

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

**Wednesday, December 2, 2015**

**LEGISLATIVE CHAMBER**

**Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal  
Re: Investment in Road Improvements and Repairs**

**Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services**

## **Public Accounts Committee**

Mr. Allan MacMaster (Chairman)

Mr. Iain Rankin (Vice-Chairman)

Ms. Margaret Miller

Ms. Suzanne Lohnes-Croft

Mr. Brendan Maguire

Mr. Joachim Stroink

Mr. Tim Houston

Hon. Maureen MacDonald

Hon. David Wilson

[Mr. Joachim Stroink was replaced by Mr. Gordon Wilson.]

### In Attendance:

Ms. Kim Langille,  
Legislative Committee Clerk

Mr. Gordon Hebb,  
Chief Legislative Counsel

Ms. Nicole Arsenault,  
Assistant Clerk, Office of the Speaker

Mr. Michael Pickup,  
Auditor General

### WITNESSES

#### Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal

Mr. Paul LaFleche,  
Deputy Minister

Mr. Bruce Fitzner,  
Chief Engineer

Mr. Peter Hackett,  
Executive Director - Highway Engineering and Construction

Ms. Barbara Baillie,  
Executive Director - Maintenance and Operations

Ms. Diane Saurette,  
Executive Director - Finance and Strategic Capital Planning



House of Assembly  
*Nova Scotia*

**HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2015**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

9:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN  
Mr. Allan MacMaster

VICE-CHAIRMAN  
Mr. Iain Rankin

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good morning everyone, I call this meeting to order. With us today we have the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal to speak with us about investment in road improvements and repairs.

We'll begin with introduction of committee members, starting with Mr. Maguire.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Perhaps Mr. LaFleche you and your colleagues could introduce yourselves and after that perhaps you could start with some opening comments.

MR. PAUL LAFLECHE: Thank you very much for inviting us here today. I think this is an annual event we look forward to. On my left is Bruce Fitzner who is our chief engineer. Bruce has been with the department 34 years and nine months - I don't know what that tells you but it is telling me that he has another five years to go. He has held many, many jobs in the highway side of the department and is also responsible for the public works side at this point.

Barb Baillie who is on the far right is our executive director of maintenance and operations for highways, so you can read into that snowplowing - it was all her fault last winter - and also obviously Spring pothole maintenance, summer maintenance, brush-cutting, et cetera - general road maintenance.

Peter Hackett is our director of highway design and construction. If it's new roads, rebuilt roads, repaved roads, surface treatments, things like that, that's what Peter takes care of for the department; he's in charge of that section.

Diane Saurette right here is our executive director of finance and we share her with the Department of Internal Services. She also does infrastructure, strategic capital planning so she holds the purses and can answer the money questions.

Our road infrastructure helps keep the economy moving. It connects people, communities, businesses, to where they work, where they go to school, where they shop, et cetera. It allows us to move goods in and out of this province. It also links Nova Scotia to Canada and the rest of North America. We do have other links - as you know, we have some ferry links - but the road link and the rail link through the Amherst area into Sackville is a very important connection for us to the rest of the world.

Province-wide, we manage and maintain 90 per cent of the province's roads in our department. This is somewhat different from other provinces where the municipalities, the cities, really manage their own roads. In our case, the only real jurisdictions that manage a lot of their own roads would be Halifax Regional Municipality and the Cape Breton Regional Municipality. There are towns that manage some of the main streets in their town, but generally the province manages about 90 per cent of the roads. Why is that important? Because the federal gas tax goes to municipalities and towns and not to the province, but we own the roads for which the gas tax was originally collected. So there's a bit of a disconnect there financially, which Diane can explain if you are at all interested in that.

We have 23,000 kilometres of roadway and we have about 4,100 bridges. We own and operate nine ferries throughout Nova Scotia and our total budget for the road side of the department is about \$220 million. That goes towards new roads, bridge construction and all sorts of other things that were outlined in our five-year capital plan. That capital plan for the next year will be coming out shortly, probably within the next month or so. That's an annual capital plan. We usually bring it out shortly after the government announces its overall capital plan.

We have a lot of road infrastructure for a province of our size, mainly because the province happens to own the roads, but we feel - as experts here in the road business - that we have too much road infrastructure for the tax base we have in the province. That's not the taxes we collect, but rather the tax base we have. Of course, from time to time we've tried to thin that down, but it's very difficult because people like their roads. Even if they're

low-volume roads, even if they're rarely used, people like to have the convenience of having their roads. They want them paved and in good condition.

As with every other province in Canada, our main challenge is to keep these roads in a good state of repair and to maintain them in safe working order. I'll mention safety, because as you know, as traffic volume builds up on some roads there's a requirement to increase the capacity of the road. Otherwise it could become unsafe due to a higher volume on a road which is meant to carry a lower volume. That happens in areas which are growing, or through areas where a lot of traffic has increased for reasons of economic activity or commuters.

Our first priority in the department, always, is road safety; that's number one. Unfortunately yesterday, as you know, we had a very, very tragic accident. Very, very sad. We don't like to see that. We want our roads to be safe. We want our people - our citizens and those who travel to or through the province - to feel that they are on safe roads.

One of the things that we have to do every year is determine priorities. Of course, at the end of the day it's the politicians that choose the final priority, but we provide them with the advice, the base facts, so that they can make the appropriate choices on behalf of citizens. Through Peter's group and Barb's group, we do very sophisticated assessments of our roads every year. We have some very nice electronic equipment, some of which I worked on thirty years ago, when I still knew more than I know today, and they take all sorts of detailed measurements of roads, so that we can understand how a road is behaving, what sort of condition it's in, and when it might need some sort of maintenance repair or upgrade.

We very much value the feedback that we get from our MLAs, our municipal councillors, our federal MPs, and any other elected representatives. In fact, Bruce Fitzner - our chief engineer to my left - has spent considerable time in the last two weeks, for the second time this year, meeting with any MLA from any Party - or even the MLAs from non-Parties - who want to meet with him and talk about the road concerns of their citizens.

We go over what Bruce would consider to be our priorities in their area. They give us what they get from the citizens, or what they feel are their priorities. We try as best as we can with our limited budget to match those up and to be flexible enough within the realm of reality to get the roads done that the citizens want done in a future five-year plan.

All of that work goes into our five-year plan. In many cases, what MLAs want done as well is maintenance work. It's not major repaving, it's not something that's going in the plan, but it's the sort of day-to-day things like brush cutting, pothole filling, ditch clearing, culvert - much of that work would come out of our RIM budget. This year we've had about \$16 million, and I think in the material we've handed out there's a chart of how the RIM budget has varied over the years. So we've had about \$16 million in the RIM budget in this fiscal year, which is up from about two years ago, when it was \$15 million.

I want to talk a little bit about the gas tax. I know that people have their own thoughts about gas tax and they don't really like our thoughts, but the problem with the gas tax, the RMV fees, etc., is there are not enough of them. There's not a large enough amount to actually pay for road maintenance. I hear many commentaries from some of my friends out there in different organizations - some of them watching this show right now - about how we should spend the gas tax on roads. We do spend the gas tax on roads. We're actually short somewhere between \$70 million - \$90 million on an annual basis from what we need in gas tax, RMV fees, et cetera, to pay for all the road work we do. That would mean that the gas tax is actually maybe four, five, six cents too low.

Now, at no point do I want anyone to rush out and say boy, I just heard the deputy say he wants to raise the gas tax; I didn't say that. What I said is that the rumour, the paradigm out there, that the gas tax money is being spent somewhere else or that there's a big box of gas tax money under the Premier's desk, is not true. I've now been through four different Premiers and in fact, and I've checked under every one of those desks and when Premier McNeil arrived, he and I looked under the desk for the gas tax money and we actually found it out on a road in Inverness County. I'm sorry about that, that that sort of paradigm out there is not true but it's not true, and I'm not speaking of the federal gas tax because I said that goes directly through municipalities. They may spend it on roads they might own or towns might but we don't get that gas tax to spend on roads. I'm talking about the provincial one and the provincial RMV fees.

Last year, in fact, we spent about \$70 million more on roads than we collected through those sources. As a society we're always finding ways to reduce fuel consumption. We're getting more and more fuel-efficient cars which help the environment, reduces greenhouse gases, and eases the burden on our pocketbooks because we pay less gas tax. But it means that we, as a province take in less money but that's fine, it's good for the environment but we have to find ways to be more innovative in terms of what we do ourselves for roads.

Just as vehicle fuel consumption has gone down over the years, we have to find a way to build roads that last longer, that are safer, and that are cheaper. So my staff is very dedicated in doing that. We focus a lot on innovation, we've brought in a lot of innovations and I'm sure if you want to ask questions about them, just mention one, the pre-brining liquid applications we now do in certain areas of the province before storms. That lessens the cost of actually plowing, clearing later, spreading salt later and that's one of the innovations. We have many, many innovations that we have brought in.

Every year we get together and this year we got together at Dundee. I know I'm just saying that because I know that people have accessed that through freedom of information wanting to know how much we spent thinking about innovations at Dundee. That's all available if you need to know how much we spent there. My staff are very dedicated to looking at how we can improve service. I've got very dedicated engineers; these engineers could be somewhere else. They could be at another job making more

money, but they want to serve the public of Nova Scotia. They've dedicated their career, like Mr. Fitzner's 34 years to the Province of Nova Scotia. They've made some sacrifices to work here and they're working very hard on behalf of the citizens.

We're always looking for ways to save money on bridges. Bridges are very expensive; I've mentioned we have 4,100 of them. We're taking advantage of any technology we can to make bridges last longer and cheaper. As some of you know, we have bridges that are 100 years old. I believe that's true in the chairman's area, right? Also down in Mr. Wilson's area. We're working on one right now.

Another thing that we do in the department to make things better in terms of transportation is our active transportation thrust. This year the minister announced the start of the Blue Route. We're working very hard with Tourism Nova Scotia and Bicycle Nova Scotia to ensure that the Blue Route is completed and connected across this province. It's modelled after the Route Verte, the Green Route in Quebec, and in Quebec it serves as an incredible tourism asset and we hope to have the same here. I know I heard Mr. Maguire on the radio last week talking very much about the potential Blue Route sections and, Mr. Houston, I think in your area we opened the first section of Blue Route this summer.

We have to be bold. We have to take risks, so we always take some risks. In engineering it's all about risk reduction but calculated risks - risks you know about. Sometimes things go bad. Sometimes projects don't always go as you want them to go. But we do our best, and our engineers do their best, to make sure that we make the appropriate choices for Nova Scotians.

