HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Wednesday, June 15, 2011

LEGISLATIVE CHAMBER

Halifax-Dartmouth Bridge Commission

Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services

Public Accounts Committee

Ms. Diana Whalen, Chairman
Mr. Howard Epstein, Vice-Chairman
Mr. Clarrie MacKinnon
Ms. Michele Raymond
Mr. Mat Whynott
Mr. Brian Skabar
Hon. Keith Colwell
Mr. Chuck Porter
Mr. Allan MacMaster

[Mr. Leonard Preyra replaced Mr. Howard Epstein]
[Mr. Gary Ramey replaced Mr. Brian Skabar]

In Attendance:

Mrs. Darlene Henry
Legislative Committee Clerk

Ms. Ann McDonald
Assistant Auditor General

Mr. Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

WITNESSES

Halifax-Dartmouth Bridge Commission

Mr. Wayne Mason, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners
Mr. Steve Snider, General Manager & Chief Executive Officer
Ms. Carolyn O'Brien Feindel, Chief Financial Officer

House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 15, 2011

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

9:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN
Ms. Diana Whalen

VICE-CHAIRMAN
Mr. Howard Epstein

MR. MAT WHYNOTT (Chairman): We'll call the meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to order. We will do a brief introduction of our members, so I'll begin with Ms. Raymond, please.

[The committee members and witnesses introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: As is the custom here, we will first give an opportunity for our witnesses to give an opening statement and then move on to 20-minute intervals for each caucus.

Mr. Mason.

MR. WAYNE MASON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, committee members. I should mention to you that I've had the privilege of holding this office for all of a month and a half, so you'll forgive me if I end up deferring some of the questions over to Mr. Snider and Ms. Feindel.

Thank you for the invitation to present to the Public Accounts Committee about the Halifax Harbour bridges. It has been more than 10 years since we were here last, and we look forward to discussing our mandate with you. Our mandate is to provide safe, efficient, and reliable transportation at an appropriate cost.

Over the next few minutes I'll update you on the HHB accomplishments over the last 10 years. Much of this information is referred to in the material we sent out in advance, so you should probably have that with you, I'm sure. Following this, we'll be pleased to answer some questions you may have.

In 2000, when HHB was here last, it had just completed the third-lane project on the Macdonald Bridge and had launched electronic tolling, which we know as MACPASS. At that time HHB reported a gross capital debt of $123 million. Within 10 years, only $51 million of that debt remained. To maintain safety and keep up with growth, an additional $100 million was spent on maintenance and capital projects over that same time period. Clearly there was responsible fiscal management during this time.

With the additional capacity afforded by the third lane and MACPASS, congestion as we knew it was virtually a thing of the past. Congestion is growing, and shortly we'll share with you how HHB is responding to the challenge.

Annual inspections on both bridges form the basis for decision-making for approval of mid- and long-term capital and maintenance projects. This work ensures that the bridges remain safe for the travelling public, despite the fact that the bridges are aging. The Macdonald Bridge is 56 years old and the MacKay Bridge is 41 years old.

Most of you are aware, yet I do want to highlight that HHB is funded through tolls and receives no funding from the provincial or municipal governments. However, in the past 12 months, to improve safety, HHB has completed capital works on the MacKay Bridge totaling $9.2 million, half of which was funded by the federal Infrastructure Stimulus Fund. This is the only external funding HHB has received in the last 25 years.

In a recent third party survey, 71 per cent of the respondents said they strongly support, or support, repairs to the bridges even if it means lane reductions to do the work. Although it comes at a slightly higher cost, maintenance, when possible, is scheduled during the evening and weekends to minimize inconvenience to the travelling public.

The two bridges are becoming more expensive to maintain. In 2011 alone, we've budgeted $14.5 million in capital expenditure. This is primarily due to the age and the increase in traffic volume. In 1955 traffic was approximately 2.7 million crossings. In 2010 traffic was approximately 33.7 million crossings per year. So you can see the significant growth.

In early 2015 the largest project since the building of the MacKay Bridge in 1970 will begin, the replacement of the suspended spans of the Macdonald Bridge. The design work is taking place now and the on-site work will begin in early 2015 and end in late 2016. When the third lane on the Macdonald Bridge was added, the deck on the approach spans was replaced as well. At that time it was estimated the deck on the suspended span had about another 15 years of life. The board has approved the Macdonald suspension

span's redecking project because the deck is wearing out and the maintenance costs are increasing. The engineers who will do this project and work on this project also completed the same project on the Lions Gate Bridge, in Vancouver, a decade ago.

This project is expected to cost between $185 million and $205 million and because it is only the second time a project of this nature has been completed, we can expect to attract worldwide attention. The cost associated with this project is the reason HHB requested the recent toll increase as approved by the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board. With strong fiscal management, decreasing interest rates and increasing revenue, we were able to avoid a toll increase for almost 20 years. However, funding a project of this size through borrowing a loan is not fiscally responsible.

With the introduction of MACPASS, HHB has been able to more effectively manage the increase in traffic volume over the past 12 years. Launched in 1998, MACPASS has seen tremendous growth. During the peak hours 80 per cent of crossings are now made with MACPASS. In a 24-hour period, approximately 72 per cent of crossings are made with MACPASS. In the North American tolling industry, this ranks in the higher penetration levels. HHB has leveraged the use of MACPASS at the Stanfield International Airport. If you replenish your MACPASS account with a credit card, you can use your MacPass for long and short-term parking at the airport. Approximately 2,200 MACPASS transactions are made at the airport each month for parking.

In 2005 HHB responded to the need to fully understand the dimensions of the congestion problem that was continuing as a result of population growth and development within HRM. A traffic study was conducted and concluded there are no further improvements we can make that will provide any notable congestion relief on the bridges. In 2009 HHB commissioned a study on peak period tolling and one-way tolling to determine if either of these measures would help reduce congestion. The study concluded that given current conditions, peak period tolling and one-way tolling on the harbour bridges would not noticeably assist in reducing traffic congestion at this time, and the study showed that substantial change in demand would only occur if a very significant increase in tolls were applied - a 500 per cent increase in bridge tolls to $3 would result in a bridge crossing demand reduction of only 15 per cent.

HHB promotes active transportation in a variety of ways, including a dedicated sidewalk and bike lane on the Macdonald Bridge, plus sponsoring HRM's Annual Bike Week and the Halifax Cycling Coalition's social marketing campaign. Each year HHB flies banners on the Macdonald Bridge promoting other modes of transportation. In May HHB was awarded the 2011 Halifax Cycling Award from the Halifax Cycling Coalition for recognition for our outstanding contribution to the encouragement of cycling in Halifax Regional Municipality.

The Board of Commissioners at the Halifax-Dartmouth Bridge Commission is very active, forward-thinking and focused. The board is responding to current needs and

looking into the future with the same mandate as in 1950 - to provide safe, efficient and reliable passage at an appropriate cost.

Thank you for your time. I'll be pleased to answer your questions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We will begin with the Liberal caucus and your time is 9:12 a.m.

HON. KEITH COLWELL: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to see you gentlemen and ladies here today. It's always interesting to see how the Bridge Commission is doing, and by your financial report I'm glad to see that many improvements have been made over the years - and the financial situation of the bridge, that wasn't always the case so I want to give you credit for that. Prior to the management structure you have there now there was a different story altogether, as you're well aware of. I think you deserve a lot of credit for that fine job.

I know the task is horrendous. It's a very difficult thing to maintain a structure as that, especially steel over a body of salt water - it makes it very, very difficult to maintain. And the traffic, which I can testify to, is getting worse, and worse, and worse - of course you have no control over that whatsoever.

A couple of things concern me when I travel the bridge. Has HRM been helpful at all in the exits and entrances to the bridge? From my understanding, once you're off the bridge span, it is strictly HRM - have they been helpful at all trying to resolve the traffic? When you travel the bridge, what I see is the bridge flows pretty well, but when you hit the other side of the bridge, either side, then you're held up. Has HRM done anything to help you within this regard?

MR. MASON: I can probably answer a fair amount of that, although Mr. Snider did serve on committees with HRM when they developed a lot of the changes that you now see at either end, particularly at the Halifax end. So if you wouldn't mind, I'd defer the answer to Mr. Snider.

MR. STEVE SNIDER: Halifax Regional Municipality and ourselves, along with the Province of Nova Scotia Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, serve on a collective committee called the Strategic Joint Regional Transportation Committee. Through that committee we discuss potential improvements around the city, in the municipality, in relation to the bridges.

Halifax has done some work, the city has done some work at the Windsor-Kempt interchange where we've had traffic backed up from that all the way back on to the bridge, so they made improvements there. The commission itself, actually, made improvements on the Halifax end of the MacKay Bridge a couple of years ago when we had dedicated lanes from Windsor Street and from Robie Street so that we don't have the merging issue. That

was collectively designed and thought through by HRM and ourselves, so there is ongoing coordination.

In terms of further improvements, for instance, one thing that occurs to us is that if North Street were a little wider, it would serve well, but that's a major task. We have had discussions, but no major actions at this point in time.

MR. COLWELL: As I say, when you travel over the bridge all the time, as I do when I come to Halifax, it's - the other thing I notice when you're travelling the bridge is that a lot of people, and you have signs up, "no lane changes," but it is never enforced, and I see that sometimes holds up traffic, because people get in one lane and they see that one is stopped, so they switch to the other lane and then they move when they come off the bridge, especially coming to Halifax.

That causes congestion there that shouldn't be there - is there any intention of enforcing that or making sure that people don't change lanes once they are on the actual bridge?

MR. SNIDER: We currently do not conduct any enforcement on lane changing on the bridges. The last time that was done was prior to myself being at the commission, which has been 17 years. Back before we expanded what we call the K-ramp on the MacKay Bridge, there was a point in time where there was virtually road rage and fights at that merge point.

