioned so many times—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Is anyone reading it nowadays?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: There has been the initial announcement. There is a body of work now. You said you are going to phase this. Clearly, based on your statements earlier, you are not going to do one big bulk transfer or reclassification now; there is going to be some phasing of this.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: That is still to be determined because this has to go through, once we get the main round—we will get the main round of roads that are being put forward by the panel. There is still the process of that going to Cabinet. Transport will need to do its work around the roads that have been put forward for consideration, so we will need to understand the status of the road today as well.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: To be clear, going forward from here there is going to be more than one rollout—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We will not go back because we will actually have the main round, so the roads will already be identified. So they will all be bulked up and identified and I would presume, from there, there may be priority roads that need to be considered in a phased approach as well.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: And the funding envelope that comes with that?

Mr SHARP: In May this year we went out to tender for specialist consultants to actually work with us on that economic modelling that I spoke about earlier. The financial complexities are significant and we are well into that exercise. So that part of it is already well underway.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Okay. What I am worried about here—and I know the Minister has been hearing this from councils as well. They put their bids in for work, and this is in the current environment or situation, and by the time they are announced that they are successful, the input costs have changed. Some of the material costs are actually going up and so there needs to be adjustments made. If we do this in a phased process, they are going to need to be able to go back and revisit the dollars, surely.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We will have to assess more roads as we go forward, so we will probably have to—once we understand what the nature of those roads will be, that is \$250 million to start. That is a start. We will actually be going out there and looking at what roads in the next round. It is still hard to know how much of that \$250 million to begin with is going to be used because we still need to actually do some work around those roads that have already been identified as priorities now for reclassification.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, have you advised the councils that you are going to move through this process in a round by round or phase by phase way?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: There are two rounds. I have always been up-front. There are two.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: But the phased implementation then.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We will still have to determine that through Cabinet and obviously that is our Cabinet processes, but when I have spoken to joint organisations, when I have spoken to councils, they understand that this is over a number of years. I have made that very clear in all of my meetings with all the councils and all

CORRECTED

the joint organisations, country mayors, whenever I have spoken to them about how this process works. What they also say to me is, "Thank God you guys are spending over a billion dollars in fixing country bridges and fixing local roads because they are fantastic programs that are delivering for us right now." And the fact that I have also told them that we have now got \$250 million, they are very grateful that there is actually dollars. Linda Scott from Local Government NSW—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Is that the quantum though? Is that \$250 million just for what has been announced—the roads to be reclassified?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It is still—we do not know exactly what it will be until Transport has done its work, so it could be a component of that \$250 million but what I think is important is we have got a quarter—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It could be all of that \$250 million.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: What is important is we have got a quarter of a billion dollars on the table to actually begin the process, and it is serious dollars from a government. It shows that, by having a quarter of a billion dollars on the table, we are serious about the road reclassification as part of our election commitment and delivery of it.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Okay. And so, your engagement with local councils around this is critical because they are probably the most major stakeholder in this process.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes., they are.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You mentioned Linda Scott but are you having ongoing dialogue then with Local Government NSW and the union around what this will mean going forward?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: So Local Government NSW, I think their last release was actually basically saying, "We're encouraged that the Government has actually set aside a quarter of a billion dollars for these upgrades." So they actually acknowledged, too, that this investment that is being made, this funding allocation that is being made by the Government is also going to assist in the works that will be required on some of these roads.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: But there will be more money coming once the other roads are determined?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes, and there may be money left over in the priority round as well for a whole host of new roads that are being announced, but I think what is important is here, at least over the next three years, there is a quarter of a billion dollars that is being set aside to actually ensure that the road reclassification program can run and actually bring those roads up to, in some cases, a different standard.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And will you rule out any of that money being spent in Blacktown or Parramatta or Liverpool?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: This is our \$250 million for regional.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes, I will, because it is the regional roads reclassification quarter of a billion dollar fund.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Good, good, good.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: And I do not consider them to be regional.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Well, you had us confused.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Some people might—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: If Labor were in, they might.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: —but I certainly do not.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: No: Trust me, it is for the regions. Minister, I just wanted to ask again about consultation. So the Lower Hunter freight rail corridor—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: —and the consultation processes that have taken place around that. Again, our members up there are receiving concerns around that consultation process. Why are we not waiting until the M1 is done or progressed with regard to this corridor?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: So, the consultation that is taking place at the moment for the Lower Hunter Freight Corridor, I mean we are talking about something that is going to be used in 10 or 20 years.