One of the things we need to do is reduce our bridge inventory. I spoke about this last time I was here, and immediately the media wanted to know the secret list of bridges we were going to close. Well, there is no secret list. How it happens is if say a bridge has to be closed for safety reasons, following years of downgrading in inspections. If there's sufficiently low volume and there are alternatives, we present to the minister the idea of not replacing that bridge.

Many of our bridges, which are 50, 60, 70, and 80 years old, were built in a different era - some in the horse-and-buggy era when cars weren't as fast and as convenient and as accessible as they are today. Those bridges are no longer needed to the same extent they were back then. They have very low volumes, so we sometimes suggest to the politicians that the bridges not be replaced. In some cases they are downgraded and they are used for walking bridges. In other cases we make minor repairs so they can carry cars but maybe not heavy trucking anymore. We've got to reduce our bridge inventory and focus on the bridges we really need and make them really good.

The other part of that is roads; we have a lot of them. In some cases, roads are no longer used for what they were formerly used for. We would like to return some roads to gravel. We do mention to the minister and his colleagues many times that sometimes when

a road needs repaving, our chosen choice is to return it to gravel. I made the mistake of mentioning that in a community hall about a year ago, and the MLA was not happy with me. But we feel we've got to provide the best advice we can and if a road is extremely low volume, and it's going to be very expensive to rebuild, returning it to a good gravel road is not a bad idea, and it's a good way to spend taxpayers' money.

We are doing a feasibility study, as you know, on twinned highways. Everybody wants to know - we get requests almost every day - when is something going to happen? When are we going to hear something? The good news, and Mr. Fitzner can elaborate on this a little later, is that we will have some preliminary results early in the new year which Cabinet will have a chance to look at. Then we will proceed to the consultation with the public stage. Things are happening, things are moving on, but as yet we don't have anything to give you today.

You know the eight sections we're looking at, and you know the safety studies we've done on some of those sections, which we released last year which started the ball rolling. It would be very costly - hundreds of millions of dollars, if not \$1 billion or more - to twin all of the roads that everybody wants to twin. That is one of the reasons we're looking at tolling.

Mr. Fitzner can tell you that in many cases our roads are considered safe, but sometimes the way people drive or sometimes small rush hour traffic volumes get above the safety limit and cause, for short periods of time, dangerous conditions on those roads. We're always looking at how we can improve them. There are other ways than twinning. Two-plus-one highways are used all over Europe. We have a modified two-plus-one in the Valley, which was put in several years ago. Even though it's not as safe as a twinned road in many people's minds, it does provide separation between the two sides to somewhat avoid head-ons, and it does provide passing lanes. I know that Mr. Wilson, you would drive that road frequently.

As part of the feasibility study, our consultant will be conducting a series of public consultations throughout the province. This is a great opportunity for the citizens of Nova Scotia and for you MLAs to get out there and to listen to what the people have to say, but also for us to educate the people on some of the facts and educate them on the choices that Nova Scotians have to make regarding roads. Nobody really likes tolls, but tolls are a universal option that is used in many, many locations of the world.

The main factor behind tolling is that we could get many of these roads done quicker, make them safer, and drive higher volumes of traffic through them in a short time as opposed to our regular capital plan, which would have many of these roads twinned a long way out.

I want to thank you for your attention. I know I had a rather long introduction. Usually my introduction is quite short, Mr. Speaker, but today we wanted to put out a few



messages there. So with that, we are open to questions and I will direct the questions to the appropriate staff member as we go along.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. LaFleche, it was a very informative opening. We'll move to Mr. Houston for 20 minutes.

MR. TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Chairman, I actually found it riveting - informative is an understatement as to that introduction. So thank you very much.

I do want to start with a couple of questions just to orientate us on the numbers; I do think they are best directed to Ms. Saurette. I'm looking at the budget for this year and there is, on the tangible capital assets budget for Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, Highways and Bridges, \$220 million. I guess that's the capital budget for this year. Then also under the departmental expenses summary for this year there's a line item for Maintenance Improvements, \$216 million. I wonder if you can tell me how the \$220 million capital and the \$216 million interact. Do I take that to imply that there will be \$436 million spent on roads this year or is there an overlap between the two?

I'm looking at \$23.2 million from the departmental expenses. I don't know if this is in the package that came or something I dug up elsewhere, but there are Maintenance Improvements for \$216 million. Maybe that's the number that is familiar to people.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Houston, would you be able to table the paper you have there, or provide a page number and a document so they can reference?

MR. HOUSTON: I can, but I didn't - it was more just - Ms. Saurette, maybe you will answer how they interact.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Saurette.

MS. DIANE SAURETTE: I'm looking at a different page here. On highways, yes, and maintenance it would both the operating and capital. So you are referring to two different budgets: our TCA budget, our capital budget, which is \$220 million on the highway side; and then on the maintenance improvement side, that would be winter, summer maintenance, work on bridges, all of that, that is approximately \$212 million. So if you add the two together you would be over . . .

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, that was my question. I do want to talk about the maintenance - I had \$216 million budgeted for this year, you've just referenced \$212 million. Would that be the actual kind of year to date or just maybe another iteration of the budget?

MS. SAURETTE: It's another iteration. I'm looking at my gas tax in the breakdown.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, fair enough. Now the budget for this year for Maintenance Improvements, the official budget was \$216 million - do you have a sense as to how much of that has been spent, like year to date?

MS. SAURETTE: Year to date? Well a large portion of it is related to winter and we haven't really hit the winter budget yet, so that's about \$60 million. We're about seven months through the year, so most of the summer budget would have been spent. We keep a small contingency and then of course we have other maintenance on bridges and things of that nature.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, maybe that's a question, as to the \$216 million.

MS. SAURETTE: Yes, we are on forecast.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, that's fine. How is the \$216 million split? Is it like X percentage is usually winter and Y percentage? Is there a rule of thumb - is it 50/50 for summer versus winter?

MS. SAURETTE: Yes, the amortization we do. Our operating budget is approximately \$419 million. You have to consider that about \$190 million of that budget is amortization for our capital assets, so it brings down that budget significantly.

MR. HOUSTON: Is this split between summer and winter, 50/50?

MS. SAURETTE: Yes, it is. Here, I'll give you the exact of what we have in summer and winter. Our winter budget is actually relatively about the same - about \$61 million is allocated to both summer and winter. We do have a pot that we hold centrally as well.

MR. HOUSTON: That's fair. So of the \$216 million, would it be fair to say that \$60 million-ish of that is winter and the difference is summer?

MR. LAFLECHE: We have to figure out the page all the time, but I think Bruce has it here. The \$216 million includes amortization - that's summer. Winter . . .

MR. HOUSTON: Is that the \$190 million - \$190 million of the \$216 million is amortization?

MS. SURETTE: Yes.

MR. LAFLECHE: That's mainly amortization, what you're looking at.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, that's fine. So the \$216 million for maintenance - \$190 million of that is amortization. Is the difference the RIM? Is it all RIM?

MR. LAFLECHE: No. I have a page here actually, Mr. Chairman, that divides all this out, and Bruce will go over all the numbers for you.

MR. HOUSTON: Maybe I'll look at that later, but I'm just trying to orient myself as to what's being spent.

MR. LAFLECHE: We have a summer budget and a winter budget, and right now this year, our anticipated winter budget is about \$60.578 million. Last year we actually spent \$75 million; I don't know if any of you lived through last winter, but there was a bit of an overage. Bruce can go into this in great detail. You probably don't need this today, but the budget varies according to a five-year average, so if we have a few bad winters - we've had two in a row - all of a sudden the total maintenance budget switches the balance more towards winter than summer, so things vary.

MR. HOUSTON: I guess what I'm trying to zero down on is - maintenance is a huge concern because if you don't maintain something, then obviously you've got bigger problems down the road. I'm trying to understand how much is spent on maintenance. I understand so far that the amount of money spent on maintenance comes out of that \$216 million. It's not entirely dedicated to maintenance, but a portion of it is.

Is the entire maintenance budget for the whole province encapsulated in the RIM? We know the RIM was - this is the Rural Impact Mitigation fund. Is the entire RIM budget of \$16 million, is that all of the money spent on maintenance in the province or is there another pocket of money?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Fitzner.

MR. BRUCE FITZNER: Basically for the summer maintenance, we have a budget of about \$60 million. That includes the \$16 million for the RIM so the \$16 million is in the \$60 million for the summer budget. We then also have, as mentioned before, a winter budget - about \$60 million we're budgeting this year as well.

In Maintenance Improvements, a large portion of that is the amortization, which is basically paying off the capital roads that we've built before and then charging it to our operating budget. Then there is about \$22 million or \$23 million of that is used for maintenance work and it's stuff that is below the TCA threshold. So for a road project, if it's below \$500,000, it's not considered TCA. That would come out of that as well so it could be small paving projects and that type of thing or a bridge below \$250,000.

MR. HOUSTON: But it would all be out of the \$60 million?

MR. FITZNER: No, there would be an additional \$25 million out of the maintenance improvement budget that's not amortization on top of the \$60 million.

MR. HOUSTON: I kind of got a little sidetracked, but I do think this is really important. I'm just trying to understand - pure bottom line number - how much is spent on maintenance? What I understand so far is that there is a \$60 million pot of money set aside for summer maintenance. Some of that is dedicated to the RIM fund, which is \$16 million, so that would leave \$44 million additional that somehow gets out into the market for maintenance. So is \$60 million the amount that's spent on summer maintenance in the province?

MR. FITZNER: It would be \$60 million plus about \$22 million on top of that, that's contracted out. So you would have the RIM is contracted out \$16 million. The difference is done through our field operations, so our bases and our workers spend the additional, and then there is about another \$22 million or \$23 million that's contracted out. So it would be \$60 million plus the \$20 million - whatever, \$83 million or \$84 million. In that range.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, so let's talk about the \$60 million for a brief moment here. Can we get a list of how that \$60 million was spent by what you guys would call your "internal zones" around the province? Can that list maybe be provided in Excel? It would be something that I would like to see, where the money is being spent in the province. Is that something that you would be willing to provide to the committee?