We have examined the flow on the Macdonald Bridge, you know, traffic going up North Street, traffic going around Barrington Street, and I've questioned staff as to why the Barrington traffic is so slow. They advise me that the biggest problem there is the tightness of that radius, looping around. That, in itself, slows traffic down. I know that some people do scoot across the centre lane and cut over. At this point in time it is pretty tough to do any amount of enforcement. I'm not quite sure how we'd do that.

MR. COLWELL: Usually on the inside lane, when you go down onto Barrington Street, what happens is somebody goes straight up the hill, a pedestrian walks across and everything stops - as it should do, of course. Sometimes those people cut into the traffic partly across the bridge, seeing that the other lane is stopped. Then they're going up over the hill and it does stop the traffic, because if the traffic is turning - I always turn down onto Barrington Street - as the traffic continually turns onto Barrington Street it flows steadily, not fast, but steadily and fast enough, but once they get on that spot and they get stopped right there, then the traffic stops and it stops on the bridge and backs up way, way up. It doesn't take very long to do that.

I don't know what you do about it, but just driving it every time that I do, I see the same thing over and over again - mostly the Angus L. Macdonald Bridge is the biggest problem; the MacKay Bridge moves pretty well. I mean, there are not issues with someone

changing lanes; it doesn't really affect anything, but the Macdonald Bridge is always a problem and a lot of people travel that. Of course, it is closer to downtown, the whole nine yards, but it does have a problem – and then when you come off it, going to Dartmouth, again there are issues there when you come off.

Have you looked at the traffic lights at all with HRM, to see if they can be adjusted at different times of the day, to make sure that they are appropriate for the time of the day, as the traffic comes and goes?

MR. SNIDER: My understanding is the green time is - I'm not a transportation engineer, but the length of time in which you have green lights varies from the morning to the evening, so it is automatically controlled. One thing we've suggested that the city consider is permitting a double left-hand turn onto Wyse Road, but they've declined that. They're focused on getting traffic straight up to Victoria Road, off the bridge. We've had discussions on that topic.

The challenge with the Macdonald Bridge is that it runs from city intersection to city intersection. You have a set of traffic lights at one end and a set of traffic lights at the other. On the Dartmouth end, you have traffic looking to go in three different directions - that challenges us as to how we have lane configurations on the toll plaza itself, for instance, the focus of dedicated MACPASS lanes. Then again, our transportation system also serves pedestrians, and we have pedestrians crossing there and just up from the bridge, from the Sportsplex to the shopping centre - a lot of pedestrian traffic.

There is a balance. Frequent users know which lanes to get in, and the best routes. Most often the challenge is for infrequent users. We have reviewed this with HRM and we have had discussions, but there are no current plans to make any major changes.

MR. COLWELL: That's really the point I was trying to get to, because HRM - from the past I can understand that they haven't been totally as co-operative as they could have been with the Bridge Commission. That was just my personal opinion, serving on regional council and seeing what the Bridge Commission has to fight with every day with the traffic volumes you deal with. Of course, the HRM is dealing with the same traffic problems and it makes it very difficult.

You're talking about the major work you're going to do in 2015, it's close to or around $200 million - how do you propose to finance that?

MR. SNIDER: As we approach the project, we'll take a look at, most likely, at least two options. One would be doing a toll revenue bond, again, that is we can do an issue as we did back in 1997. It's interesting that we are still rated by the Dominion Bond Rating Service, DBRS, and Standard & Poor's, and our ratings are quite favourable. They advise us that they frequently are asked by the private market, do you know if the commission is

going to go to market again? They're quite interested in our product. It's a desirable paper, and so that will be one option.

Currently, of course, we are financed through the Province of Nova Scotia. Given the level of financing we have today, that is really the best option for us. I think it serves the commission well, it serves the province well, and it serves our users well, because we have what I believe to be the most cost-effective form of financing. We don't have the underwriting expenses, we don't have the disclosure expenses, and so it's very effective. On a go-forward basis, depending on how much we need to borrow, it will have some implications as to whether we could remain with the province, financed as we are today, or whether we would do a bond issue.

MR. COLWELL: The new revenues, the new toll increases, are you going to be able to pay down your $50-some million debt with that now, or with the increases, or are you going to build a surplus towards the 2015 construction start?

MR. SNIDER: There will be a very small surplus that will be building. I think we have an additional $3 or $4 million. If I could, I would defer this to Carolyn.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Feindel.

MS. CAROLYN O'BRIEN FEINDEL: With the toll increase that we've had, that will allow us in the next couple of years to continue to pay down the $60 million debt that we have with the Province of Nova Scotia. There will be a one-year period where we may have a small surplus of about $4 or $5 million, but then the next year we're into a large borrowing of about $10 million. So it's a very short time and really that's our projection at the moment.

That could change depending on how quickly we get into the construction period and the amount that we have to spend at any certain point in time. We won't have the tender until about 2013 and the timing of the project will get more and more defined, the definitive, as we go forward, so that surplus that we have in our projections right now may not exist at all. As we get closer and we know that we have to spend maybe $10 million in one year or $20 million in a year, depending on the timing of the certain components of the construction, that small surplus may not be there. It's not going to be significant.

MR. COLWELL: And if you don't use the surplus, you use it towards the construction, so you're effectively using the money, as it should be.

MS. O'BRIEN FEINDEL: You are, yes, and it's just going to be a small timing issue, a window.

MR. COLWELL: Yes. Instead of having a surplus, it means you won't have to borrow that amount of money.

MS. O' BRIEN FEINDEL: Right, exactly.

MR. COLWELL: Yes. Yes, that's very good planning. And this project, what will it include? What is going to be done - are you going to take the whole deck off and put a new deck on? Is the bridge going to be closed?

MR. SNIDER: This is a major project. In the material that we provide - I'm not sure if you have access to it - on Page 262 there was a profile provided and it showed what the Macdonald Bridge would look like, what it looks like today, and it shows what would be removed in its entirety, essentially from cable vent to cable vent. The cable vent is where the main suspender, the main cable, goes above the roadway. From the cable vent to the tower, tower to tower, tower to cable vent, a distance of about 2,500 feet, the entire truss will be removed; that is, the floor beams, the top court, bottom court, the entire truss, the road deck, so all that would be left between cable vent to cable vent would be two towers and the main cable. All of the suspender ropes will be replaced.

During the nighttime construction we'll actually simply add an extension onto the suspender ropes each and every night, but when the project is complete we come back and we replace all of the suspender ropes. It's a major, major project and it will eliminate a lot of further maintenance on the bridge. It will vastly reduce the amount of painting that has to be done, the steel maintenance.

The profile will change slightly, for instance the bridge, at a distance, will look a little more like the MacKay Bridge on the road deck. Currently, the suspender ropes are attached to the top cord and the roadway is on the bottom cord, if you take a look at it as a steel box. The suspender ropes are going to be lengthened by about 14 feet to 16 feet and the truss will be below the road deck once the project is complete.

MR. COLWELL: Will the bridge be closed during that operation?

MR. SNIDER: The plan is to close the bridge nightly at 7:00 p.m. and reopen the next morning by 5:30 a.m., the same program that we had for the Macdonald Bridge. We will be replacing one panel every three nights. It takes two nights to prepare for the next panel to go in. The interesting thing is that during the preliminary studies that have been done and the scoping study, we've identified that Halifax, as a city, is windier than Vancouver and as a result it is anticipated that we will lose 20 per cent of our construction days due to high winds here in Halifax, so that adds some complication to the project.

MR. COLWELL: When you go through that you always have a problem with maintaining the deck surface, is that going to resolve that deck surface problem?

MR. SNIDER: Yes, it will. I suspect you can get part of the answer from the smile on my face. The intent is that we will have a full-depth, asphalt-wearing surface. When we replaced the deck on the approaches - and that's from the abutment to the cable vent - we

initially had a thin-wearing surface on that section and about five years ago we put on a thicker asphalt-wearing surface. The suspended portions will also have the thicker asphalt-wearing surface on it so we will be clear of the thin-wearing surface issue.

MR. COLWELL: That will be good because I know you must have had awful problems with that, it must have been very, very expensive to maintain that thin surface.

MR. SNIDER: Interestingly enough, the suspended spans have served us better than the approach spans did. When we completed the project for the third lane, we removed the asphalt that was out there. The old deck that is underneath is a metal tray with a grid in it, in-filled with concrete. It had some cupping in it because for years there was no asphalt on the Macdonald Bridge, up until I think early to mid-1970s it was, as it had been built back in 1955 and so we were driving on concrete.

Back in the 1970s they put the asphalt on; during the third-lane project, because of weight load, we removed that asphalt. We put that very thin surface on it, but because that thin surface had problems adhering to steel, not to concrete, and on the suspended spans it actually stayed quite well but it was wearing down. Last year we put a track machine over it to rough it up and make sure that we maintained our coefficient of friction so that we didn't have a slippery surface. We haven't done a lot of maintenance on the suspended spans, most of it - you are correct, there was some expensive expenditures for maintaining it, but that was on the approach spans.

MR. COLWELL: How much do you estimate it is going to reduce your annual maintenance when this project is completed?

MR. SNIDER: I can't recall off the top of my head calculating any numbers. I know, for instance, that the painting should be much less and it will grow over years. It's like buying a new vehicle, the maintenance is pretty low in the first several years and then it starts to grow on you. So we should benefit from reduced painting expenditures and road surface expenditures, but I can't recall if we've done a calculation on that yet.

MR. COLWELL: I wondered if the steel structure on the old MacKay Bridge is still in really good condition or does some of that need to be replaced?

