

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Wednesday, July 10, 2019

Legislative Chamber

**Selection and Quality Management of Bridge Projects in Central and
Western Districts - May 2019 Report of the Auditor General, Chapter 2**

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Public Accounts Committee

Eddie Orrell (Chair)
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Brendan Maguire
Hugh MacKay
Tim Halman
Lisa Roberts
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[Hon. Gordon Wilson was replaced by Rafah DiCostanzo.]

[Suzanne Lohnes-Croft was replaced by Bill Horne.]

In Attendance:

Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

Michael Pickup
Auditor General

Adam Harding
Senior Audit Principal

WITNESSES

Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal

Paul LaFleche,
Deputy Minister

Peter Hackett,
Chief Engineer

Don Maillet,
Executive Director - Highway Engineering and Construction

Will Crocker,
Bridge Maintenance Engineer



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, JULY 10, 2019

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

9:00 A.M.

CHAIR
Eddie Orrell

VICE-CHAIR
Hon. Gordon Wilson

THE CHAIR: Order please. We'll call the meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to order. Before we start, I'll remind those in attendance to place your phones on silent or vibrate. I will now ask the committee members to introduce themselves.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: On today's agenda, we have officials from the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal with us to discuss the Selection and Quality Management of Bridge Projects in Central and Western Districts from the May 2019 Report of the Auditor General.

At this time, I would ask the witnesses to introduce themselves.

[The witnesses introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: If you now would like to begin with your opening remarks, we'll start from there. Mr. LaFleche.

PAUL LAFLECHE: Good morning. I'm Paul LaFleche, the Deputy Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal. With me today, I have the gentlemen just introduced. Peter Hackett is TIR's chief engineer and oversees both the highway and public works side of the department in that capacity. That is actually a legal position which involves sign-off on engineering projects.

Donald Maillet is the executive director of highway engineering and construction, reporting to Peter Hackett. He would be in charge of all of the bridge and road designs in Nova Scotia that are done under provincial jurisdiction. Will Crocker is our senior bridge maintenance engineer. He's the guy who calculates what we need and when we need it. He determines what needs to be repaired and how long it might be good for.

The safety of our roads and bridges is a priority to the department and to the government. Our inspection and maintenance activities are focused on ensuring that our 4,100 bridges and structures are safe for travel. Our bridges receive regular inspections, and maintenance is necessary as required. We have 12 bridge engineers, 13 to 15 bridge inspectors, and dozens of additional regular and seasonal support staff whose job it is to ensure that our bridges are safe, maintained, and well-constructed.

Like every Canadian province, we face the problem of aging infrastructure, changing needs, and funding challenges. Nova Scotia's climate is very hard on bridges, given our heavy reliance on road salt and the many freeze/thaw cycles we experience each winter. To give an example - it's an over-simplification, but somewhere around early November in Edmonton, it went below zero, and somewhere around early April in Edmonton, it came above zero. They had one freeze/thaw cycle. In that duration, we had 100 freeze/thaw cycles. Even though they have colder temperatures, it goes down, and it stays down. Ours go up and down, up and down, up and down, and that moves the structure. That moves the abutments the structure is connected to. It moves the roadway, the pavement. All of that is moving all the time.

Nova Scotia, because of its milder climate, is actually harder. Because that climate is near zero for much of the year, it's harder on our structures than in most provinces. The budgeted \$45 million we have for bridges ensures that priority bridge repairs, rehabilitation, and replacement needs are being met.

The Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal accepts all recommendations made by the Auditor General recently about the management of bridge projects. The department is committed to improving our bridge data information systems, implementing consistent criteria for assessing bridges, tracking warranties better, reviewing our resource allocation, and implementing appropriate written policy around training of bridge inspectors.

There is one statement, however, that the Auditor General made in releasing this report which I would like to comment on. The Auditor General stated that at the current rate of new bridge construction, it would take about 200 years to replace all provincially owned bridges. We would suggest that, while this statement is factually correct, there are many mitigating factors. For example, new bridges are currently constructed for an intended 75-year lifespan. Many of our older bridges have lasted much longer than that and much longer than their original design life. As a result of our regular maintenance program

and upkeep, every year the department also undertakes work on hundreds of bridges to extend their service life.

With that said, we would be happy to take any questions at this point from the committee. I will have a number of copies of my statement available for the Opposition and the media shortly. (Interruption) Is this them? They have arrived. Okay. If someone who doesn't have a scooter wants to pick them up.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. LaFleche. We'll now open the floor to questions beginning with the PC caucus. Mr. Halman.

TIM HALMAN: Good morning, gentlemen. Thank you for being here this morning. Thank you for your ongoing work for the people of Nova Scotia. Before I begin my line of questioning, I do want to acknowledge the great work that staff of TIR do. I know MLAs across the province see them do that each and every day.

To your point, Mr. LaFleche, I also want to recognize the obstacles and the challenges. Certainly I know in the two years that I have been an MLA, I have come to understand that as well, specifically in relation to the freeze/thaw that we see in the wintertime, your mention of the milder climate, and then of course seeing the bigger picture, the larger context in which our infrastructure exists in Nova Scotia. I want to acknowledge that I certainly understand that larger context. However, there are some key questions that I have for you today, and I hope we can engage in a meaningful conversation.