MR. LAFLECHE: We can at least break that down by district, right, Bruce? We've got four districts. In fact, the four district directors are sitting somewhere where I'm not allowed to point, but we can break that down in their districts, and then I believe they can break that down through area managers. So we can probably eventually break that down. I'm not sure we can break that down to the exact riding, but we can get pretty close, if that's what you're (Interruption) We can get Pictou County.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay. I think it would be of value to the members of this committee to see that, so that's something I would definitely ask for.

MR. LAFLECHE: The capital we can get to the riding.

MR. HOUSTON: For sure, but the list of maintenance broken down as finely as you can, that's a request I would certainly make, so I appreciate that very much. If you can provide any historical perspective on that breakdown, that would be useful as well.

Before I leave that part of it, I guess I would just ask Mr. Fitzner - the \$60 million budgeted for this year, how does that compare historically? Is that number going up or down over the last three years?

MR. FITZNER: That is down slightly over last year, and largely because of the heavy winters we've had the last couple years. Basically, we have a bottom-line budget and we had to budget a little bit more this year for the winter, and so that had an impact on

our summer money. So I'd say it's down slightly over last year, but that budget has been relatively flat for many years.

MR. HOUSTON: We have a new federal government that plans to spend a lot of money on infrastructure over the next ten years. Has the department created a wish list of their top ten projects they would like to submit to the new federal government to tap into? Do you have a list of ten projects, and can you share that list with us?

MR. LAFLECHE: I think it's a bigger question - I'm not trying to dodge the question. Yes, we do have a list of all of our projects.

MR. HOUSTON: Can you share it with us?

MR. LAFLECHE: As we go through roads et cetera, I think basically that list is sort of shared in the five-year plan, but it's a bigger question, because that infrastructure money that the federal government is promising is fairly broad - there's social infrastructure in there, et cetera, et cetera. We have no details on the federal program.

What we're doing is, as Minister MacLellan is the Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal Minister, he's coordinating a pan-government approach. He'll also be working with Municipal Affairs for the municipalities and Minister Regan for the post-secondary sector, to look at how exactly we prioritize and approach the federal government. But as yet the federal government - really, other than a bunch of bullets in an election pamphlet, we don't have a lot of details. The only early thing we know is that they threw out the P3 screening.

We will have an overall list, which will include road infrastructure and other capital things that we approach the feds on.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, but you don't have it yet. I guess I'm just curious - it's going to start raining money and everyone should have their bucket ready. I'm just curious if you have your bucket ready for our road maintenance.

MR. LAFLECHE: Yes, we will have a bucket ready. We want to double check and triple check, because some elements in our bucket may not be eligible, or they might be eligible under a different program. So depending how the federal buckets come out and what's allowed in them, we might change things. We've got to be very flexible until we see what the federal government does.

We have a whole array of things, because the 100-Series or national highway system highways have a different eligibility than local roads or trunks and routes. They're all in a different bucket, so to speak. We have to look at each one and see what the federal program is and what would be eligible, and move things around to maximize our ability to access the big rain of money.

We've got to remember too, though, that the big rain of money will be cost shared - so in other words . . .

MR. HOUSTON: Yes, that's my question now. That's my question. Let's talk about the last year. There's been a Building Canada Fund. Have we, as a province, left any money on the table because the province didn't proceed with road work that was previously approved to get money under the Building Canada Fund?

MR. FITZNER: Basically the program that came out in 2014 was a 10-year program. The Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal has submitted three projects that have received tentative approval. One was on the Ingramport interchange. We also put together a package of repaving 100-Series Highways, 20 sections over four years, and we have agreement for a piece of Highway No. 101 just down below Digby. The remaining money has not been allocated yet.

Again, this is a 10-year program so not all the projects automatically go the first year.

MR. HOUSTON: So you haven't lost anything yet?

MR. FITZNER: No, exactly.

MR. HOUSTON: So there are opportunities there and there will be bigger opportunities once the new fund showers down on us.

MR. LAFLECHE: I need to elaborate on that a little bit because the federal government started the New Building Canada Fund a bit late so they wanted to basically kick-start things and get some early projects done - you might guess why. Anyway, we were early out the gate with those three projects that Mr. Fitzner is referring to. My colleagues in P.E.I. and New Brunswick were rather mad at me since we got there too early and they didn't but we did fairly well in the first round.

It's 10 years of money so the money, the build-up of Building Canada - the first two years, I believe, Bruce - were less federal money so there was less for us to do, then it builds up. We have already divided up conceptually the federal Building Canada and sort of have an idea of what we would do over the 10 years of the program.

Now as you alluded to, there's new federal infrastructure money coming and we're waiting to see what that will be. We have left no money on the table from the early years of the New Building Canada Fund.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, good, thank you for that, that's an important clarification.

Now I guess I have just maybe two minutes this round?

MR. CHAIRMAN: You have about four minutes.

MR. HOUSTON: I have four minutes, okay. I heard your comments about too many roads, we need more gravel roads, and I have a question. I have a lot of gravel roads in my constituency and I don't know when the last time was when very many of them actually saw gravel. A lot of gravel roads are no longer gravel roads, they are dirt roads.

I'm just wondering can you tell us how much has been spent on gravel for re-gravelling of roads over the past construction season right here and then put that into some historical perspective because it doesn't seem like there's a lot of gravel being spread around.

MR. LAFLECHE: Mr. Fitzner is going to look that up for a second but I want to explain that many people who think they have gravel roads don't have gravel roads. What they have is dirt roads that you referred to.

MR. HOUSTON: I'll clarify that, I'm talking about gravel roads.

MR. LAFLECHE: Many of our so-called gravel roads in fact have a very poor base, they're not properly built, properly drained gravel roads. When we talk about returning a road to gravel, what we really mean is building a true gravel road like you see in other areas of Canada. We've got a few of them in Cape Breton now.

MR. HOUSTON: How often does a good gravel road need to be re-gravelled, need gravelling?

MR. LAFLECHE: I'll let my maintenance director take that.

MR. HOUSTON: How often should a gravel road need gravel? They get graded once a year but how often should they really need some gravel?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Baillie.

MS. BARBARA BAILLIE: As the deputy mentioned, we don't have many true gravel roads. The gravelling that we do now is mostly spot gravelling for shaping the road, just repairing soft areas. If you had a robust gravel road program, you would probably need eight inches of good gravel on it and then you could probably touch it up every couple of years; just minor touch-ups.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, every couple of years.

MS. BAILLIE: That would be just touch-ups.

MR. HOUSTON: Sure, yes. So back to the deputy minister, if we are going to tell people that you don't need to be on a paved road, that there's nothing wrong with a good gravel road - which I do hear said quite often - what do you say to those people who think they are living on a gravel road but you would suggest they are actually living on a dirt road? Would the same thing apply, that there's nothing wrong with a good dirt road? Or would we be saying, we should really try to get your road gravelled?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Baillie.

MS. BARBARA BAILLIE: Yes, we are looking at our funding levels now and we are trying to do a program where we could do more gravelling on the gravel roads. There's a balance, as the deputy and Bruce said, there's only a certain pot of money so if you do more gravelling, you are going to do less paving and patching. So there's a balance and we're trying to do a little more gravelling but, like I said, that will impact other activities.

MR. HOUSTON: If we say the population of people who think that they live on a gravel road is 100 per cent, do you have a sense as to how many of those the department would say well, no you're not a gravel road, you're on a dirt road - would it be half, or do you have any kind of a sense?

MS. BARBARA BAILLIE: I really couldn't comment on that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. Time has expired; I'm sorry. We'll move to the NDP caucus and Mr. Wilson.

HON. DAVID WILSON: Thank you for being here again - I think it was a year ago, or some time ago. As was indicated, I think for my own riding, I don't have any provincial roads other than the highways that surround my community, but travelling around the province I hear from constituents in other districts often about the road conditions. Of course, it's always a concern, especially the more rural you go in our province. Some of the roads are in bad shape.

Deputy, I know you mentioned earlier about innovation and being bold and taking risks, but would you agree that one of your priorities would be to stretch the amount of money you receive? Stretch that as far as it will go to make sure that you can address either repair or construction of roads in the province. I would assume that that would be a goal of the department.

MR. LAFLECHE: That happens to be the goal of every deputy minister in every department, but we have to do that with due consideration of the safety of the public.

MR. DAVID WILSON: So when I was preparing for today, looking at the 5-Year Improvement plans, the editions went back to 2011-12, 2013-14 editions, and then of course the 2014-15 edition, in the earlier ones I noticed that there was a page that had the



title Making Our Dollars Go Further but I noticed in the most recent one that page is no longer there. When you look back, it talked about, I think, maybe being bold and the risks and how do we stretch the dollar to make sure that we're meeting the needs - is there a reason why that page is not in the, I think it's the last two editions of the 5-Year Highway Improvement plan?

MR. LAFLECHE: We'll have to ask the author of that.

MR. FITZNER: There was no specific reason other than they wanted to, over the last couple of years, sort of trim down the report a little bit more to focus more on the projects and less on all the flowery stuff that I had put upfront in the original one. It's all still valid stuff; it's just not appearing in the report. The pavement preservation and the different ways to go about dealing with the roads is all the same program that we're pursuing now.

MR. DAVID WILSON: So you mentioned that "they" don't want to see the flowery stuff - did you get instructed to take that out? I'm just trying to figure out, I mean, when you read the information that was on those pages, I think it's relevant to the update of the plan. Were you instructed by the deputy or the minister to remove that?

MR. FITZNER: No, it wasn't like that. It was like we had new public affairs and communications people move into the department and everyone who comes in wants to do their own version of the front end of the document and so they felt that it was probably better to be more succinct I guess.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Even I can feel the daggers coming down from the gallery as you threw your communications people under the bus. (Laughter)

I just wanted to make sure there was no directive . . .

MR. FITZNER: No. No.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Okay.

Going through, preparing - as I was saying, a lot of information was provided to us and one of the packages that I went through - of course, some of the information that this committee had received in the past and it talked about the trends of paving, the cost of paving. I'll get a little bit into that now. One of the charts that was provided to the committee revolved around the paving plan and the need to try to address the cost of tendering for a number of years. Of course, in 2009 costs were two and a half times higher than New Brunswick for some of the chip sealing and paving. So there was a whole package provided to the committee from you and the deputy on why we should go that way, and it showed charts that saw a trend in the costs. I'm going to spend some time on that.

One of the charts that we received was all the contracts that were awarded to vendors, and I apologize if this is available. Is that something that is available currently - of all the vendors - is that something publicly that we can get?

MR. FITZNER: Yes, procurement will put all that out on their website. That's all public.