MR. SNIDER: On the MacKay Bridge the truss is pretty good. The road deck on the MacKay Bridge is an orthotropic steel deck, which means it's a seven-sixteenths steel sheeting with seven-sixteenths troughs that are welded on the bottom, based on a 14-inch spacing, so you have a 14-inch trough then a space, a 14-inch trough. It's an approach that was developed in Europe, I believe, shortly after World War II, as a result of shortage of steel supply and it's the thinnest, suspended bridge, orthotropic deck in North America. We are monitoring that, in fact, we have strain gauge testing that took place last year. There is an analysis being done on that. While the rest of the structure on the MacKay is good, we

believe that the deck on the MacKay Bridge most likely will have to be replaced somewhere between 2023 and 2024.

However, this testing that we've undergone last year and some more testing that we're doing this year - I should comment, last year we replaced the expansion joints at the towers on the MacKay Bridge and replaced about 100 feet of the road deck itself - 25 feet on either side of these expansion joints. That section that was taken out, we're taking some samples from that. It's going to be put through some destructive testing to understand what the life expectancy is, and with the results from the strain gauge testing and this other testing we're doing, we can identify whether 2023-24 is the right timing for the replacement of the MacKay road deck or whether it has to be done earlier - or hopefully, it could be done later.

MR. COLWELL: That's great. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We will now move to the Progressive Conservative caucus and the member for Hants West. Your time is 9:32 a.m.

MR. CHUCK PORTER: Thank you, members of the committee, for being with us this morning. Some interesting information has been put out already, and I have a few other questions. I'm going to jump around a bit. I just want to pick up on where the member for Preston left off with regard to the structure. You mentioned some testing that is done. Obviously there is some type of inspection or engineered process that that goes through. Who does that work for you, that says the steel is good for another 10 years or whatever it might be?

MR. SNIDER: Our primary consulting firm is an engineering firm by the name of Buckland & Taylor. They're a preeminent engineering firm in Canada. Their head office is currently in Vancouver. I'm pleased to report that they will be opening up a local office here in Halifax with the addition of about eight staff this Fall. So Buckland & Taylor is the major engineering firm, and they do annual inspections for us.

In conjunction with Buckland & Taylor, we also use a local engineering firm called Harbourside Engineering Consultants. I believe them to be the preeminent bridge engineers in Atlantic Canada. These two parties both work for us and they make use of sub-consultants to do the actual destructive testing. Local companies will cut the sections out and put them in jigs. I suspect - I'm terrible at names. I tend to refer to them as Jacques Whitford; I forget their new name. Anyway, the local engineering firms also - Stantec, thank you - do a lot of the testing for us.

It's a combination of our annual inspections, which are very extensive - I have a couple of them here with me. They tend to be two-inch volumes with a lot of photographs and follow-up reports. This information, combined with this testing, is what will help us identify how long we have for life on the MacKay Bridge.

MR. PORTER: So there's basically - to simplify it - just some scientific equation that says so many years, so much wear and tear, traffic weight, whatever is based on that, and your number is obviously the crossings, vehicles. I suppose there's some mathematical genius out there who determines through the engineering corporation that this shows you so much wear and tear. It sounds, though - you said you had samples - that there's some kind of actual physical test that is done as well that says, the bridge is good, or this section, we see some weaknesses, whatever they may be.

MR. SNIDER: They'll take sections of the panels that were removed last year. They'll examine them, determine whether or not there is - what the thickness of the steel is, whether there is any apparent cracking in any spots now, and then they'll run it through millions and millions of cycles by loading it with weight. Following that, I suspect that they will periodically stop the tests - maybe after every million cycles or every two million cycles they'll stop and re-examine the sample and go through it again. It's interesting. I've equated the development - I'm not an engineer myself, but I guess when you hang around with engineers long enough you pay attention to what they say.

Interestingly enough, for years the analyses and inspections of our bridges was a very physical thing. You go out; you take a look; you use a hammer, do a little banging, and you examine it. You derive your conclusions based on your experience and your observations. Today, when it comes to engineering related to bridges, there are significant computer models developed. In fact, Buckland & Taylor are well known for this strength of developing computer models and using those to assist them; so it's more like having the availability of internal medicine, so to speak, for bridge engineering.

MR. PORTER: All very interesting, I'm sure, especially if you are an engineer, they live and die by this stuff. So the inspection is an annual inspection, I think you said. Would it be that vigorous each year, like annually, would the inspection be as you've just described, would it be that detailed?

MR. SNIDER: It is that vigorous. If I may, these are the two inspections for 2010. We have the Macdonald Bridge; it's a lot thinner because we're doing a lot more work on the actual design for the re-decking, and this is the MacKay inspection. We go through this level of inspection each and every year. These are suspension bridges. They are complicated. They have lots of moving parts on them and we just want to know that they are in good shape.

If they are not in good shape, we want to know where it is; we want to know where we should be focusing our maintenance programs. We need to know for budgeting purposes and financial planning. We need to know this for the safety of the travelling public, so we don't leave it go two or three years. Because of the nature of these structures, we are dedicated to doing it each year.

MR. PORTER: I guess just on that same vein, you talked about the bridge moving and I don't think there is any worse feeling than sitting there, maybe in the morning when traffic is heavy on the odd occasion, and the bridge is moving, I've had occasion to do that once in a while and even had my children say why is the bridge moving? It is supposed to do that, be comfortable that it is doing that.

I don't know that people really realize that's normal and that there is some movement and it might be an awful thing if it wasn't moving maybe just a wee bit. I want to talk about the safety and the security a little bit, if I can. I know the bridge police, I'll call them, are out there and they're doing their thing; you see them every once in a long while. We talked about the passing-lane issue, obviously we're not monitoring that very closely. It would be very difficult, I agree, especially in heavy traffic times. What are the biggest safety concerns on the bridge, as far as the commission is concerned? I'm sure there must be some issues of safety.

MR. SNIDER: I guess, from our focus, our biggest concern is the safety of the travelling public, that's the motorists, pedestrians and cyclists. We want to make sure that their travel across the bridge is safe and unencumbered. That means we want to take steps to minimize traffic distraction and collisions. Everything we do, each and every project we do, focuses on safety, so it's a primary consideration.

MR. PORTER: Are there issues of security on the bridge?

MR. SNIDER: These are big bridges. There are different security issues. We currently have about 12 cameras on each bridge. We are expanding our security system to incorporate about 120 cameras between the two structures. We are going to smart technology that will allow our cameras to identify vehicles that are stopped, people who are stopped, or packages that weren't there before, anything that's not normal. We're also looking at, wherever possible, tightening up the security around the structures. Keep in mind that we're there to serve the transportation needs of the public so people are walking back and forth, cycling back and forth, driving back and forth constantly; so there's a balance, we just need to be very vigilant.

Our - we refer to them as "bridge patrol." We have 24/7 coverage; that is to say, the bridge patrol are driving back and forth. About every half hour they would be back and forth across the facility, making sure things are as they should be. We have a control room where we have eyes on the cameras, but we also have the presence out there on the structure. Security needs have changed for structures of our nature; it changed about 10 years ago. There were things that took place that changed the way that we all look after these structures - we're responding to that and being very careful.

MR. PORTER: We'll jump around a little bit. The number is 33 million crossings a year - I think is what you quoted there - does that include all of your walkers, cyclists, et cetera, or is that just the driving public?

MR. SNIDER: That's a vehicle count, so that's just cars and trucks. Automobiles and light trucks and motorcycles represent about 97 per cent of all of the crossings, and 3 per cent of the crossings are commercial vehicles. In terms of pedestrians and cyclists, I should mention that we're quite proud of the bicycle lane and sidewalk that we added on the Macdonald Bridge back in 1999 when we opened - and we promote it quite heavily.

We believe active transportation is something that we need more of in our community. In terms of pedestrians and cyclists, in the summer months we've had as high as 700 cyclists a day and 700 pedestrians. Now, it varies a little bit - I would suggest that for about the last 60 days it's been down somewhat, given our rain, but under normal good weather conditions we have a pretty active transportation group.

MR. PORTER: I didn't hear you mention Metro Transit, just as an example, and the daily commute of passengers. Any idea what the numbers are? Would they be over and above the 33 million crossings? I think they would be.

MR. SNIDER: If I may, I'll defer to Ms. Feindel.

MS. O'BRIEN FEINDEL: You're asking the number of buses?

MR. PORTER: I guess not so much that. I'm kind of going down the road and wondering about people count versus - I just think you have a multitude of people travelling by Metro Transit who are coming in from outlying areas. I still consider them as using the crossing, so I'm wondering if there were an added count over and above the vehicle count of people like that that would be more reflective of how many people actually use the crossing versus just 33 million - I'm going to say "just" 33 million car crossings. It seems a phenomenal number, but how many people does that equate to? Maybe it's of no interest to anyone other than myself.

MS. O'BRIEN FEINDEL: We don't actually track or have the information on the number of passengers that are in a bus. We track the buses, the vehicles, themselves. We get those counts as they go through the gates. It's a physical count of motorcycles, buses, trucks, taxis, whatever. Metro Transit might be able to answer that question, though - and maybe Steve can add to that.

MR. SNIDER: We've played with that number before, and we suspect that you could take our traffic volume and multiply it by a factor of somewhere between two to three, and that would give you the total number of person-trips per year - we could be looking at upward of 100 million person-trips a year back and forth across these structures.

MR PORTER: Very good. I want to go to a place I haven't heard anybody go to, and I know there's been great discussion on it back some time ago, and that is a third crossing of some type. Where did that all end up, by way of the commission - did you favour it? Do you have no opinion at this point? You can't afford it, there's a cost

associated? Maybe if you want to speak to some of that in general that would be fine. It doesn't matter which one; maybe whoever's most knowledgeable on it.

MR. MASON: I'm just curious if you're asking about cost and budgeting and debt related to that?

MR. PORTER: That's the idea of it, the cost and the budget and where are we with it - is that still something that's in mind somewhere down the road, that we are going to need this, Wayne? There has been just a slight increase over the years now, reaching 33 million. In the opinion of the commission, is there a true need to have it? We've been through quite a bit on it and heard a lot about it.