CORRECTED

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: But we also know that there is a lot of growth, there is a lot of development, within that area. So, I understand that, as part of this, this is about looking at that particular line for freight as we go forward. What we need to do is to make sure that consultation now is about preserving that corridor so that we do not see further development on the corridor and then we are looking at a future date in trying to buy it back rather than preserve it now. Yes, I have had some local members who have made representation. I think that is what they should do on behalf of the community. There will be more opportunity for the community to have its say in relation to the Lower Hunter Freight Corridor as well. One of the views that has come up, and this is part of the conversation—we are not going to make a decision on this in the near future. This is a long-term project but what we need to do is to make sure that we are preserving the corridor. That is the critical point right now.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I guess I can take it from here that you can guarantee there is going to be further consultation and opportunities for those communities?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Absolutely, and I would certainly ask you to make sure that the local members are aware of that as well, if not.

Mr SHARP: If I could add, the Lake Macquarie and City of Newcastle councils, in particular, have advocated for a release of our preferred options for the corridor and that is to actually help with the land use conversations around the M1. There are potential opportunities to co-locate some of the corridor with the M1 and we have committed to consultation. In fact, that has been extended recently off the back of COVID but we are in dialogue with those local councils about those options.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Consultation comes up a lot with all these projects, which you will be well aware of, Minister. As a matter of interest, at the end of each of these projects—whether it be Milton-Ulladulla, Burrill Lake, whether it be Brown Mountain, whether it be the Hunter freight corridor—does the department, after the exercise, review the consultation mechanisms to work out how we could do it better each time? Do we take the time to reflect and learn the lessons?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Absolutely. I think with any major project there are always strong views that come from the community about any major projects. I think we accept that, but what the department tries to do is to actually ensure that those voices are heard and at the end of the day if we can actually make changes to the project, we will try to do that to accommodate the needs of individuals and communities in various cases. I mean, one of the really positive things—and you would be aware of the area—but even on the Great Western Highway we actually went out and created what is known as a co-design committee. That was the first time that Transport did something like that. It allowed a number of residents from the Blackheath community to actually be part of that committee, to actually determine what was going to be the best option for that area. I met with that group after Transport had done the work and they told me that that was probably the best consultation process that they have ever been engaged in.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Is that something you could roll out in—

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We are trying it now on the Princes Highway. Down in Burrill Lake, we actually have a co-design committee there. Because it was so successful, the community was engaged and they had their voices heard, what we are doing is rolling that out now at Burrill Lake. I think there are opportunities again—not everywhere is going to have that kind of a solution—but the co-design committee that worked there, we are actually trying to emulate it down in the community of Burrill Lake for that particular project on the Princes Highway.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you for that observation, Minister; that is of real interest. I might ask about the great Western Highway, just with the groups, in particular, that are raising issues around Medlow Bath. I believe you have spoken to them and that they have talked to you about their desire to extend your very long tunnel even further—up to 19 kilometres. They understood that in fact you had given them a good hearing and you had gone away to direct your agency to look at this. Where is that issue up to?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes, look—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: What action have you taken?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Transport has engaged with the Medlow Bath community. I know that they would like to consider having a longer tunnel. As you are aware, having a four-kilometre tunnel under Mount Victoria, having a four-and-a-half-kilometre tunnel under Blackheath, we are now doing the works to actually look at joining the two together and that will actually create the longest road tunnel here in Australia. That will be an 11-kilometre tunnel. This project has always been one that has been very challenging. The topography makes it

CORRECTED

very difficult but, again, you know, if we are going to look at extending it out to 19 kilometres, the project itself is not going to be feasible.