MR. DAVID WILSON: One of the charts that was provided in support of the paving plan was the five-year comparison of single and double chip sealing prices from 2008 to 2012. In that chart there was a significant decrease in the cost. I'm wondering now, in the environment we're in today, do you have that same comparison from 2012 to the current year? Are you able to provide the committee with such a chart? I would assume it's tracked. I'm just wondering if you could give us or tell us what the single and double chip sealing prices are and the trends over the last number of years.

MR. FITZNER: I don't have it with me today. Of course, we dismantled the plant and the chip seal crew, so I don't have a comparator against our own sector (Interruption) Okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Hackett.

MR. PETER HACKETT: We can find that information out for you; that's pretty readily available. I don't have it here today, but we can certainly track the last number of years and who's done what where and so on and so forth.

MR. DAVID WILSON: That would be great. I understand we don't have a plant, but we still have the cost, and that's really what I'm getting at - what the costs are today, and if we're getting the best bang for our buck. Hopefully, the decisions of the government move in the direction so we're achieving that.

MR. HACKETT: In general, if I could just say to it that in the last couple of years, at least the last two construction seasons, prices have pretty much stayed the same. They haven't gone up very much. We've had a fair amount of competition both locally in Nova Scotia and competition coming in from New Brunswick as well. That stayed fairly steady, so we're still getting pretty good value on most of our projects anyway.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Thank you, I look forward to that. Hopefully we can have a couple of years, not just a single year. I would think from 2012 on would be great to have.

One of the reasons why the previous government went down the road of the plant was around the bids per contract - seeing the rise in the cost especially in rural communities, the costs being really significantly higher than others. We also had a bid per contract chart in that. Is that something you keep track of also? Are you able to pull that off and provide the committee on where we stand the last few years on bids per contract?

MR. HACKETT: Yes, we can find that information as well.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Very accommodating. Thank you very much - that saves us from doing some FOIPOP's. Also, the average asphalt price by county - I'll probably go through a number of things, and hopefully at the end, you'll just say, "We'll provide it." I assume the asphalt price per county - we will be able to get that?

MR. HACKETT: Okay.

MR. DAVID WILSON: We were also provided a chart from 2007 to 2012 of the top four contractors' total asphalt tonnage. Is that something that is available publicly? Excellent. Then also asphalt price per year, we would be able to get something like that?

MR. HACKETT: It would be like average asphalt prices, but yes.

MR. DAVID WILSON: I look forward to all that information, that's great.

The deputy minister opened the door on this, through a previous question around the federal government throwing out the P3 screen for infrastructure projects, which I think is important. Would you agree (Interruption) - don't try to engage the deputy here. The previous federal government really emphasized infrastructure money to the provinces if they were ready to go through P3 models. You mentioned that that screen is no longer there. Would you consider that a positive move on the federal government, and would it allow for more projects to be looked at from Nova Scotia that could potentially get funding through the federal government?

MR. LAFLECHE: I'm not allowed to have opinions on whether it's positive or negative. All I have to do is deal with it. The screen was only valid for projects \$100 million or more. It wasn't a firm \$100 million. It was sort of a flexible one.

We are doing the major sections. We're looking at all the feasibility studies. We're doing the screening anyway. So we can deal with it either way.

The federal government in its recent announcement on that, which I scanned last night, seemed to have indicated some reasons for doing that. I can only assume that the reasons are appropriate in their mind. We'll live with whatever they do.

We will be providing in advance of the federal infrastructure, hopefully, details of how the new money will be delivered - the increased money. We will be giving them some concepts about what we would like to see in terms of eligibility and so on. I know the Atlantic Provinces are getting together to do that also, but we don't get to have - at least I don't get to have - opinions about the federal government, other than the big vote I cast on October 19<sup>th</sup>. That's the only one.

MR. DAVID WILSON: I won't ask you how you voted so don't worry about that. But I would assume that does open up greater possibilities for the province, especially with some of the infrastructure projects that are in front of us. I mean, we're looking at replacing a hospital, we're looking at twinning highways. You mentioned earlier there are eight different projects you're looking at. Those are significant amounts of investment - well over \$100 million on each of those projects.

What I'm trying to get at is that the possibilities now are greater for a partnership with the federal government for infrastructure money. Would you agree with that, where that screen is now removed on those larger projects over \$100 million?

MR. LAFLECHE: What I would like to see is that the eligibility be broadened because that's what my political masters would like. Indeed, when you were Minister of Health and Wellness, I flew to Ottawa and asked that the major Capital Health facilities be eligible for the New Building Canada Plan, which had not yet been announced. Then I believe I was sitting at Mr. Glavine, the Minister of Health and Wellness' desk when he came in, and I also flew to Ottawa and petitioned the same thing. We were of course unsuccessful.

I don't think we had many partners in the other jurisdictions who had similar opinions, but we desperately wanted our major Capital Health facilities to be eligible for Building Canada. So we have made those requests in the past. If that were to open up, it would open up a significant opportunity for the province. We don't know if that will be or not. There are other people in other areas in other jurisdictions in this province who would like other things to be eligible, which are currently not eligible.

So really the eligibility would be the major benefit. The \$100 million P3 screening was something, as I said, we would probably do for large projects anyway, so it's neither here nor there.

MR. DAVID WILSON: I know I questioned the Minister of Health and Wellness recently on a briefing note that was prepared for him, and also a briefing note for the Premier, around the benefits of P3s. When we did the FOIPOP, we received all the benefit information, but the risk factor of P3 projects were all blacked out. I know you can't tell me what it was, but were you part of preparing information for the Minister of Health and Wellness and the Premier on the risk factor of P3 projects?

MR. LAFLECHE: I'm not sure I exactly know what you're talking about. Do you have a document or something that you got?

MR. DAVID WILSON: We did a freedom of information request for briefing notes to the Premier and to the Minister of Health and Wellness revolving around P3 projects - the benefits of them and the risks of them. Of course we couldn't see the information about the risk; it was blacked out. I'm just wondering, have you been engaged with your

counterparts in those departments on preparing the risks and the benefits of P3 projects if the government chooses to go that route on some of the larger projects in health, or in any other sector?

MR. LAFLECHE: Well as the department responsible for infrastructure over the last whatever years, we've been involved in advising many governments about P3s, as you know. Some governments didn't want to talk about P3s and other did; we're always there.

I can't think of a specific - I know there was an article in allNovaScotia, there's a free ad for somebody there, a couple of days ago about a briefing note that they FOIPOP'd or something. We weren't involved in that. No, we know nothing about that; in fact if you can send us that article, if you FOIPOP'd it, we'd appreciate that.

MR. DAVID WILSON: That's good.

MR. LAFLECHE: When we go in with a large project, no matter what it is, if it's a really large project and we feel that there's a possibility of some sort of private involvement - let's not call it P3 - we would normally have that as one of our options to talk about the pros and cons of and on the table. That's a normal business practice that we had when you were minister and when Mr. Houston's government - I know he wasn't there at the time, but when you were there, Mr. Chairman, we had normal practice and I believe under the government of the chairman we did have some P3 projects on the table but they never got completed.

This normal practice, there's nothing - it's our job as civil servants to provide those options even if the politicians of the day want to turn them down.

MR. DAVID WILSON: So in front of us now this year and a few years ahead of us we're going to need to deal with the P3 schools. We're at a point where the government has to make a decision. Are you involved in that currently, or are you going to be involved in the options that are in front of the government - is that something you are working on currently?

MR. LAFLECHE: We would be involved only because of our design and construction division. We may do assessments of the buildings so that those assessments of the quality of the building - the potential life remaining the condition of the building, et cetera - could be factored in the decision making. I think those decisions would probably be made by the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

MR. DAVID WILSON: So when dealing with the schools that the province has given the land to the developer, that needs to be part of the discussion on what the government will do into the future. Have you evaluated the schools that are coming up on which schools the province actually provided the land, and is that something you are actively working on now? What do we do in those circumstances when the province

initially did own the land? Is that in the discussions or some of the things you are looking at while you are in looking at the schools themselves, and are you actively doing that now? Are you in those first few schools that are coming up for renewal, looking at the conditions of them to try to compose what advice you may give to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development on where to go?

MR. LAFLECHE: Yes. We have been invited to participate and assist at Education and Early Childhood Development to the extent they need assistance, because of our land transaction group and because of our design and construction group. Unfortunately I didn't bring the people of those groups with me today and they are not in the legal audience upstairs, and the best person to answer that would actually be the Deputy Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

I can't really delve into it any more. It's not that we don't want to answer your question, but if you wanted to ask me that off-line I can find out from Tom Gouthro, who is our lead there, exactly how he has been participating in the different working groups on P3, but it's quite out of the scope of where we are here.

MR. DAVID WILSON: And you don't charge a fee for me to see that?

MR. LAFLECHE: No. In fact I would mention that all that FOIPOP-ing that is done, sometimes it is just done because people want to say they got a FOIPOP. We actually give that information out, too, without a FOIPOP most of the time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order, we'll now move to the Liberal caucus and Mr. Rankin.

MR. IAIN RANKIN: I'm interested about collaboration with municipalities, specifically with HRM, being an HRM member. I'm just wondering, when you are tendering out for paving and other projects, do you ever actually combine a tender with HRM in terms of paving? Do you try to find economies of scale that way? Is that ever an option?

MR. HACKETT: There can be some things, not so much in paving. If there are sidewalks involved, the municipalities pay for the sidewalks so we get together on things like that. We sometimes try to coordinate with municipalities, if we're working in their area. Sometimes they have other services like sewer and water, that sort of thing, and we work with them and try to get that work done. If they need to get it done in the same area, we work with them to contribute to the contract, yes, to get that done at the same time.

MR. RANKIN: I don't want to get too specific to around my area but there is development on Highway No. 3, also on the St. Margaret's Bay Road so I just want to make sure that there is discussion because I know that HRM is getting very close to - and sidewalks is a big component to that area. It's not directly in my riding, as you go into the Bayers Lake Park area so I just want to make sure that discussion continues along that vein.

MR. HACKETT: Yes, I'm assuming it depends on who is leading the work so if it is HRM's work and they'll be coming into our road or near our road, then they would be coordinating that with their district to ensure they both work together. If it was us doing the work then we would often collaborate with HRM to make sure that we're not interfering with their work where they join in on it. I couldn't say specifically for that job what the districts are doing but that's usually the method.