MR. MASON: The question most often related to what you're asking is: Why do we continue to have debt? I remember prior to joining the Bridge Commission, it's a question that I had - and in addition to that question is the one: When will the bridges be paid for?

MR. PORTER: Yes.

MR. MASON: So you're not there very long before you get an understanding of the financing and why they're not paid for and why you continually have to carry debt. To pay down the debt, you're limited, if you will - it's kind of like a fixed income for seniors - you're limited with what you can pay to your toll revenue. As we mentioned earlier, we don't receive funding from the federal or provincial government and so your total revenue is your source of income.

Back when the third lane crossing was put in place - I think you'll see in your sheets the history of borrowings - we had a $100 million toll bond offering and through a period of time, in 2004 I think, the Bridge Commission purchased some of those bonds back and continued with their paydowns. They continued to pay down until I think it was 2007 when the toll bond offering came due and at that point there was roughly $47 million remaining, plus a $12 million outstanding loan from a line of credit that we had with the Province of Nova Scotia.

So effectively, in December of 2007, both of those came due. So what happened there was that was rolled over into a $60 million loan and a line of credit from the province, but the part that's in the middle that makes you say, well, why didn't you pay it all down, is during a 10-year period in there, while this was being paid down, over $100 million was spent in capital projects and maintenance. So you tend to look after your capital projects and maintenance out of your cash flow on a go-forward basis and there could always be a slight residual left on the borrowings that you would need to consolidate, if you will, like we did with the $60 million.

So that $60 million that was borrowed from a line of credit in 2007 is paid down over a 12-year period. So over the next 11 years, at $3 million each, that's $33 million that would be paid down. You can see by doing the math that leaves a balloon payment in the last year, of year 12, of $27 million, but when that comes up in, say, 2019 for that payment, then it would be there, but in 2014-15, which is prior to this $60 million term being up, we will need to go to market or borrow for this decking of the Macdonald Bridge. So just when you see the $60 million getting down and you're going to say, well, we're out of debt and that's paid off, we do have this redecking project of close to - a lot of money as we just mentioned earlier, $200 million. So the bridges - will they ever be paid for? Not in the foreseeable future. Will we ever be out of debt? Not in the foreseeable future.

MR. PORTER: So in saying that, would it be fair to say that the assumption would be that there is not likely to be a third crossing at anytime that we would ever see, based on money not being available? I guess some people think - you know, you hear about tolls going up, well, obviously, they are going to pocket a bunch of money and the bridges will probably be revenue-neutral, at the very best, if they're not making money, and the belief is that you make money, obviously. If you talk to the travelling public, a lot of them would say, God, they're making more money now, and especially when they hear there are 33 million crossings a year and they're going to multiply that by $1. Wow, that sounds like a big number, but in actuality the costs that you've explained going out, I think the maintenance costs are probably an unforeseen.

MR. MASON: Well, the number we mentioned in the opening statements of 2.7 and 55 and you look at the 33 or 34 million crossings today, it is strictly wear and tear. I mean if you had a carpet in your living room and you only walked on it once a day, it will last forever, but bring in a bunch of your neighbours, particularly around this time of the year at hockey season, the carpet wears out pretty fast. So we're in that kind of scenario and a lot of the maintenance is the kind of maintenance that's not visible to the public in the sense that we're talking about large bearings and trusses that are underneath the bridge - and to try to do this work at night so as to minimize inconvenience to the travelling public requires a lot of engineering and planning.

I give full credit to our engineering staff in the way that they've released the contracts and the co-operation we've received from contractors.

MR. PORTER: What is your typical annual maintenance cost per bridge - do you know that?

MR. MASON: I can speak to expenses, but on annual maintenance, I think I'd defer to Ms. Fiendel - or I guess Steve chooses to answer.

MR. SNIDER: For the current fiscal year, our actual budgeted maintenance expenditure is about $4 million; however, we have a capital program budget that is close to

$15 million. So it's directly $4 million on maintenance, but the capital is in large part directed to long-term maintenance on the bridges.

MR. PORTER: What would fit into the $4 million, what would be a couple of examples of that? I know that we only have less than a minute here, but if you want to give me a couple of examples of where that $4 million - your basic annual - would fit in.

MR. SNIDER: The $4 million - initially it's the people who drive the plows, who push snow and apply salt; it's the maintenance of our buildings; and it would include the painting program on the bridges. Off the top of my head, I would suggest that we spend about $1.5 million a year painting the two bridges. It takes us about three years to cycle through the bridges - and we don't do complete overcoat painting, we simply do spot painting. Spot painting makes sure that we don't add too much weight to the structure.

So there's the painting program; our winter maintenance program; our building programs; and there are small jobs - for instance, like doing a water treatment or waterproofing on the top of our anchorages. That's the type of project we do - and there may be some small welding projects on the structure, but nothing that we'd capitalize.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Porter. Your time has elapsed. Now we'll go to the NDP caucus. Mr. Preyra, your time is 9:52 a.m.

MR. LEONARD PREYRA: Welcome to this committee. I hadn't realized that it has been 10 years since you last appeared at the Public Accounts Committee. It seems like we've seen the Bridge Commission everywhere over the last several years talking about transportation issues and maintenance issues. I commend you on your engagement with this issue, even though you haven't been here for quite a long time.

I also want to commend you on tackling your debt. I know everyone asks: This bridge is 56 years old, how long is it going to take us to pay it off? I'm glad to see that in the intervening 10 years you've reduced your debt by about $75-plus million. We as a government understand very well what "living within our means" means, and we appreciate you taking on that challenge and understanding it.

Also, the Bridge Commission has a great reputation for safety. I know you went through some of that in raw numbers, looking at the $100 million in infrastructure renewal and maintenance and things like that, so I want to commend you as well on your safety record and commitment to long-term maintenance. I know that with a lot of the public institutions we're looking at, deferred maintenance is a huge challenge.

I had a question starting with safety. I think the member for Hants West was asking about safety provisions that you have in place and you had talked about cameras. But as I understand it, you have a number of other things - wind and radar and ice detection, and a whole range of other things - that helped get you to that safety record that you have. I

wonder what you could tell us to reassure the public in terms of what you're doing to protect the health and safety of pedestrians and motorists?

MR. SNIDER: I should open by commenting that we at Halifax Harbour Bridges are dedicated to having a world-class safety program for our employees and for our customers. If we focus on anything less than that, then we're not doing our jobs.

In terms of safety for the travelling public, we are great users of technology. We have several weather stations on both of our bridges. These weather stations will give us the deck temperature and the air temperature, and they track the wind speed and the humidity level. What that does is it ultimately gives us a 20-minute warning in the colder season to predict the formation of black ice. That, combined with the fact that we have staff in the winter months, from November until the end of April, who are on-site 24/7 - that is, maintenance staff, the people who do the plowing and salting, and we have one for each bridge, so that if we have a prediction of black ice they can get out there and put the salt and brine solution down as soon as possible to make sure that we don't develop icy conditions. We actually pride ourselves as having two miles of the best maintained winter maintenance program roads in Nova Scotia.

Above and beyond that, there is safety of pedestrians and cyclists. We have safety barriers on our bridges; we have phone systems out there; and we recently installed VMS, variable message signs, on the MacKay Bridge - there are three on the Halifax approach and three on the Dartmouth approach. Our main reason for installing those - as I mentioned earlier during the discussion around the redecking of the Macdonald Bridge on the suspended spans and the fact that we have higher winds - we have noticed higher winds in the last 10 to 15 years on the Halifax Harbour bridges. In fact, about five or six years ago we had a tractor-trailer early in the morning that was turned on its side on the bridge. It was driving across the bridge and a big wind came along and upset it.

So we need a system whereby we can get messages out to the travelling public to warn them about whether conditions on the bridge or, in fact, if because of high winds we are diverting traffic or asking traffic to slow down, or we can have the tractor-trailers diverted to go around the Bedford Basin instead of going across the bridge.

Other safety systems on the Macdonald Bridge - we have three lanes and we have signs up there to identify when the centre lane is closed and open, but something we developed prior to opening the third lane was the concept of using gates to at least transition people into the right lane - or the correct lane, I should say - to begin with, so that we prevent, and you know we've been operating since 1999 and, knock on wood, we have not had any head-on collisions in that centre lane as a result of opposing traffic. I think that's a stellar record in itself.

Another safety system we have, and most people wouldn't be aware of this or understand it, but our traffic is not just what goes over our bridges, we also have traffic that

goes under our bridges. We don't charge them a toll, but we have these large post-Panamax ships - it's because we haven't figured out how to do it - we have these large ships that go underneath the bridges, and when it was announced that they would be arriving here several years ago, the question was, well, what is the air gap - what is the clearance between the water surface and the underside of the bridge?

Keep in mind that what we're dealing with here is an accordion effect because we have a tidal harbour, so the water goes up and down - as one of the members mentioned earlier, the experience you get on the bridge when you are out there, of winds moving the bridge up and down, so you're really dealing with an accordion. How do you figure out, on a real-time basis, how much space you have there for ships to travel?

Well, what we did was we make use of information from tidal gauges in the harbour that tell us on a real-time basis what the water level is. Then we have a GPS unit affixed to each of the bridges, and one on a land-based unit, so that we can tell how much the bridge is moving up and down. Then we can do a calculation on the Macdonald Bridge to see how much the air gap is - is it 47 metres, 47.25 metres, 47.5 metres? How much is it changing?

From a quality control perspective - because when you have information inputted to a system, it's good to know that you've got this information – but, how do you make sure that it's accurate? Well we have the ability, since we have two bridges, of tracking the air gap on both of them simultaneously and we know that if the range between the two of those varies more than one-quarter of a metre - that's a hypothetical number - but if we have a variance between the two outside the norm, then we know that we may have a system issue and we can check one against the other, and. what that results in is the ability for us to have ships pass underneath our bridges with as little as six-tenths of a metre clearance.