The project itself would extend over 10 years. It is going to add billions of dollars additional to the project. What the main concern that was coming out of Medlow Bath was the fact that they wanted safety upgrades. We have addressed that. That is why I wanted to start there as part of the works on the east and the western end of the road, to make sure that those previous upgrades that happen before my time as the Minister could be addressed. Not everywhere does there need to be a tunnel. I mean, there is enough space above the surface to be able to do that. It would have impacts. If we were to go below the surface there with a tunnel as well, there are factors around gradients—all of that. I have met with those who have actually put forward their proposal. The other thing is, too—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But it is fair to say, listening to that answer, that is not an option that is on the table.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: It is not. It is not an option.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: And I do say there is a group of people who have actually wanted to sit down with, you know, about the 19—I have met them.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. Understood.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: They also want to meet with Transport. Transport has reached out to them but they have not come back actually indicating that they will meet with Transport. The door is still open for them to actually explain to them why this is not possible.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: What we want to see here is duplication of the lanes going from—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am just conscious of the time, Minister, so we might go to my colleague, but thank you for that answer.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: A couple of things very quickly: During the four months of the recent Delta outbreak, regional transportation and the truckies did an outstanding job with the logistics of getting our freight around. But there were some stumbling blocks around COVID, and particularly in the roadside rest areas. I understand a fair bit of work was done to try to make sure that they were able to pull over and get a feed, have a shower and whatever else in a COVID-safe way. Now that everyone is freeing up from 1 November, what are the measures for making sure our roadside rest areas are going to be COVID compliant?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: A couple of things just very quickly: I think our freight industry has done a phenomenal job.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I do not think anyone disagrees.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I have a freight industry task force who I regularly meet with. They have been phenomenal at just making sure that they can move goods and supplies across the State to make sure that the supermarkets are full and pharmacists have got their supplies. It has been an amazing job. We have also set up testing sites. We have 11 of them across the State now so that the industry can be tested, because you cannot just pull up one of these large rigs into a community testing site.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You could, but it could be dangerous.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We have got them now at 11 sites across the State, and they are being well used. Can I just say that even from May to now some of them have actually increased by about 1,600 per cent, just with the number of freight operators that have been getting tested at these particular sites. Rest stops—I think this is a pretty important area for us as well. I can tell you that we are doing work around the rest stops. I know you have got a brother-in-law who is a truck driver. Is that who it was?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes, and a brother.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: And a brother, yes. In 2022-23, we have got 50 rest area sites that are going to see improvements being delivered. That is including around lighting, amenities, toilets and signage. We have got a rest area digital map review and update. That is using those green reflector signs, as well, to alert truck drivers that they are coming up to those rest stops in various locations.

CORRECTED

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: But specifically about the COVID safety going forward, from 1 November we will have people coming out. Up until now it has been pretty quiet on a lot of those roads, so the truckies have had pretty much free rein on some of the rest areas.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: We have got trials as well. We are going to have trials where we have got CCTV set up at a number of rest stops to try to actually understand some of those key areas as to what the engagement is between light vehicles and heavy vehicles, because we do not want them parking there. We are trying to get a better understanding of compliance and allowing them to be able to use the rest stops for what they are intended for. The other thing, too, we are trying to do is look at real-time tracking. We can even have the truck operators having technology to be able to show that there is a freed-up space at rest stops. That kind of technology is something we are looking at as well.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Thank you. There has been a bit of advocacy coming out of Bega shire, I think it is, around having the Princes Highway and the Snowy Mountains Highway deemed to be disaster-resilient highways—so investing a quite substantial amount of money to make them flood-, fire- and whatever-proof. Have they approached you about that? Do you support the concept of a disaster-resilient highway? In your head, what would you see that being?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I see it as a number of things, and this is part of the work that we are doing anyway through Resilience. One of the things is about making sure—some of those smaller communities potentially have got an access in and out, and that is it.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Not the same road.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: Yes, one access in and out, so we are looking at whether there is a possibility in the future for alternative routes if there are natural disasters. We have also done a lot of work, and Transport has engaged a lot of contractors who have done a lot of work, in relation to cleaning up on the sides of the roads those trees that were burnt that posed a high risk of falling over. Even if there was a small wind, at the end of the day, some of these limbs and trees could potentially fall over. There has been an enormous amount of work that Transport has undertaken to remove those trees, from a safety perspective. Again, it is about having an alternative route, at the end of the day, for some of these communities when they have only got one access in and out. We have seen that happen in some of those areas of the south previously.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes, the bushfires highlighted the extreme risk of having one road in and the same road out.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I think so.

Mr SHARP: I will just confirm there was a bushfire corridor resilience program that we kicked off last year. That is in conjunction with Resilience NSW, and quite a few phases have already been rolled out. The aim there is to have two routes in and out and to make sure, if there is a disaster, that you can reopen those routes quickly. The plan is well underway, and it is in conjunction with Resilience NSW.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The Bega Valley shire's request specifically is around the Princes Highway and the Snowy Mountains Highway, and making those disaster-resilient highways. Have they approached you with this concept?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I have met with the council, and I think it was one of the things that the mayor raised with me. I cannot 100 per cent recall. I am pretty sure it was, but there was a number of topics that we covered on the day that I met with him.

The CHAIR: Order! Your time has expired, unfortunately. I will just check whether the Government has any questions.

The Hon. WES FANG: I have not.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Wes has got 15 minutes of compliments.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: We all want to sit back and watch Wes with his 15 minutes.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I think the Minister wants to leave the room.

The Hon. WES FANG: I do not need the Minister.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I think the Minister deserves an early mark, as do the departmental staff.

The CHAIR: On that note, thank you to Deputy Premier Toole and the Government officials for attending today. That wraps up our hearing for today. The Committee secretariat will be in touch shortly in relation to any supplementary questions or questions taken on notice.

CORRECTED

(The Minister withdrew.)

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.