MR. LAFLECHE: I think it's important, just in a more general sense, not your area, to know that we do collaborate with the municipalities very much. In fact, when we build schools there are often road issues. Sometimes there is a road that needs to be built, paved, rerouted, there are school bus issues. So we collaborate very closely with the municipal officials.

When we do major construction like we have recently done in Pictou County a couple of years ago; Antigonish; also CBRM, Minister MacLellan has had very close discussion with Mayor Clarke on the Highway No.125 twinning - we're always connecting with them because our roads connect together.

In HRM we've had a lot of connection on the potential for the Bi-Hi and Bayers Road. I know that's not popular with some of the councillors so we won't talk about that anymore. We will obviously cooperate wherever we can and work with the municipalities and we have very good relations, Bruce does, I do, and Peter does, and all of our district directors who are here today deal very much with head of the public work section in all of the towns and municipalities.

MR. RANKIN: I appreciate that, I know that you met with me and councillors on some of the signages used, and I think that was expedited because of that.

I'm going to have to ask a little bit about snow plowing. Usually municipalities handle their own snow plowing. Are we the only province that has a major city centre where the province actually does snow plowing in what they consider rural but is still part of HRM so that's part of my area, part of Halifax Atlantic, part of two or three other of our electoral districts, I'm just wondering if this is a big anomaly in Halifax where we actually have the province go into some of the suburban and rural sections.

MR. LAFLECHE: It is an anomaly. When you asked if we're the only ones, I believe there might be one other province right now, but generally yes. The answer is because we own the roads, we do the plowing on them. We are creating more and more partnerships with towns and municipalities wherever we can, to ensure that the jurisdiction best able to do the plowing does it. So we swap roads sometimes, swapped areas.

For instance, we're very good at large highway plowing. We have the equipment for that, big equipment, but we don't have a lot of the small J-Class subdivision equipment. When it comes to that, we're not well-equipped perhaps to do it as efficiently as a town or

municipality to do those small little cul-de-sacs and things like that, so we swap with them as we can. We're looking at more and more swaps with them in the future so that the jurisdiction with the equipment and the staff which is best suited does what they do and we do the part for which we're best suited. We do do exchanges, I think we have quite a few of them in Beechville, don't we - subdivision exchanges?

MS. BARBARA BAILLIE: Yes, we have some of the local roads. As the deputy said, we're better on the higher-speed highways with our trucks, and the little subdivision streets, we can swap off. We also contract out some of the smaller subdivision areas because the contractors have their equipment they utilize in the summer, and this provides year-round utilization for them.

MR. RANKIN: Yes, thank you for that. That was actually my next question. I know last year we had a lot of highway plows going into subdivisions and the contracted-out areas of HRM had more conducive equipment going in through.

This year, have we been able to source more equipment that does subdivisions, or have we contracted out? And can you roughly state the order of magnitude - what's the percentage of areas that are contracted out? I'm interested in Beechville, but if you just give me a broad scope, that'd be fine too.

MS. BARBARA BAILLIE: I can't comment on just Beechville, but province-wide, we probably run around 375 plows. At the current time, we have 29 of them contracted out to the private sector. I believe we increased by about six units this year, so there's 29 of, let's say, 375 contracted out now.

MR. RANKIN: So there are more contracted out this year than there were last year?

MS. BARBARA BAILLIE: Yes.

MR. RANKIN: Do you know if that happens to be in the HRM?

MS. BARBARA BAILLIE: We had a couple new contracts in HRM, but we also tried another performance-based contract there. The bids didn't work out, so our own forces are going to be doing it this year, and we will reevaluate next year.

MR. RANKIN: Is there any interest in combining any of those tenders with HRM? Given that some of these sections fall right in between the same companies that are tendering in between - I'm talking about economies again. Do you ever consider, you know, what about one tender where it's shared in between two levels of government?

MS. BARBARA BAILLIE: Actually, that suggestion was just brought up to me last month, and yes, it's something we are going to explore with HRM. The only issue is



that their levels of service and our levels of service are different, but yes, economy of scales would be very good.

MR. RANKIN: I do have more questions, but I want to pass it on to my colleagues. Thanks.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Thank you very much. It's my first time on the committee here. I guess I can actually almost say it's the first time I'm envious of the two Opposition Parties - we have five to share 20 minutes of questions, and those lucky folks had 20 minutes each, but in saying that, I'll be quick.

First off, I just wanted to mention that I think, from my observations, we as Nova Scotians are very lucky in the Maritimes compared to the other provinces. We do have roads in better shape and better conditions than our other Maritime colleagues, and I do thank the hard work.

I also want to note that personally, I'm very pleased with the support and co-operation that I have of my regional staff and folks like Barb, and the ones that come down and really pay attention. I can't say how much I appreciate that, and that coordinated response to working closely with them - I can't say enough to my colleagues.

I'm curious about the comment you made that there's too much road for our tax base, and you also talked about taking our roads from pavement to gravel. What is the plan? I understand that we don't have a capital budget for gravel roads, an envelope there to build those. If we're going to walk the walk, what would you say would be your wish list - it's Christmas coming up - to maybe start that conversation amongst all of our colleagues?

MR. FITZNER: I don't think it's any surprise that there's a big infrastructure deficit in the province. Every year the amount of spending, even in the good years, is not enough to maintain all the infrastructure in a condition that we would like to keep it in. So every year things fall off. They don't get done. Some of these paved roads with low volumes get worse and worse, and people want them paved and there simply isn't enough money in the program to get to them all.

The level of service is dropping radically, so we need to start having a conversation with the communities around some of the suggestions that were made today about having a good solid gravel-road program. If people would be able to see what a properly constructed and maintained gravel road looked like, I think that they would prefer it quite a bit to what they're experiencing now on some of these roads.

I think it's a dialogue that needs to happen with the MLAs and with the communities, and to get a couple of pilot projects there so that people could see it and

decide for themselves. There are issues around gravel roads - people don't like the dust and different things like that. But I think they would find that we could be able to maintain those much more cost effectively, and overall they'd have a better level of service.

MR. GORDON WILSON: So is there a way that we can - or I should ask maybe first off, has there ever been an initiative put forward by government, through an ad in the newspaper or just something MLAs could have in their hands, to show the design differences and the benefits and that?

MR. FITZNER: No, we haven't done it that way. We've had a couple of projects where we were preparing to pulverize the roads and re-gravel them. The one that we were planning to do this year just got delayed a little bit, and it got late in the winter, so we didn't do it, but we had one down on Route 203 down there.

MR. GORDON WILSON: I would be very interested if that's possible to get. I wouldn't mind promoting it and finding if there were opportunities myself because I know there are a few candidates that I have. I understand how sensitive it is to try and bring that to the community, but I think in this world that we're in today, it might be fruitful.

One other area I just wanted to delve into quickly also was the rights-of-way of 100-Series trunks and connectors and even local roads. I do understand we're challenged with our infrastructure for rural Internet, but I understand that there are some Internet companies that are interested potentially in accessing the shoulders or outside of the actual paved portion of the road. Is that something that you feel that we could address maybe a little bit more proactively with some of these companies?

MR. FITZNER: The rights-of-way were originally procured, I guess, to allow for the road infrastructure, so you have basically now a public corridor, and there are other parties that want to be on it: the Power Corporation and the telecommunications companies and this type of thing. We always have to keep the safety aspect of it in mind. The more that you put in - we talk about a clear zone outside the road, so if somebody goes off the road, they have so much time for the car to come to a stop before they hit something. So we're cautious about how much we put into the rights-of-way.

Also, last year was the perfect example with the snow clearing. We needed to store the snow. A lot of cities have to lug the snow down to the harbour and dump it in, which is quite expensive; we're able to push it off to the side. So there are those kinds of conflicts. But I think we're always open to looking at opportunities for people to get on that land. In many cases, that's the only opportunity, like when the gas pipelines came, to get these things in, in a corridor. I don't know if that answers your question exactly.

MR. GORDON WILSON: No, I just wanted to make sure everybody is still thinking about it. That was my main reason.

One final comment - your plow tracker was a huge success. One of the questions I've had out in the general public in the summer is, could we do the same thing for our road graders? Everybody wants to know when the road is going to be graded. It might save an awful lot of calls to your offices if that technology could - and we could promote that ourselves. I'll close with that.

MS. BARBARA BAILLIE: Actually, that idea was brought up later this Spring, and we had almost finished our grading at the time. But yes, we're going to look at that next year and try and provide a list of which roads we're going to grade, and then people can look on the tracker and see where the grader actually is.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Miller.

MS. MARGARET MILLER: Hello, and thank you for coming in. It's funny, when we started, my colleague had mentioned in her Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne that her main subject was roads, roads and roads. I thought, oh, your area must be different than mine, and then we started getting calls. Seventy per cent of the calls that come into my office are about roads, potholes, bush clearing, and everything.

I really want to commend the people with TIR who work in my area and who work in the province. We've had Peter Taylor doing a really great job for us. I think he has been in contact with our office on a daily basis. Brad MacInnis does a great job for us, Don Maillet, and I really appreciate all the efforts of your group - I want to say "family" because it really seems like that sometimes, you do such a great job for us. On a day-to-day basis we wouldn't be able to do the work we do without your support, so I want to thank you with that.

Also, just recently, I was at a recycling facility in Milford and they recycle tires. I believe they are trying to get into some kind of a program to do road construction, to do on and off ramps, that type of thing. Is that an efficient system - can you tell me a little bit about that?

MR. LAFLECHE: Mr. Fitzner and Mr. Hackett will probably answer in detail. It's interesting that you ask the question because I happened to be in charge of the corporation that owned the tire recycling facility about 15 years ago - no longer; we sold it quite a few years ago, over a decade ago and after a major tire fire, et cetera. At that time we tried to promote different ways of using recycled tires. Of course there was a big cow - you were in the cow industry, right - the milking industry and of course there's that application that a lot of people had, but it's not a very high-value application.

One of the things we try to do is promote roads. We did three tests about 15 years ago down in the Annapolis Valley, in Annapolis and Digby County, basically as an

underfill. Those have stood up over the years - and about four years ago the minister of the day announced he was looking at doing some more and, I believe, we've done some more since.

Bruce, do you want to talk about that?

MR. FITZNER: Yes, they make a product they call tire-derived aggregate. It's basically a lightweight fill. It is useful when you have soil conditions where there's not a lot of bearing capacity in the soil, so you don't want to overload it with normal heavy fill, so you can use it there.