MR. PREYRA: Thank you very much. I was at a conference of port authorities about a year ago and one of the authorities was raving about this technology and he suggested, in fact, that we had invented this technology and designed it. Most of them are facing these challenges with the large post-Panamax ships and bridges constructed 50 years ago that were not designed for things that large to pass under them.

Moving on to something else, you had talked about infrastructure priorities - do you have any other strategic priorities? What are your larger strategic priorities for the next five years, particularly as it relates to the priorities of your stakeholders, the people you work with - what are their priorities and how are you identifying and addressing those?

MR. SNIDER: In large part, of course, our focus is this very major project on the Macdonald Bridge. We have to replace the deck, and under normal conditions people would prefer to take a facility and close it down - it's a lot less expensive and you can shorten the entire timeline on the project by moving ahead more rapidly. But we can't do that - two bridges in a city of 400,000 people, annual crossings of over 33 million. As it was shown through the peak-period tolling study, the demand is not elastic, it's inelastic. We

have people who need to travel back and forth across that structure each and every day, so our strategic planning is focusing on how we're going to continue to provide a level of service to our customers, but maintain the bridges and focus on the safety of the people using them.

The safe and efficient crossing at an appropriate cost means that strategically we focus on safety. I'm proud to say that about a year ago we hired our very first manager of safety in Halifax Harbour Bridges, that we are dedicated to an injury-free workplace and that we're making great achievements. But that's just an extension of safety as part of our long-term strategy. Maintenance of the structures is part of our long-term strategy. Both of those focuses are to ensure that we can provide uninterrupted crossing. As you close a bridge, that means that people are going to have to be diverted to another facility. People who normally use the Macdonald Bridge during that construction period will have to go to the MacKay Bridge. We will have a communications program that will reach out long in advance of this project, and will communicate to people the timing and will develop communications through a series of media, and be communicating with the public.

In the meantime, our current strategy is to focus on the MacKay Bridge to do all of the things that we reasonably can. You may have seen in our business plan that part of our focus is an intensified maintenance program in advance of the Macdonald redecking project. That is to say that we don't want any other projects to sneak up on us or surprise us or be in a time conflict with our focus on the Macdonald, and that is to get everything done and out of the way and leave ourselves with a one- to two-year window in advance of the Macdonald. Our strategy is to make sure that we're ready to focus just on the Macdonald Bridge. Our longer-term strategy, of course, is what I'd mentioned earlier about our ongoing analysis of the MacKay Bridge, to identify the timing on that project.

Strategically, it's focusing on developing a world-class safety program for our bridge users and our employees, and it's focusing on the maintenance. We're not looking at one or two years, we're planning today out to 2023-24, so we have a 12-year lead. That's essentially our strategy.

MR. PREYRA: Thank you very much. Just one last question before I hand it off to the member for Halifax Atlantic. Mr. Porter had talked about public transit and he said perhaps no one has any interest here in the public transit issue. I can assure you that in my constituency that is the big issue - it's probably the biggest issue, and I'm delighted that you're taking this issue on as well.

I do have a question about the Strategic Joint Regional Transportation Committee and your relationship with Metro Transit. Now I know you had talked about the complexity of having three different directions that you have to go in - you have MACPASS travellers, and you have people turning right and left - it's a very complex process, I understand that, but is there any possibility of doing something for public transit users more than single passenger vehicles, or just generally encouraging more people in single vehicles, and also

the coordination issue with Metro Transit and HRM to make sure that you can get more users of public transit to use the bridge, and maybe even help them expedite that process?

MR. SNIDER: We were very pleased when we made our application to the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board last year for a rate increase to ask for an exemption of all transit. Now, that is to say we believe that while our mandate is to provide safe and efficient travel across the harbour on these bridges, that transit and carpooling, an act of transportation, are so important to us as an organization and us as a society that we asked the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board to permit us to not apply any toll increase to Metro Transit, that is to save them the cost of any increase - and they granted us that and that was a first time for us and we were pleased to do that.

In terms of Metro Transit, we meet with them periodically; they discuss with us their operational challenges and we keep them advised of what our upcoming projects are. They met with us and talked about the development of the new terminal, the revised terminal on the Dartmouth end of the Macdonald Bridge. It's a bit of a challenge, given our traffic volumes, to take a lane and develop it for HOV for instance - HOV being high occupancy vehicle. Less than 1 per cent of all of our trips across the two bridges are made by transit, by buses, and so to dedicate a lane for just buses would be a little bit of a challenge these days.

Interestingly enough, I saw a presentation recently where, in terms of HOV, there's a trial that's being developed in the States whereby with the use of smart phone technology - I should say the challenge with HOV, by the way, has always been how many people are in the vehicle. Are there the three people in there who should be there or is that two people and one mannequin? (Interruption) It has been done repeatedly, but with smart phone technology, they've developed a process whereby if three people get into a vehicle with smart phones, they can advise you that there are three people in that vehicle - and, in fact, they can differentiate between one person getting in with three smart phones and three people getting in with one smart phone each.

MR. PREYRA: As long as the mannequin isn't driving.

MR. SNIDER: Yes, that's right, as long as the mannequin isn't driving. We do work with Metro Transit and I believe that Metro Transit and carpooling are going to be critical to us in the future. We need to shift the way we travel and so we'll work with them.

MR. CHARIMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Preyra. We will move to Ms. Raymond, who has approximately four minutes.

MS. MICHELE RAYMOND: Many of my questions were around public transit and the incentives that the Bridge Commission might be able to use. I always say one of the quickest ways to get a conversation started is to talk about the vagaries of the rotary and I think it's the same thing with the bridges, because this city really is one of North America's

only fortified cities - everything is built on that peninsula and it's very, very difficult to get onto that peninsula. I'm sure you've had the experience that as you add lanes there is more traffic in fact - you know, it's the old induced traffic phenomenon - and more cars will keep on trying to get across the various bodies of water to get to the peninsula.

One thing I was curious about, obviously less than 1 per cent of the vehicles are mass transit vehicles. That's very, very concerning, obviously, if we have no idea what kind of high occupancy vehicles are coming on. A couple of questions that I would have - is there any possibility of a closer relationship with Metro Transit in terms of having them actually amplify the number of routes which do do an effective side- to- side crossing? Have there been discussions with Metro Transit or even a thought of a Metro Transit seat on the Bridge Commission?

MR. SNIDER: Currently on the Bridge Commission we do have four city councillors who are appointed by the mayor - that's my understanding. So there is city representation on our board. In terms of Metro Transit, we've long worked closely with them. I, myself, served on the transit business for one year before joining the Bridge Commission and so I've always had a weak spot for transit. In terms of our coordination with them, we encouraged them to be MACPASS users very early on - we signed them up right away.

In terms of priorities for them, it's a little difficult. They've actually, by the way, focused on reducing the number of trips across the bridge for cost measures by the establishment of their new terminal, but the number of trips, in our recent discussions with Metro Transit, they advised us that for the fleet they have, they are as busy as they can be right now. They don't have a lot of additional capacity at this point in time.

MS. RAYMOND: So amplifying the number of trips isn't really on their radar. I would suggest that that is a problem in that we can only put so many vehicles onto the peninsula. It's people that we need to get onto the peninsula and I would have to commend you for your strong commitment to active transportation and so on, and I hope that it will be possible to do more with that.

If I have a moment, quickly, do you have any idea what percentage of the people crossing from Dartmouth to Halifax actually are crossing by bridge as opposed to ferry crossings? I don't suppose you know that.

MR. SNIDER: We looked at ferry numbers years ago; I haven't done that recently.

MS. RAYMOND: I'm sure the vast majority are by bridge, though.

MR. SNIDER: They are.

MS. RAYMOND: Another question, just very quickly. The ownership - does the Bridge Commission actually own land? Do you own the toll plaza land? You own the bridge, obviously, but do you own the land on either side?

MR. SNIDER: Off the top of my head, I would guess that we own about 50 acres. We have the entire toll plaza on both facilities. We don't have much land ownership around the Macdonald Bridge other than our toll plaza, our administration building, and parking area.

When we go to the MacKay Bridge, it's a little bit different. We have the Victoria Road interchange; we have that entire interchange. When the MacKay Bridge was built, by the way, the commission paid for the road system from Woodland Avenue and all of the road system in Halifax approaching the MacKay Bridge. We spent as much money on the approaches as we did on building the bridge itself.

Our land ownership in Halifax on the MacKay Bridge is somewhat limited. Most of that land is owned by HRM and we are their tenants.

MS. RAYMOND: Are you assessed? Do you pay taxes?

MR. SNIDER: We do pay taxes. Off the top of my head, I believe we pay in the range of $180,000 a year in taxes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll leave it at that, Ms. Raymond, and I'm sure we'll come back to you as your friendly colleagues will allow you to have some more time in the second round.

I will now turn things over to Mr. Colwell, and each caucus will have about 14 minutes. Your time is 10:13 a.m., until 10:26 a.m., basically.

MR. COLWELL: Thank you.

This question I know is difficult to answer, but there have been all kinds of discussion about it and one of my colleagues already asked part of this question, about a third bridge. Now I know that's a huge expense in today's dollars - is it something that the commission has looked at, or is intending to look at, or is it even feasible to look at? There's been a lot of political sabre-rattling over it.

MR. SNIDER: If you were to take a look at our Act, the Act defines who is responsible for deciding what additional cross-harbour capacity. At the Bridge Commission, at the request of HRM, we did conduct a cross-harbour traffic needs assessment and that study has been tabled. Any decision relating to that would rest with the government.

MR. COLWELL: Which level of government, provincial or federal?