We know from the Auditor General Report that the department is responsible for approximately 4,200 bridges, and that \$45 million is allocated to maintain, repair, and replace these bridges when required. I'm curious - in the report, it outlined that there seemed to be grey areas as to which bridges the province was responsible for. In some cases, there was that grey area. Why doesn't the department know exactly how many bridges it is responsible for?

PAUL LAFLECHE: Let me start with a generalization because I was told the media wants some shocking statements from me. I'll generalize, and then maybe one of our engineers can tell you.

In general, there are many things we don't know we're responsible for. When I first came to Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, I was quite surprised at that. For instance, it's not only bridges. We're doing a major review of dams now in Nova Scotia, all sorts of water control structures. It's other things - it may be harbour bottoms, it may be roads.

Every time I go out and visit rural Nova Scotia - which I was just doing with one of the MLAs on Monday - we have a debate on, who owns that road anyway? I think there were about three of them on Monday that we were trying to figure out who owns it. Then

we have to find out. It used to belong to the federal government, and then it was transferred somewhere else. We're not quite sure if the transfer was executed properly in the day, and on and on and on.

It's not unique to bridges. Generally, there are a lot of things in Nova Scotia that we're not quite sure if the province owns them or the federal government owns them. When I say a lot, that's a small per cent because there are millions of assets in Nova Scotia. We're talking a small per cent of the total assets. It's nothing anybody should be worried about.

Generally, the situations arrive when we find out something's broken. A few years ago, the Gabarus breakwater was one case in point. Another case in point was the swing bridge at the Canso Causeway leading to Cape Breton. The federal government said we owned it. We said they owned it. A lot of lawyers got in rooms for about six months, and extracted \$9 million from them, and now we own it.

This is the way things work. I know that everybody wants certainty in life, but sometimes some of these ancient arrangements pre-Confederation do not have certainty. We have to deal with them as they come up, and we do our best. We try and figure it out. On Monday, one of your colleagues, Mr. Rushton, showed me a road that he would like to be fixed up. We stood there, and he didn't know, and Peter didn't know, and I didn't know. Don was there with me, and Don didn't know. Nobody knew who exactly owned that road. We will be finding out who owns the road and finding out who's supposed to fix it up, and then we find out they don't have any money to fix it up and it's a public issue that has to be cleaned up, so it devolves to the province. Sometimes we can convince the federal government that they should cost share it with us, and these things go on.

There are a very small percentage of cases, but they do arise so it's not surprising that we would have some bridges that are confusing because our 4,200 that you quote - in fact, I said 4,100, the Auditor General says 4,200, I could find someone else who says 4,300 because it's how you define them. Some of them are long culverts so they're called a structure or a bridge, depending on how long they are. We could debate the length of the culvert, depending on where the abutments are and we'd get a different definition of whether that should be tossed into the 4,000-something or out of the 4,000-something and called a culvert.

So there are all things like that. There are culverts on logging roads, et cetera, which are called bridges and they're on old logging roads that the Crown may have inherited when a particular company went bankrupt. We're now trying to figure out where those are. Do they belong to a trails group?

That's a long answer and I hope that was sufficiently interesting for the media for today. With that, Peter, who do you want to send that question too?

PETER HACKETT: To follow up on the deputy minister's comments, it is true. A lot of infrastructure out there for a good part of it - I'd say 99 per cent of it - we do have a fairly good idea of who the owner is. Then there are always those barriers - who owns this structure, who owns this road, who owns this trail. A lot of these things have happened over the years because of different agreements that have come up or different transfers, such as the municipal exchange agreement that happened between the province and the municipalities and things weren't really that clear at that time in 1996 about who owns this bridge or who owns this road.

It's something that we're actually working on now as a separate project to try to get those things figured out. We work with UNSM and the Department of Municipal Affairs to figure out who owns some of this infrastructure. It's not just bridges - it's roads as well.

The other part of this is that there are some things with the Department of Lands and Forestry. It's government, but is it the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, or is it some other government agency? So those are things we come across once in a while as well - who owns the infrastructure.

For today, I guess the crux of today's discussion is the Auditor General's Report, and part of his report is about our information system and how we input our data and what that data gives us. That's sort of where we want to be going forward - to improve that system so it's updated and it has all that information in there fairly clearly and that's where we'd like to go in the future - because we all change. We're not going to be here forever, and for the next people that come along, we want to make it fairly clear of who owns what and who is responsible for what. That's what we're dealing with now because things happened in 1996 or before and we weren't here.

We're trying to get those things cleared up. It doesn't happen a lot, but we do have some out there that we have some gray on who owns what - not on any major highways like 100 Series, trunks, routes and mostly locals, but you are going to find some on smaller locals and smaller class roads and things like that that we would have some discussions about.

We do have a couple here in HRM that we debate the ownership because of the municipal exchange agreement back in 1996, but we didn't let those go. We're not sitting in the middle of those and saying they're yours or they're ours. We actually inspect those bridges regardless, just because they need to be inspected as part of the inspection program. It doesn't matter who owns them because we have a responsibility to the public.