We did a recent pilot project with HRM at the new bus ramp that comes out at Beechville. They used quite a bit to build that - I think they used every bit that the company had. It's something that we are looking at if the circumstance is right and we have a big fill; it may be possible in future, like twinning projects, to use more of that.

We've also had a project with Michelin down in the Pictou area where they were actually trying to incorporate the rubber into the asphalt itself. We had the designs and everything done but the tests never materialized. It's something that we are aware of and we are looking for opportunities for those sorts of recycling opportunities.

MS. MILLER: Another question I have is about bridges. I know they are challenged. I'm thinking about one in particular that is in my area, Garden Bridge. Something went through it, a construction truck or something like that, a couple of years ago. I know it's slated for replacement next year; I believe, in the next year. Do you know if that's going to be a single or a double bridge? I'm hearing a lot from residents in the area who want to know if it's single. There's a lot of traffic, a lot of people are waiting, so the good news would be that it is going to be a double bridge.

MR. LAFLECHE: I think the people I'm not allowed to look at are saying it is two-lane - would that be correct? Yes. I think we're all doing two-lane now. I know there was some question about doing one lane, but usually that's a temporary Bailey bridge. Do we not do two-lane - all new bridges are two lanes now?

MR. HACKETT: No, not necessarily, but we try to look at the circumstance and if the traffic volumes are very low we could go with the one-lane bridge. If the sight distances are good and the conditions are good you don't need a two-lane bridge. For that particular bridge it was decided to go with a two-lane bridge.

MS. MILLER: Good news. Thank you so much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: There's just about 35 seconds left, Ms. Lohnes-Croft.

MS. SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: Roads, roads and more roads. I get more calls about roads than my colleague - I get about 80 per cent of my calls on roads. I do appreciate the work that has been done by the crews in my area: a lovely bridge in New Germany and some good paving activities; and the Bruhm Bridge, which borderlines my communities. They were very necessary and greatly appreciated.

Still, roads tend to be a real issue for me . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. I'm sorry; the time has expired. We'll move back to Mr. Houston, and in this round each caucus will have 11 minutes.

MR. HOUSTON: Just on the information request I had about the maintenance budget, we were going to try to get a breakdown of what is now \$82 million - \$60 million plus \$22 million - as finely diced as we can get it. I asked for some historical perspective on that. I'd just like to clarify that. Could we get maybe five years of what the maintenance spending by zone has been? That's just a clarification on that.

There has been chat here today about taking a paved road and making it into a gravel road. We can talk about the pros and cons of that for sure, but I think most people - particularly those who live on those roads - would consider that a downgrade, right? The thing that I found interesting was that probably a lot of people who think they live on a gravel road don't live on a gravel road. I'm pretty concerned about that.

If we're talking about downgrading roads, can you tell me, are there ever any dirt roads that are upgraded to what the department would consider a gravel road? Can you think of the last one that might have been upgraded?

MR. LAFLECHE: We'll answer all those questions, but the first part - generally, the roads we want to return to gravel are low volume and the pavement is beat to hell. The base is usually shot so it's not that you are getting a worse road; you're getting a way better road when you get a gravel road. The problem is that type of road is usually such a low volume, and it's such a cost, it never makes the list for capital improvement.

MR. HOUSTON: I don't want to debate the merits of it. I'm more curious now about those people who think they live on a gravel road.

MR. LAFLECHE: There was at one time, many years ago when I had a lot more black hair, there was a policy that we wouldn't pave any new gravel roads. That policy disappeared at some point in history, and I think we've some in the last decade. Peter, do you know?

MR. HOUSTON: But you're still talking about what you call a gravel road. Now I'm talking about what you wouldn't call a gravel road - would dirt road be the right classification?

MR. LAFLECHE: We call it a gravel road, but it's more dirt-based than anything else with gravel on top.

MR. HOUSTON: So is there a distinction? Right now I'm thinking about all those people who live on the roads who say, my road hasn't seen gravel for 15 years - and it hasn't. Right now I'm wondering about those people right now - are they ever going to see gravel? Because what I took from the comments earlier was no, they won't because they don't actually live on what you would call a gravel road. Is there any hope for those people to get gravel on the road?

MS. BARBARA BAILLIE: Yes, I guess we were differentiating gravel and dirt roads. Actually, we call them all gravel roads even though some . . .

MR. HOUSTON: Do you classify gravel roads? Do you have a class one gravel road and a class two gravel road?

MS. BARBARA BAILLIE: No, we don't.

MR. HOUSTON: So a gravel road is a gravel road.

MS. BARBARA BAILLIE: Yes, it is.

MR. HOUSTON: So if a gravel road is a gravel road and I live on a gravel road, then I should get gravel every two to three years - I think that was what I heard last time.

MS. BARBARA BAILLIE: Well, if we had the money to do that, yes. What the local managers and directors have is a certain pot of money for graveling and they prioritize the roads. It's just like repaving roads - there is only so much money to go around so the roads are prioritized and based on the funding, we get so many done each year.

MR. HOUSTON: We want safe roads and there are a lot of reasons that could make a rural road unsafe. One of them that I hear a lot about is there are no more shoulders on a lot of roads. Is there much money being spent on shouldering roads or re-shouldering roads? I don't know what your terminology would be, but I definitely see shoulders of roads falling away. If you happen to stick a tire in one of those, it's a very serious safety concern. How does that rank in the scheme of making roads safer?

MR. LAFLECHE: As far as paved roads are concerned, we do have a program. I mentioned the Blue Route earlier. In many cases, we cost-share with municipalities to put the shoulders on so we can have cycling. We've done quite a bit of that in the last few years. A couple of municipalities have been very aggressive in working with us to do that.

So as far as paved roads are concerned, we're doing a lot more shoulder work than probably we've ever done. We're doing it according to a plan using an active transportation plan that the municipality or the town would have.

MR. HOUSTON: So the municipalities are recommending roads where shoulders should be done. I would call that the steroid version of road-shouldering, when you're actually adding a bicycle lane. I'm less concerned about the steroid version of shouldering and I'm just concerned about safe shoulders, which would not include a bicycle lane, but would actually include a shoulder to the road . . .

MR. LAFLECHE: Which would be gravel shoulders. Bruce can answer that.

MR. FITZNER: Under our RIM program, we do have a category for shoulder gravelling each year, and we have a standard - once it gets so low, we're supposed to go replenish the gravel. Last year's budget was about \$2 million across the province, just specifically to gravel the shoulders where it's falling off and there's a dip.

The other thing we have is a program - we call them retrievers - and it goes along, you might have seen them in some of your areas in the spring. It's like a harrow, basically, and it pulls the gravel back up from the side of the ditch. When you first do it, it looks like a lot of sod and stuff cut up, and people don't like it, but the sod dries out and the gravel is still there.

MR. HOUSTON: So \$2 million on shouldering. What about on brush cutting? Brush cutting is something else that I think makes roads unsafe in a hurry.

MR. FITZNER: Yes.

MR. HOUSTON: The motorcycle accident in my area was probably caused because of a lack of vision for the brushes.

MR. FITZNER: Last year we had about \$1 million allocated for brush cutting under the RIM program. On top of that, there's a sort of provincial program where they go out on the 100-Series with the big machines and do cutting, and then there's individual areas that have an attachment that goes on the grader, a big arm, and they do some limited brush cutting as well.

MR. HOUSTON: So \$2 million on shouldering, \$1 million on brush cutting. Is that enough or not enough to keep the roads safe?

MR. FITZNER: I think we do keep the roads safe. If something extreme happens, we prioritize it and it gets done. Could it be done better? I'm not going to argue that. We'd all like to have more resources to do more of that type of work.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, and the shouldering in particular, because if the shoulder slips away, it doesn't take long for the road to slip away with it. Is that a fair statement?

MR. FITZNER: Once you lose that support at the shoulder your asphalt starts cracking at the edge, and then you start - yes.

MR. HOUSTON: I think I have just a couple minutes left, and I do want to talk about this whole issue of rack when it's being peeled off the roads and trucked back. I hear a lot from truckers about this per-ton mile thing versus per-hour, and I wonder about the impact on the roads, because a lot of times when a job is per-ton mile, I hear about trucks being overloaded. There might be a gentleman's agreement that they won't be flagged and fined and stuff, and I know that if you're overweight on a road, you're going to deteriorate the road.

In my area specifically - and I'm sure that it's probably not unique to my area - this has happened, and it's really hurt some of the roads that they've trucked over. I'm thinking of the Pine Tree area, where they were trucking over our road that got completely - it was a fine road, but it got demolished on a job, and the department's hands were kind of tied to step in and say, stop it, you're hurting this road, because of the way the tender had been issued.

There are two questions that come out of this. When you're putting out tenders, have you considered designating the route that would be trucked along to preserve the roads that are fine and not get deteriorated looking for the shortest, cheapest route? And when you're designing those routes, let's say, would you involve the people who actually know the roads, like the truckers' association for the area and things like that? So overweight trucks, being part of a job taking rack back to the pits and routes - that's kind of one question in two there, a bonus question for whoever wants it.

MR. LAFLECHE: Peter answered a part of the question, but I want to say that you've raised a very good point. I talked about this last year. It's not only people working on our jobs, it's people working on other construction jobs. In two places last year, I caught truckers who were destroying a brand-new chip seal. I caught one this year on Wakeup Hill Road, and we've gone in and dealt with them; caught them on Marriotts Cove Road last year. This is just - you put in a brand-new chip seal and someone wants to build mansions or whatever or some construction project and they just go in. This is not a project related to us. We've generally got that problem and we've got to be very vigilant about this.

MR. HOUSTON: Did those guys get fined that you caught?

MR. LAFLECHE: I don't know - did they? I'm looking up there to the man - he says no, they didn't get fined, they got lectured. Okay. It was lucky because we hadn't put the final chip on yet so we were able to fix it.



We get this all the time and in terms of our jobs, Peter can probably better answer what type of instructions we give the TANS - Truckers Association of Nova Scotia - members.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Very quickly, Mr. Hackett.

MR. HACKETT: I just want to address that one item on the overweight trucks. On the weights that you're talking about, there's no reason that those trucks should be overweighted. The contractors and the truckers should understand how much material should go on the truck to be below the weight for the road. If they're going over weight, then there has to be a communication between those two.