MR. SNIDER: That would be provincial government.

MR. COLWELL: Do you have a copy of that study available to this committee?

MR. SNIDER: I do have a copy of that study, yes.

MR. COLWELL: Can you make it available to the clerk?

MR. SNIDER: I can do so, yes.

MR. COLWELL: That would be very, very helpful. Again, as we go through this process, looking at the process you have - and traffic, traffic always seems to be a problem, and I know you deal every day with the maintenance and that's where you eat up a lot of your money.

Some of the areas in the MACPASS - and I was a reluctant user of MACPASS, I'll put that on the record, but now that I have it I think it's the greatest thing that you ever invented. I think a lot of Nova Scotians are like I am, pretty reluctant to try things, but it's great when you go through and you don't have to shuffle and look for change - that does hold up traffic, I've seen it happen - the green light goes and people are trying to find their change and getting the money in the unit.

Is there any consideration of making more of your lanes totally MACPASS? I know when you come off the bridge and you turn left - we talked about that a little bit earlier, a double lane there - that one lane, people get in there and they throw money in that. It just stops the traffic dead when the green light is on.

MR. SNIDER: We've looked at it. My office is a little fishbowl in the corner of the Macdonald Administration Building. I look out on the plaza, so I do watch traffic from time to time. There is very little opportunity for us to add any additional MACPASS-dedicated lanes on that plaza without really getting into a negative marketing position with people who still choose to use cash. I, myself, make very few trips straight up; if I come across the bridge, I tend to make a right-hand turn by the Sportsplex, get in lane No. 2, and away I go. We don't think at this point in time that there's a lot of opportunity to expand MACPASS-only lanes on the Macdonald plaza - there may be on the MacKay plaza, but not on the Macdonald.

MR. COLWELL: You mentioned earlier about making a double left turn off the bridge, and HRM said no. Why did they say no? It would make a lot of sense to do that, actually.

MR. SNIDER: Keep in mind that one of the benefits of Halifax Harbour Bridges is that we're very focused and we're dedicated to the bridges. HRM has a much broader mandate when it relates to transportation, and they're responsible for a much larger system

that goes well beyond the bridges. Their desire is to have as much traffic go straight up off the bridge to Victoria Road as opposed to zigzagging down to Wyse Road and going up via either Boland Road or Albro Lake Road. Victoria Road is a major route and they want traffic to get to that route as soon as possible - that has been what they've explained to me.

MR. COLWELL: At the same time, by not turning a double left lane in there you're holding up traffic on the bridge. There's no question about it. That road is designed to handle - when you turn on to that it's at least three lanes that it can turn into and there is never a holdup on that side, but if you go up over the bridge, especially with the new terminal that HRM is going to put in for the buses, it's going to make it almost impossible to go straight up. I used to go straight up all the time, but I gave up on it because of the pedestrians coming back and forth to the buses. So once that's finished, you're going to have an even bigger problem, you're going to have more traffic congestion on the bridge - is there any discussion about that with HRM?

MR. SNIDER: We meet periodically. There have been no new updates on any further actions. About the only thing we could do is try to reduce pedestrian-automobile conflict, but roads are there for all parties, so it's difficult to restrict pedestrians any further. There's nothing planned at this point in time, but it's always an open file.

MR. COLWELL: As I say, when the new facility comes up there with HRM, and with all those buses there are going to be more and more buses and it's going to be more and more difficult. There doesn't seem to be an easy way to get pedestrians over top of where you come up off that road or underneath it or anything like that. There doesn't seem to be any easy way to do that. I don't know, there are engineers who could probably figure something out, but there's nothing easy for people there, and there is a pile of pedestrian traffic there, which is good - it's great, because they're accessing the buses.

I really like the way you handled the bike lanes and the pedestrian lanes. I think that was a huge improvement on the bridge and made it a lot better for people walking and cycling. I think that when you did the planning for that that was well thought out, and maybe some of your staff should work at HRM for a couple of months and straighten some of their stuff out - and I'm saying that as a former councillor. I think that's one of your biggest problems when you go through the traffic flow, and as traffic gets worse and worse, as the HRM population grows and people move out further, it's going to become more difficult.

I know the transit system, that HRM has been always after you to eliminate the tolls, but basically if you did that for the buses you would be subsidizing HRM - wouldn't that be correct?

MR. SNIDER: That would be correct, yes.

MR. COLWELL: And you're not connected at all with HRM except for the work you do with them to try to move traffic.

MR. SNIDER: We're connected in that we are two bridges in the middle of their city and we're very focused on maintaining good relationships and working closely with them. I'll admit when I first joined the commission 17 years ago, there was not a lot of ongoing discussion back and forth between the entities, but today we don't do a single study related to traffic without reaching out to both HRM and the province to make sure that we have representation from both parties on our steering committees, because we want them to understand what our challenges are, what our focus is, and we need to understand what theirs is so that there is a collaborative working process to help serve, because we are all serving the same customers.

MR. COLWELL: Exactly and I think that's a very good approach. As I said early on, I really appreciate the work you've been doing over the past several years and it's a huge improvement over what I've seen many years ago when the bridge was running debts and all kinds of problems. The management change has been very welcomed by the public in general, so keep up the good work, which I know you will do.

The issues as you move forward with the toll increase - do you think you might have to increase the toll after you do the expansion on the bridge, is that a possibility? I know it's hard to say, today.

MR. SNIDER: From our perspective in terms of the toll increase, first and foremost we're very proud of the fact that we went from 1992 until this year without a toll increase; that we were able to manage our financial resources, our work programs, and live within our means. We have this major project coming up. We did make an application and the toll increase has been granted and that toll increase will serve us for this project.

MR. COLWELL: So you don't think that you may have to apply for another one down the road, or you don't know at this point?

MR. SNIDER: I don't know. I can't say "never", but right now what we have received is going to serve us for the project that we have and there are no plans or intentions of any other increase.

MR. COLWELL: I'm sure that Nova Scotians will be glad to hear that. Again, it goes to your good management when you do these things. It was good to see that you went all that time without a toll increase and still managed to do all the work that you did do on the bridges, and it has been significant.

You can see the people working there all the time and that isn't cheap. I know that you have to have specialized people to work on that bridge, who are used to working at

heights and all the other requirements you have for safety and everything - that must be very expensive, isn't it?

MR. SNIDER: It takes our staff a little longer to get to their work site than others if you're working at 160 feet above the road deck, or halfway between the road deck and the harbour, or whether you're working off of a ladder that's suspended under the bridge. At the same time, our focus is on safety. Those people are trained in all that they need to be trained in terms of fall protection, confined space, and. one of the training programs that we have our staff go through that they take the greatest pride in is their emergency recovery program - that is to say if one of their peers was to be in trouble, our staff are trained on how to immediately respond. They know how to rig ropes and they know how to get somebody who may be in a precarious situation. But that is important for them because it's our team working together.

MR. COLWELL: Have you had any serious labour accidents on the bridge in the last 10 years?

MR. SNIDER: Not that I can recall.

MR. COLWELL: That's good. I'm sure you'd recall instantly if you did have.

MR. SNIDER: I should mention that our goal is to have no injuries in our workplace. It's not to reduce injuries; it's not to get it down to a small number - our goal is to have no injuries, and that is what our team is focused on.

MR. COLWELL: That is good. I'm Workers' Compensation Critic and I'm really glad to hear that because I see so many people get injured at work and, when you really investigate, it probably could have been avoided. Again, that's a sign of good management in what you're doing.

Those are all the questions I have, thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Colwell, and we'll go to the PC caucus with Mr. MacMaster, and the time is 10:25 a.m.

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning everybody.

Have you ever completed a valuation on your organization, on the bridges and the value of the organization?

MR. SNIDER: From what perspective - marketability?

MR. MACMASTER: Yes, if you were looking at - and I would caution governments if they were to sell an asset for a one-time gain because governments of all stripes have always had challenges with spending. So you see situations where you might sell an asset, have a windfall, only to have that windfall erased by, say, operating deficits and provincial budgets over a number of years.

I was just curious, what would the value of the organization be if you looked at - I mean the bridges were built a long time ago and to replace them would be a tremendous cost today, especially with the cost of raw materials now. I guess you have a business model, but a lot of it's based on depreciation of the assets and how to maintain them and you've got a cash stream of tolls as people are crossing, based on volumes and that - but have you ever looked at valuating the bridges from the standpoint of their cash flow ability relative to the cost of maintaining the assets?

MR. SNIDER: I recall being at a conference years ago and there was a small little company from Australia called Macquarie. It was a couple of young fellows who had a laptop computer and basically they said, tell me what your revenue stream is and tell me what your operating costs are and there, would you be interested in that number? I'll be honest, I can't remember what that number was.

The concessionization or privatization of transportation infrastructure was, and in some cases still may be, a fairly popular concept on a global basis. It has slowed down a little bit in North America, but there was a move to do that for awhile. Keep in mind that most of the concessionization was to private entities that were interested in providing a return to their shareholders.

First of all, to answer your immediate question, we have not recently or, in fact, at any point in time internally gone into any, what I'll call, professional evaluation. I know there's some question as to what is the value. The value really is related to the revenue stream; then it would be offset by the cost of maintaining the facilities.

If an entity that was to gain a concession had the ability to set the tolls or have periodic programmed increases, then that appeals to them. To have an organization concessionized but still be under the control that we are reporting to the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board as a very valid watchdog, then you'd really have to remove that level of oversight and provide the entity that wants to operate the concession at least a programmed toll-increase structure.

MR. MACMASTER: Thank you. I appreciate your comments on that. I guess the other thing, if government was looking at selling an asset like that, you'd also have to look at the impact on the consumers and the people who are travelling across the bridges. There would have to be some way for a private entity to prove that it could run things more efficiently, and tack on a profit margin for their shareholders, to justify a move by government to do something like that.