What they're discussing there is about the ton-mile. We go by the ton-mile for rack material because it is a weighed material and it is a paid by weighed material so the department does that for accounting purposes. If you go by the hourly rate, which they always did, I don't see what the difference was by going by the hourly rate than it was by going by the ton-mile, they still have to figure how much material is going on the truck so they should be able to figure that out.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. I'm sorry but we have run out of time. Mr. Wilson.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Quickly, what I'll do is provide the deputy and the department the package that was provided to Public Accounts earlier and some of the charts that I was asking for updates so that way you know exactly what I'm looking for. I would hope that I could receive that information sooner than later. I'm not looking at months - I would love to have it by the end of the week, but if you could get it to us as quickly as possible, I'd appreciate it. I'll provide that to you before you leave, at the end of the questions.

Just quickly on one of the answers that I thought I heard on a previous question from the deputy, and I'm just wondering if I heard it correctly. I think you indicated that you do not track road work by constituency, is that true? Did I hear that or did I . . .

MR. LAFLECHE: We track by county. For capital construction, I think the question there was from you or Mr. Houston more about actual maintenance, like when we get down to fine details like brush cutting and stuff. The area managers do know what they do in their area. I'm not sure we have that breakdown - do we, Barb? We can? For maintenance? By area manager but not necessarily by political constituency. We do have the capital, like the five-year road plan is all divided up by county, which I know in the case of my former great hockey player there who popped his head in, Mr. Belliveau - he's in two counties so we have to look at things like that.

There are some roads, like Bruce mentioned - we'd love to re-gravel the Tin Mine Road. That would be a great test - Route 203 it's called? Yes. That's actually in three

MLAs' counties so sometimes you get into those difficulties where we can't get it down to that fine level.

MR. DAVID WILSON: All right, thank you. I did provide, or hopefully they'll provide you with a copy of the briefing note that I was referring to earlier. Just quickly on that, of course, at the start it was from Dr. Peter Vaughan, who is Deputy Minister of Health and Wellness, to Dave Darrow. The reason I want to go back to it a little bit is I'm a bit concerned with the fact that your department and yourself, deputy, overseeing the potential projects coming up - and some of the details in that briefing note are very specific - I'm concerned that you're not in the loop, if that's the case, and maybe you could correct me down the road.

It indicated on Page 3, for example, that it's difficult to find examples of successful P3s, where there are no criticisms in audits by provincial Auditors General. It has been discovered that - and then it indicates some of the projects in Nova Scotia, for example. On roads, in the briefing note it estimated that more than \$300 million in tolls were produced on the Cobequid Pass for a deal in which private financiers put up \$66 million. The government is paying an effective interest rate of 10 per cent for 30 years, twice its rate for borrowing.

With those details, I'm concerned that they didn't turn to the deputy who oversees some of these large projects for advice or would they maybe have just asked someone in the department for some of the facts?

MR. LAFLECHE: This briefing note - in fact, yesterday I phoned Dr. Peter Vaughan and asked him what this was all about when I saw it on allnovascotia.com, and he sent me this. He called it an SBAR. I actually don't know what an SBAR is; I don't know if anybody knows. We'll have to look that up in Wikipedia.

This was a briefing note he said he provided personally for David Darrow, although I know it was listed as being provided for someone else. We didn't know anything about this briefing note and this material is not being used. As you know, Minister MacLellan is in charge of all large capital construction in the province so his department - through us, through John O'Connor and Tom Gouthro - are working on any health capital projects. This has nothing to do with that. We're briefing the Cabinet and the Premier on those projects and I don't know what this briefing note has to do. This was something for Dave Darrow and I'm not sure that it's part of the regular government system - I just don't know. You'd have to ask someone else.

When I saw the details on the highway, I was quite concerned because, as you know, the tolls are collected by us in fact who are the owners of the corporation, not the financiers. So these details all seem to be rather strange and don't fit our world. Diane is going to explain that in a minute.

The other thing that is strange about this is that it refers to ownership of the highway by people who, in fact, don't seem to own it. A private company . . .

MR. DAVID WILSON: So you would say it is incorrect information?

MR. LAFLECHE: Yes. In fact, it refers to the Auditor General, so immediately my buddy Michael Pickup over there, I was wondering what he had to do with it. I found out that, no, it was not Michael Pickup, nor was it Michael Pickup's predecessor. It was the predecessor of the predecessor of the predecessor of Michael Pickup who in 1996, before the highway were completed, did some sort of an audit pre pre-construction on the highway - the initial purchasing, the procurement of the original companies that did the construction.

So the Auditor General-material referred to is, in fact, from 1996; I have a copy of that. I don't know where this came from. It's just not part of our current paradigm.

MR. DAVID WILSON: We only have a couple of minutes. I believe you and I think I'm correct that the nature of this information - it's not only going from the Deputy Minister of Health and Wellness, but it's going to the deputy that oversees and supports the Premier's Office. I mean, for you to sit here and tell me that this is incorrect, I'm extremely concerned that the Premier's Office and the Department of Health and Wellness is being briefed on an SBAR, which is a situation background assessment - I think that's what it stands for - and I'm concerned about that.

Have you prepared something like this for your deputy and, if so, are you able to provide it or will we have to go through the Freedom of Information request?

MR. LAFLECHE: We haven't prepared anything like that. Like I explained earlier, when we have any large capital project - and this is being done on the feasibility studies, it will be done on any large capital project - we automatically do some work on whether there could be a private interest in that project, which would be better, more beneficial for the taxpayers. That's an automatic thing we've always done, whether the government likes it or not. We will be doing that on the hospital construction. We will do that on any other construction we do, which is of a large capital value, and so this is a normal course of events that we would provide that type of information - pros and cons potential.

You may have heard that Minister Kousoulis has mused about that for some projects across the street here. It's always part of our deliberations. We have no specific SBAR. I didn't even know what an SBAR so I have not been able to produce one for Deputy Minister Blewett, who is the current deputy and did not get this note.

MR. DAVID WILSON: I appreciate that. I think government must ask themselves, and I think you're reassuring us that when making decisions about public importance or public infrastructure - you have to look at whether the benefits outweigh the risks. I think you mentioned that in your opening, and it's not just in that briefing note. There is study

after study after study from across Canada around concerns around P3 projects, infrastructure projects. In the same briefing note, which I know that are in other studies - I know that that road part is maybe outdated - we're looking at Ontario, for example. The Auditor General recently revealed a P3 hospital in Brampton cost the public over \$200 million over what it would have cost had they done it in-house.

There is mounting evidence from across jurisdictions raising the flag of concern around moving forward with large projects in a P3 model. Do you share that concern and why are we pursuing that as a province if every jurisdiction, some ending up in court more recently around these types of projects? Should we not just look the other way, look at the federal government with the renewal and their willingness to, hopefully, transfer funds to provinces for large infrastructure projects other than through a P3 screen? Why are we pursuing that, and are you advising the minister that we should be looking at doing this within government control, so that we don't see what happens in other jurisdictions happen?

MR. LAFLECHE: I'll just start off, and I think Mr. Fitzner wants to talk a bit about it. We're going to look at what makes sense for Nova Scotians. There is no one answer; all projects are different. In fact we will be going to look at this famous hospital in Brampton at some point in the near future. Some consultants came into us and told us it was the greatest deal ever; other people, like yourself, have told us it's not a great deal. So we will be doing our own research on any project.

As you know, your own government and that of Mr. Houston - sorry, Mr. MacMaster, did a P3 project on the Nova Centre. That's effectively what it is, it wasn't P3 Canada but it was a P3 project and the current government has continued that, so all three Parties have sort of agreed that the Nova Centre was an appropriate way to do a P3. That project made sense for Nova Scotians. So there are times when it works and times when it doesn't work. What we have to advise our minister is when is it not going to work and when will it work, and we'll advise him to do the ones where it works and not do the ones where it doesn't work.

Bruce, what do you have to say?

MR. FITZNER: Yes, I just wanted to mention that P3s can be many different types and forms and that they are just one tool that we have to build infrastructure. But like the deputy says, they're not all good and they're not all bad. So what we do is a thorough business case on any of the major projects that we do and we examine it through that lens to see if there is an opportunity there - but if it wasn't a good opportunity, we wouldn't do it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. Thank you. We'll move to Ms. Lohnes-Croft.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Where I left off, we talked about how you meet with MLAs to go over the needs of the constituency. Can you tell me how much influence an MLA has in the day-to-day work that goes on in their constituencies?

MR. FITZNER: When we put our programs together, we look at a wide range of things. We go out and do our own technical assessments on that. We talk to our crews that maintain the roads and we talk to MLAs. MLAs represent their constituents so to us, they are sort of a funnel through which all the calls and comments that you get are put down into something that's easier for me to deal with. So you can bring things to me.

I consider the advice that we get from the MLAs very important, and it does have a significant impact when we're developing our program. But we balance that against sort of the technical side. We try to find projects that are both big interests to the constituents and sort of fit in with the pattern of what we're able to do on the roads and get those on the program.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: But in the day-to-day operations, I sit in my office and take call after call, my assistant does. We try and package it up, and we make priorities. We follow a protocol; we ask that they call the TIR office first and wait for a response from them. We don't step in until they haven't had a response from the TIR. Then we go forward.

How does an MLA get the top priorities for RIM work and whatnot seriously looked at by the department locally?

MR. FITZNER: What I advise people to do, and I think a lot do, is that you should have some regular meetings with your local staff - district director, area manager, operations supervisor - on an annual basis, if not more often, to talk about those priorities so that you can bring the stuff that you're hearing to the table. That can help them to shape their plans for the next year.

For instance, probably sometime early in the new year, we'll know roughly what our budget for the RIM program will be next year. Then we start developing the RIM program, so January or February would be a good time for you to meet locally with your local staff and have that discussion of what the RIM program might look like for next year.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: How do we prioritize on a regular basis when we have a road that we constantly call in about, and the work does not get done? How can we be more influential? Or are we not influential in getting that work done?

MR. FITZNER: Basically, I think what we have to do when we get a call from an MLA is go out and assess the work to see what can be done. Then we have a responsibility to get back to the MLA to know what the art of the possible is. Not always can we do everything that people want, because we have some limits on how much we can do, but in every case it should be looked at, it should be roughly costed - how much this is going to

be to do. We've got to try to fit it in the ongoing program plan that we have, and that type of thing.

We don't like to just drop everything every time a call comes in and start moving people all around the district to go fix this and to go fix that. We have to have some sort of plan. But our commitment is to get back to you and give you a realistic idea of when that work might be done. It might not even be done the current year; it might be the following year sometimes. That would be something that at least you can take back to your constituent and give them an idea of what it is. When we tell you that, we do our best to make it happen, because we all get in trouble when it doesn't.

MR. LAFLECHE: I would like to just comment - you've raised a good point, and earlier Ms. Miller mentioned Peter Taylor. Everybody has a Peter Taylor, the operation supervisor. I would encourage that that sort of stuff be dealt with at that level; there's maintenance supervisors and operation supervisors. If you deal with them on a day-to-day basis for bush cutting and stuff, that's great.

Then it gets more sophisticated - the roadside, what am I going to get done in terms of paving potholing? You've all got area managers who are the supervisors. Ms. Miller mentioned Brad MacInnis; he's Peter Taylor's boss. Then above them, there's the district directors who are sitting upstairs there. Everybody's got one; yours is Don Maillet, and yours is Steve MacIsaac. Always, I would encourage you, as Bruce said, to sit down with those district directors, and then you can always go to Bruce.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Sometimes I get feedback from constituents that they're not happy with the customer service they receive when they call the local depot. I understand you're changing the way you're handling that. Can you explain a bit more about this new phone line that you're having set up?

MS. BARBARA BAILLIE: We're currently working on opening a call centre. In essence, it will funnel all the calls to the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal through this call centre. When people call, they'll be given a tracker number or whatever to reference their complaint. The complaint - or compliment, whatever it is - will be given to the field staff. They'll investigate, and somebody will return the caller's call.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: So you expect better documentation, that when people like me say I'm getting a lot of calls about such and such a road needing bushes cut or potholes, you'll be able to document these calls better, so that we can get RIM work done where it's most needed or most requested?

MS. BARBARA BAILLIE: That'll be a tool to help prioritize the RIM work, but it will also be great for us for tracking. If say 50 per cent of our calls are bush-cutting related well maybe we will have to look at how we allot the money and maybe put a little bit more to bush cutting.

Right now we have no tracking system for incoming calls. They go to a number of different employees in the government so this will consolidate that and make it a much more efficient operation.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Great and I look forward to that improvement.

MR. LAFLECHE: I think we want to be careful of the fact the MLA will still be able to get through to the local . . .

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: I hope so.

MR. LAFLECHE: You know, okay. Because there was some fear the MLA would just go to the call centre; I've had that recent experience with Bell Canada in Toronto.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: I've got my manager's cellphone number.

MR. LAFLECHE: Right, that's what you need. There is only one MLA who doesn't need any of that because he has no roads and he's sitting up there and he doesn't get much service, but he serves you. Other than that, the other 50 MLAs have pretty good service. There's one other MLA who only has one overpass, but most of you have roads and most of you should know who your local operation supervisor is.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Maguire, you have just shy of three minutes.

MR. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I've been through this process a lot with you guys and I do have great service from Don and Guy and actually Darcy now, Jonathan and Hugh and all them. So what I'm hearing is that priorities are based on safety and it's a fair and collaborative process.

I want to talk just for a quick second on last year with the snow removal. We are prepared this year; I know we've talked about that, as long as we don't get another winter from our nightmares again. If you could touch quickly on the snow removal, but also we heard a little bit on turning roads from pavement to gravel. We have a prime example of that with Chebucto Head Road, which was taken from a paved road to a gravel road, and I can tell you the people on that road are very happy that was done. Can you give us some examples of where chip seal and gravel make the road better and also your thoughts on this upcoming winter?

MR. FITZNER: I'll start with the chip seal gravel and I'll pass the winter down to Barb in a minute. We have places in the province where we've used sand seal which doesn't really hold up over the long term. In some cases we've gone out and chip sealed those and made a much better road and people are happy. In other cases I know down in Pictou

County we've had some areas where we've pulverized the old asphalt road and were fairly successful in getting a good chip-seal road. Now there are some minor problems on a few of them, but most of them came out pretty good.

The area that we seem to have the most trouble is when we take a gravel road and make it a chip seal road, so we're kind of upgrading it. What we've been finding is that many of those roads probably have to be built up much stronger before we put the chip seal on it, otherwise we go running back making repairs all of the time to them. The ones that we've turned from asphalt back to chip seal, overall, 90 per cent of them have come out great.

MR. MAGUIRE: But you wouldn't see this as a downgrade and like I said, to go back to my riding once again - with Chebucto Head Road, we went from a paved road that was pulverized down to a gravel road. This isn't a downgrade. The people on our road receive much better service now because of the service with the road.

MR. FITZNER: Well there's no question on that one because that road was like a lunar surface, right.

MR. MAGUIRE: You're not in the business of downgrading is what . . .

MR. FITZNER: No, no. We feel we give a better service level, right. The surface type may be considered by some people to be lesser, but the service level goes up.

MR. MAGUIRE: Fantastic.

MR. LAFLECHE: Mr. Maguire, I want to just . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. LaFleche, the time is expired, but perhaps you could begin your closing comments and if you want to offer some comment on that last question.

MR. LAFLECHE: Concluding remarks I would like to say that some people get wired up about the surface of the road. The surface of the road is a thin layer at the top and whether it is asphalt, chip seal, or gravel what really makes the road, in my mind, is the base of the road - that used to be my former career - so the base of the road, that two to three feet going down is what really counts and people lose sight of that. You can have a surface of gravel or a surface of chip seal and you can have a way better road than an asphalt road with a crap base.

What we try to do and what we're talking about when we build new gravel roads is build up that excellent base so that road is low-maintenance for years and can be maintained easily.



Anyway, I would like to conclude by thanking everybody for their questions. I know we have some follow-up and we will follow up. There were some questions on P3 in general and public projects which were kind of outside the scope of the road area but we'd be pleased to answer those in another venue to do with public works and buildings, if that need be.

My staff work very hard; I've got a lot of dedicated staff. As I mentioned earlier, they could be earning more in another career. In fact I was once asked by a private consultant why we're all not working in the private sector and making way more money. We could be making way more money working with the City of Halifax or the Cape Breton Regional Municipality but that's not what we do. We are here to serve the public. We're trying to be innovative, we're trying to provide the best service we can, and we've dedicated in many cases our whole careers to public service to make sure that the citizens of Nova Scotia are well served. We want to make sure you understand that.

We do our best. Sometimes it's frustrating out there. A lot of our staff, particularly the snow plow drivers - I was just up to a snow plow school in Port Hawkesbury, looking at some new drivers. One of the things I said to them was, you will receive the finger many times this winter. When you get the finger you are a public servant and you are required to just keep on moving. We'll have a beer over the finger later, but we can't treat people badly.

In fact what we do get, and what I'm very proud of time to time, is when our plow drivers or when our maintenance people stop and help stranded motorists. They pull them out; in some cases this summer tourists were given gas by our staff. Things like that happen. We try to make sure we make the roads safe and one of the ways we can make them safe is by helping people who are stranded on the roads, sort of get off the road and not become an obstacle, so to speak, so we do all we can to help people even if they give us the finger. So thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. LaFleche, and thank you to your colleagues for being with us today. I know this is a subject that is of great interest to MLAs.

We do have some committee business. There was some correspondence. The first piece is from the Department of Business - there was information requested on the Nova Scotia Jobs Fund. Now there were a couple of options presented back to the committee. Option one essentially asks the committee to wait for the annual report and option two states that information can be put together but they've put an estimate of between \$30,000 and \$50,000 on the actual request we've made.

I can't recall which member actually asked specifically for this information and I know there are some people filling in for regular committee members today. We could put off the decision on this for a week - I'm hearing yes from some of the members. I would like you to take that back to your caucus, discuss it and perhaps refine the ask. We will

have more discussion on this in our next committee meeting. I think that's the safest way to handle that, unless other members have any specific comments.

MR. DAVID WILSON: I'm not sure who requested that but I'll take it back to caucus and to members on the committee. I mean it's just unbelievable that we'd be asked to pay for this information. We are a standing committee of the Legislature that looks at information. In the 12 years that I've been here - over 12 years - I've been on this committee for 8.5 years, I've never been asked, as a committee member that we would (Interruption) That's how much it would cost. Sorry, Mr. Chairman - maybe some clarification before I go on a rant.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Sure. I think your concern is about the cost that was raised. It wouldn't be what we would pay as a committee. I guess it would be what the department is saying it would cost to put it together and that may be subject to some opinion as well. Sometimes the department might say that to perhaps discourage pursuing the information, I don't know.

I think what's important here is the department has come back with a couple of options. One is that perhaps the information requested will be part of an annual report - it's just that we would have to wait a little bit to get that information. The second option is the one that they've said it was going to cost between \$30,000 to \$50,000.

I won't say anything further on that; I think maybe I've said too much, but the point being I think we should put this off until next week. We do have one more meeting and each caucus can discuss it and have a look at the correspondence from the department, and perhaps we can go back with another ask that's cost effective and also gets to the root of the information that people were looking for.

Do I have the members' agreement to go past 11:00 a.m.? We just have a couple of other issues - so I do, okay.

So, we'll move that to next week. The next piece of correspondence was from the Auditor General's Office. There was a request from Mr. Stroink, I believe, about fire drills - what schools completed fire drills, what school did not complete fire drills within the first week of school. That question is best posed to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development - sorry to the school boards to be more specific. I know that member is not with us today, but if members here support it, our clerk could send a letter to each of the school boards asking what schools completed fire drills and what schools did not. Is there agreement on that?

I see agreement on that. The next two pieces of correspondence, I'm just bringing them for your awareness. One was dated November 25<sup>th</sup> and that is from the Department of Finance and Treasury Board, information requested from the October 7<sup>th</sup> meeting; also

information requested from the October 21<sup>st</sup> meeting. So, I just draw those pieces of correspondence to your attention.

The last and most important piece of business today is the approval of a decision made by the subcommittee on agenda and procedures - you have a record of decision before you. There are six topics here that we're agreed to in the subcommittee, and you'll see them listed before you.

Is there support for all of these topics? Would all those in favour please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

These subcommittee topics are approved by the full committee and our clerk will proceed now with scheduling. We will have another subcommittee meeting in January to start adding more topics for the New Year, into the New Year.

The last item I'll mention is that our next meeting is December 9<sup>th</sup>, next week. It's with the Department of Finance and Treasury Board and Nova Scotia Business Inc. and the subject before us will be the Nova Scotia Film and Television Production Incentive Fund.

Unless there is further business before the committee - seeing none, this meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 11:03 a.m.]