What about the idea of, say, like if we look at the pension fund for the government now, there are many people living in the province - many people working in government, past and present, are depending on that fund. We know the investment environment, the interest rates are low, it's hard to get returns out in the open market and, of course, we've seen what happened with the stock market in the last couple of years - it's trying to recover, but it seems to be in a state of real uncertainty at the moment.

I know that pension funds are looking at ways to get safe returns, and one of the areas they've looked at is infrastructure. I think of the bridges that we have here in Nova Scotia, they're generating revenue, I guess primarily in a non-profit sense now because it's purely to try to sustain the maintenance requirements of the bridges, but what about a pension fund, like the provincial government pension fund, owning the Bridge Commission and using that as a vehicle to help sustain the pension plan, while maintaining some benefits of - you mentioned earlier in your presentation about you being able to call upon the province for your debt requirements to save on interest expenses, because you can utilize provincial bond issues which would be cheaper than if you went to do it on your own.

Do you have any comment on, say, a pension fund owning the infrastructure that you manage?

MR. SNIDER: I just commented that in the past, back in 1997 when we did our $100 million toll revenue bond, the pension funds in Nova Scotia did purchase some of those bonds. At that point in time there was investment on the part of the province and the superannuation plan into the commission. The primary purchasers were Great West Life, Sun Life, and other pension plans across the country. So that did occur, and if we go to the market again they would equally have an opportunity to purchase those bonds.

In terms of taking ownership of the commission on a provincial basis I guess, in the past - this is my belief. My belief is the commission, back in 1952, was structured as a stand-alone entity with Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board oversight to ensure that there was a separation from the politics of the province and the pricing of this infrastructure for the people who use it. That was one protection.

To move us back in as a provincial entity, without that separation, could be a little bit of a challenge. Currently we report to the Minister of Finance; we consider the minister our single shareholder with a responsibility to the province. I haven't had any great discussions about ownership by another entity - usually we talk about it either in terms of concessionization or no concessionization, not a particular entity. I haven't considered the dynamics of those sorts of challenges.

In terms of opportunity to invest, if we go to the market again, if our borrowing needs are large enough that we go to the market, then by all means I think it would be great to see the Province of Nova Scotia investing in us. I should mention that Canada is a

purchaser of transportation infrastructure on a global basis. The Australians - I can't remember the terminology for it now, but for instance the Canadian Pension Plan has invested heavily in transportation infrastructure in Australia.

MR. MACMASTER: Are there any public policy objectives being served by having the infrastructure owned by the province?

MR. SNIDER: The province doesn't own the infrastructure.

MR. MACMASTER: Right.

MR. SNIDER: The infrastructure is owned by the Halifax Harbour Bridges. Our legal name today is Halifax-Dartmouth Bridge Commission, but we still market as Halifax Harbour Bridges.

Halifax-Dartmouth Bridge Commission is the owner of the assets. If our debt is ever paid off, then ownership reverts to the province.

MR. MACMASTER: Okay, thank you. I'm going to switch to a second topic.

Mr. Chairman, how much time would I have left?

MR. CHAIRMAN: You have about six minutes.

MR. MACMASTER: I may come back to one other question, but in the interest of getting this other set of questions in, I think the cost of - you're planning to do some work on the bridges and you mentioned the redecking project. I think one of the projects involves raising some of the trusses underneath one of the bridges so that it becomes higher to assist with ships moving in and out of the harbour. Who would have initiated that modification to your plans to refurbish the bridges?

MR. SNIDER: My understanding, my recollection is that we will be increasing the air gap under the Macdonald Bridge in the range of 50 to 70 centimetres. I can't recall whether we actually said to the engineers, please increase the air gap if you can, or whether it simply became a function of the design. It's always been noted that if you can, it never hurts. We'd prefer to see that. But that's what the result will be, I believe - in the range of 50 to 70 centimetres.

MR. MACMASTER: Okay. How much of the cost of the project would that be - I've heard that the project would cost about $150 million, what part of $150 million would be required to change the trusses as you've described?

MR. SNIDER: It's part of the entire project pricing. To the best of my knowledge, there is no additional cost to gain that additional clearance.

MR. MACMASTER: Is that information you could provide to us at a later date or perhaps through the committee here?

MR. SNIDER: Absolutely, we can go back and confirm with our engineers.

MR. MACMASTER: That would be good.

MR. SNIDER: At the end of the day it's a question of how long your suspender ropes are and what the profile is.

MR. MACMASTER: One of my concerns would be that commuters who are going across the bridge may be, in effect, subsidizing, with higher tolls, changes to the bridge which really doesn't have any impact on the bridge itself and the purpose for which it was put there. But it does, of course, make shipping easier and, in effect, it's almost like a subsidy for the port here.

MR. SNIDER: Internally we've never had that discussion or never viewed it that way, but we'll certainly confirm the answer to your question.

MR. MACMASTER: That would be great if you could provide clarification. Thank you.

I think I'll move back to some of my other questions that we were talking about earlier. If the bridge infrastructure was purchased by a private entity, what impact would that have on the services that you operate on the bridges now, from collection of tolls to maintenance to - and I appreciate you contract out the maintenance, but what impact on services might that have?

MR. SNIDER: It's an interesting question. I've recently asked myself, if we were to be concessionized, where is it that somebody could generate some savings that would impact our operations? I was left saying I don't know.

Do they want to cut back on the number of patrols that we do? Do we reduce the number of people we have who work on plowing and salting - can we contract that out? I've looked at our costs and I have the advantage of comparing our operations to other operations across North America and around the world. I know the level of staffing we have on our toll plazas for instance - on the Macdonald toll plaza, we have one service lane in each direction.

That is one person 24-hours-a day, seven-days-a-week, for all the people who are driving from Halifax to Dartmouth, who makes change - and the same going the other direction. We never have two lanes open or three, there is one in each direction and we handle about 14 million crossings a year on that bridge. There is nobody else that I have

seen anywhere in the world who has a toll facility that has efficient and effective service with staffing levels at that low of a rate.

So that is my opening to say I believe that we're a low-cost service provider. We focus on the little things and we focus on the big things. Another example - when we launched MACPASS, most entities tracked the number of trips and then they sent out a bill. People with us prepay, and essentially what happens is that while everybody else is sending a statement out, we don't send any statements - we don't lick any stamps, we don't lick any envelopes, we save at least $0.25 million a year on that process.

I was challenged to identify things to save costs on.

MR. MACMASTER: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll now go to Ms. Raymond for the NDP caucus.

MS. RAYMOND: Thank you, I'm glad some of these questions actually have been addressed. I'd like to go back a little bit to the questions around Metro Transit and I know that may colleague earlier felt that it would be a subsidy if Metro Transit were to be crossing the bridge toll free.

My concern and my question is this: When I understand that you're actually paying property taxes to the municipality, it's difficult not to see that you are, in fact, providing a very significant service to the municipality in terms of its ability to do regional planning and to keep its property assessments up on both sides of the bridge because these are choke points. If you don't get across the harbour, the workplace on the peninsula is of almost no value and certainly the people who live on the other side of the harbour and are unable to access their workplace, unless they live on the peninsula, have properties which are of significantly less value and that actually impacts HRM's tax base as well on both ends of this.

So you are providing a very important service to the municipality and my question would be two things; one, have there been discussions with HRM? Are they asking for your input into the regional plan, because you do have a very significant impact, I should say, and have there actually been discussions about the subsidizing or the not subsidizing of mass transit?

MR. SNIDER: There is a planned five-year review of the regional transportation plan that's upcoming and we at the commission will - as the public can - take an opportunity to participate in that process so that we do get to have input.

In relation to the subsidization, yes, Metro Transit pays us and we pay the taxes. The police and fire don't pay.

MS. RAYMOND: I beg your pardon?

MR. SNIDER: The police and fire do not pay.

MS. RAYMOND: Do not pay to cross the bridge.

MR. SNIDER: There are quite a few trips back and forth. Not as many from fire but police services and fire services are exempt from the tolls. There has been some general discussion, and in meetings with the CAO there was a question about, well, what about the bus tolls and what about the property taxes? Then the conversation generally stopped at that point. It didn't go any further so, no, we haven't had a lot of discussion around that, but at the same time, as I mentioned earlier, we do have an understanding of the importance of transit and we avoided any toll increases until this past hearing.

MS. RAYMOND: I must say that I was somewhat surprised when you said that actually Metro Transit is trying to minimize its trips rather than amplify its trips because, again, there is this problem on the peninsula.

MR. SNIDER: I should clarify that. They were looking at minimizing their dead-heading. They have a lot of their service which is not Dartmouth-based but is here on the peninsula, if they can reduce the number of empty buses going back and forth, my apologies.

MS. RAYMOND: That's okay; that's certainly a distinction. There is another question which I had. I am curious too, the bridges were built in - I mean, the first, obviously the Macdonald built in the 1950s. What kind of an arrangement do you have about the water space around the piers? You have, what, a licence to use the ocean bottom and are there security clearances around the piers? What is your relationship with the federal government there?

MR. SNIDER: We do have leases in the harbour for our tower legs and we make those annual payments to the Port Authority.

MS. RAYMOND: How much are they?

MR. SNIDER: I believe in the range of $1,700 for each segment. I see Carolyn reaching. We'll have a more precise number momentarily.

MS. RAYMOND: Okay, but you do actually pay a lease on each leg.

MR. SNIDER: Yes. When we expanded the Macdonald Bridge from two lanes to three lanes we had to obtain air rights from the Port Authority, from the Department of National Defence, from Canadian National and from Halifax Regional Municipality, anybody that we expanded our presence over. In terms of the upcoming project on the

MacDonald re-decking, on the suspended spans, it's most likely we will need to build a small wharf, or the contractor will need to build a small wharf, for the benefit of the contractor. I was astounded; there will be significant environmental reviews. I'm quite impressed by the magnitude.

MS. RAYMOND: That's going to be quite a cost, obviously. You don't pay for the air rights, you just had to obtain them, right?

MR. SNIDER: In some cases the air rights were granted without fee and in some cases we paid a one-time or a lifetime fee for that air right.

MS. RAYMOND: Very interesting. Okay. And that presumably will change. I guess the only other question would be just around security around the piers, around the legs?

[10:45 a.m. Ms. Diana Whalen took the Chair.]

MR. SNIDER: Currently there is no fencing. What we have around the piers is called riprap. It's those very large rocks we have. There is no fencing around them at this point in time. With our enhanced camera system, you can develop what they call a "virtual fence" - that is to say, you take the image and you draw a line around it. If something penetrates that imaginary line, an alarm goes off.

MS. RAYMOND: Thank you very much. I'm going to turn the rest of my time over to my colleague, the member for Lunenburg West.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Ramey.

MR. GARY RAMEY: Madam Chairman, I should mention at the outset that I'm replacing the member for Cumberland North, Brian Skabar. I normally wouldn't be here today, but I've totally enjoyed listening to what you've had to say. Thank you for coming, of course.

I think I have this correct, but I'll just double-check my numbers here. In 1955, about 2.7 million people moving across?

MR. SNIDER: It's 2.7 million vehicles.

MR. RAMEY: And in 2010 about 33.7 million people moving across?

MR. SNIDER: Vehicles, correct. Yes.

MR. RAMEY: I would say a job well done. I live outside the city, so anything I'm going to mention here just quickly before I ask my question is artifactual, but I have been

called upon to go to Dartmouth quite a few times for various reasons over the last two years, at various times of the day. I have to say - and I don't have the MACPASS because I'm not from here. I probably should, and I go through the change lane because I never have the right change either. I have to tell you, any time I've done it, it has been smooth sailing for me. So I'm not sure if that's the case all the time, but I have to say I'm pretty impressed by the number of vehicles that are moving back and forth across there and how well you do it.

My question is on a completely different tack. I know that the Halifax Harbour bridges play a fairly important part in community events, because I hear about this, usually on the radio. Usually on CBC or something they're talking about some event that's taking place and the bridge is somehow involved. I think you put a float in the Parade of Lights and things like that as well, if I'm not mistaken. I'd just like you to maybe comment very briefly on how HHB takes part in these and how that fits in with your overall plan. I think it's a good idea, by the way.

MR. SNIDER: We really feel that the Macdonald Bridge is a connector between communities. The MacKay Bridge is a little industrial and it doesn't accommodate pedestrians or cyclists, unfortunately. I wish it could, but that's not viable. The Macdonald Bridge does. The Macdonald Bridge connects city centre to city centre very closely. I believe that the people in this community feel that it's their bridge, and there are times when we get a chance to share their bridge or let them be more intimate with their bridge.

Bridge Walk is a tremendous event. It was established before I arrived there, and I remember my first day being there - for Bridge Walk, that is. At 1:45 p.m. there was nobody there. The event starts at 2:00 p.m. and I'm like, well, where are the people? Why are we closing this bridge for Bridge Walk? Bridge Walk was the Sunday afternoon of Natal Day when we shut the bridge down for two hours and pedestrians get to come out and walk.

Well, at 1:45 p.m. nobody is there. At 2:00 p.m. there's a lot of people there. They all show up at once and several thousand people go out and walk back and forth. We serve a little bit of cake now and we make sure there's water. This year we're moving to a program where we don't have bottled water. Water will be available. We'll have paper cups, because we've got perfectly good water in our tap system.

In terms of engaging the public, we've offered ourselves for fundraisers for a couple of events. We do have a limit on the number, because you just can't be closing all the time, but we have Bras Across the Bridge, which is an incredible event - 11,000 bras, $1 apiece - very touching, you know. Some people wrote notes on there. Anyway, it was very good. It was for breast cancer research.

We also have another event where people rappel down the bridge. (Interruption) Thank you. It was Easter Seals. I was drawing a blank on that one. It was Easter Seals, and

so if you wish an opportunity to participate in a fundraiser, that will be coming up this year. It's very good.

One of the things that I've been the most thrilled about was MACPASS Miles. I think it was in my first or second year at the Bridge Commission we had a running club approach us and they said, can we come and run a one-mile race? I said how long does it take to run a mile? They said well, the fast guys are five minutes; the slow guys are 10 minutes. I went okay, we normally shut down at 1:45 p.m. just to make sure everything is clear. You be ready at 1:45 p.m. and you run.

Well, they did and they had, I'm not sure, maybe 150 people the first year. Now we have over 700 people who come out annually. The big race to watch is the kids. We have six one-mile races. Our fastest time, I think, was a 4:02, which was very quick. It's a great event and there are people who have never run a mile before in their life who come out and run a mile on the bridge, so it's the beginning of their running career.

We do those sorts of things. We are engaged with the cycling community. It's a different place than it was 17 years ago and so my thanks to a very supportive, encouraging board in encouraging and permitting us to do this, and staff who likewise have carried the torch for us.

MR. RAMEY: Thank you very much for that. Madam Chairman, do I have time for another question?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: You do, you have until 10:53 a.m.

MR. RAMEY: Okay, thank you very much. My second question - thank you for that answer, by the way. I think every one of those events is very important and I think it's a great way to get people to somehow interact with the infrastructure and the people who run it, so top notch on that.

I notice you have, I think it is nine strategic goals or something on your Web site. I think one of them is something like - to strengthen relationships with major stakeholders. I'd be interested if you could outline who your major stakeholders are and what you're doing to strengthen your relationship with those stakeholders. Could you just speak briefly on that, please?

MR. SNIDER: One of our major stakeholders is government, we're here today; our public, the public in general; in fact we periodically go out and do surveys to understand not just our users but what the entire public think about us.

Internally, our employees are a stakeholder, we're reaching out to them in the next couple of weeks and doing a survey with our employers to engage how they feel about our organization; our neighbours; the Department of National Defence; the people who do

business under us; the Port Authority; the political government; the city, HRM, who we serve; Metro Transit; I can go on and on. I mentioned employees, our customers, our public, our government and any other interest group that comes along, we're looking to make sure that we have open and meaningful communications.

I love it when somebody, by the way - stakeholders call me periodically. In the phone book I'm listed as General Manager. When my phone rings, I pick it up. People call and they're not always happy with us, sometimes they are a little frustrated about something.

MR. RAMEY: I can't imagine, being in government, that anybody could ever be unhappy.

MR. SNIDER: I'm pleased when they call me because then I have direct engagement with one of my stakeholders and I get to understand their concerns and I get to relate to them, whether that's a mistake on our part and we can remedy that, or help them understand why we conduct business in a particular manner. These are our stakeholders and we're looking to engage them whenever we get an opportunity.

MR. RAMEY: I gather from a previous answer to a couple of previous questions - am I finished, or can I . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: You are finished now, yes, if you wanted to just close it.

MR. RAMEY: That's fine, I'll stop talking.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Ramey, good questions, thanks very much. Our time has elapsed for the questioning today so I'd like to turn it back over to you, Mr. Snider, if you'd like to have a few closing statements from today's meeting.

MR. SNIDER: Thank you. It has been a pleasure being here today. You are always a little leery when you come through the door. What are the questions? Do I have the right answers? The right answers are the truthful answers and today we've shared with you, on a very open basis, what it is we do, why we do it and what our focuses are.

The public - not all the public but some of the public - from time to time you see letters to the editor, we go out for a toll increase, you go on some of the blogs and you can read what people think about you. Sometimes they don't always see us as being a proactive, forward organization that is looking out for their interests. Sometimes they see us as they define old boards and commissions and people who are vested in serving themselves. That is not Halifax-Dartmouth Bridge Commission of today.

I can't tell you what it was before I was there, but it's not the way they've been performing, that's not the way our boards have been performing in the past. We're an

organization that's focused on maintaining these assets, protecting the public and protecting our employees. Safe, efficient travel at an appropriate cost is our focus. Our staff focus on their expenditures like it was their own money. They are very prudent, but they're not prudent to the point of being foolish. They are looking to make wise investments for these facilities.

I have a board that's very supportive. I have a board that's very demanding. They are exercising good governance and they challenge us and they guide us. It's interesting, I've been at the commission for 17 years but it was only two years ago that I had an entire team that was hired by me. I tell my board again and again, my biggest challenge, my biggest responsibility, is hiring well because the team that I get to work with are the folks who deliver. I'm thrilled by the team that I have today and they're doing tremendous work.

I hope you've seen from the answers that our chairman, Mr. Mason and our CFO Carolyn Feindel have shared with you that we are a board that is focused on serving our customers and the public and we look to do that into the future. Thank you very much.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much Mr. Snider, I appreciate that. For our committee, there is no big business today but there are a couple of notifications. One is for our conference that's coming up at the end of August, that's on your agenda, the CCPAC/CCOLA conference, which is jointly members of Public Accounts Committees and auditors from across the country.

We're the host this year so I'm hoping you will notify the clerk, Mrs. Henry, of your attendance at that. We really would like to have all members of the committee be attending as much as you can of that three day event. If you have guests you're bringing, there is a guest program as well, so if you could notify as well and register your guest. We don't need to register, we just need to notify, but if you could register your guest, that would be good. If you want to book any hotel rooms, that has to be done by July 28th. Today is the deadline for registering guests so we would really appreciate it if you'd think of that.

The next piece of news is that we don't meet again until September 7th and that will just be the subcommittee on that day. Members of the subcommittee will meet and we'll set the agenda for the Fall.

With that, have a wonderful summer and I ask for a motion to adjourn.

MR. CLARRIE MACKINNON: So moved.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We are adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:57 p.m.]