PAUL LAFLECHE: I would just like to add on to the broader question of public assets. There is a light at the end of the tunnel. We have a group put together led by the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, working with all government departments and Crown agencies to put together a GIS database. We're slowly working

away at figuring out who owns all these structures - control structures, assets, dams, breakwaters, roads, et cetera.

So one day - probably not fast enough for those who like a lot of detail quickly - as resources allow, we will have a GIS system capable of zooming in on anything in Nova Scotia and figuring out who owns that or sometimes it's who is responsible for it, which is different from who owns it.

TIM HALMAN: Certainly the notion that this is the way things work - I'm sure, gentlemen, you're aware that that confusion over who is responsible for what is a source of great frustration for Nova Scotians; MLAs hear that time and time again. It is good to hear that there is ongoing work to try to determine who is responsible for what bridges or what lakes. I know in Dartmouth, oftentimes, it's a point of contention as to who's responsible for what. I think this needs to be clarified. It certainly has to be clarified in the name of public safety.

[9:15 a.m.]

I'm curious - historically, what was the total number of bridges approximately 10 years ago in our province?

WILL CROCKER: The overall number of bridges really hasn't changed significantly. We have added some with highway twinning. On occasion, there have been some removed from service, typically on a backwoods K-class road. The overall number that we've always been quoting in terms of the number of bridges has been 4,100 to 4,200 in my time with the department.

TIM HALMAN: Do you think we should be able to quote an accurate number as to the amount of bridges we have in Nova Scotia? Is that a realistic expectation?

WILL CROCKER: Part of that goes back to having the information system, as was already mentioned, as well as what truly defines a bridge. Previously, structures have been assigned what's called a structure ID and classified as a bridge, whereas now we define a bridge as a structure with a span three metres and greater. In certain cases, some of those structures have been assigned a bridge ID, but they're really not a bridge - they're a culvert. That's why some of those numbers have been fluctuating over time. As mentioned previously, we're slowly working towards clarifying not only which structures are truly a bridge but also the responsibilities.

TIM HALMAN: Let's go back 10 or 20 years within the department. I'm curious about what reforms have been done over the years within the department to improve efficiency, to cut down on time for project completion schedules, spending less on goods and materials, improving worker efficiency, and to record data collection. Can you outline what changes have happened over a 10- or 20-year period of time within the department?

PAUL LAFLECHE: I've only been seven years now in the department, a little over seven years. I'll go back at least during my time. One of the things we're very proud of is our innovation capacity as a department. We're always trying to innovate, and we encourage all of our staff throughout the province to look at all sorts of innovations that would achieve better results with less dollars because we're always being challenged by dollars, and the public has high expectations.

Many efficiencies or changes have been brought forward over the years. I'll just mention one, and I'll let Peter go into some others. One of them would be the pre-brining program. That was an innovation that was brought in due to a particular engineer that we had who had seen it work elsewhere and thought that this may work given our climatic conditions. It wouldn't work everywhere - it doesn't work everywhere in the province because we have a province where the climate does vary considerably from southwestern Nova Scotia to the Cape Breton Highlands. But it has been a real boon, and you've seen HRM take it up. Those types of innovations - I just mention that one in particular - are the types of things we're always bringing in.

The type of equipment we use, we innovate on that. Again, our equipment is different in different areas of the province and different than equipment in New Brunswick. When we get hit with a big storm like we did I believe in 2015, which is a very rare storm - a 100-year-type winter when every Wednesday we seemed to have a big storm - we didn't have the equipment we needed. On the other hand, we wouldn't want to have that equipment sitting around, paid for, and depreciating for 99 years.

We brought in some equipment from other places. I'm talking about some of the big machinery you would see in northern Quebec and northern New Brunswick and Labrador. We do the best we can. Our equipment needs are very different. In fact, our equipment in many areas has to serve subdivisions as well as twinned highways. So we have to have equipment which is very flexible and can go between the two.

We're always innovating on the equipment side, looking at what we can do. As some of you know - some of you have toured our shop at Miller Lake. We have a very large shop where we take in basic chassis and we build them to specs and needs. This last year we acquired a very large plow, which we're using on the Cobequid Pass. It's sort of a one-of and it's in your area, Mr. Rushton. You've probably seen it.

TIM HALMAN: I'm Mr. Halman - I have more hair than Mr. Rushton.

PAUL LAFLECHE: Sorry. I must apologize. That's twice I've called you Mr. Rushton. It's because I saw you once in the dark with Mr. Rushton and I think I called you the twin brothers. When you get old and you've had cataract surgery twice, you know.

Mr. Halman, sorry, it's in Mr. Rushton's area. So we have things like that. Peter, do you have examples you would like to talk about?

PETER HACKETT: There are always changes going on in technology, both in our department and right across the country. We follow a lot of things that are happening in other provinces. We work together with the other provinces across the country to determine what they're doing to make more efficiencies and to make things better in the transportation system.

One of the things we do have - we do have a challenge, obviously, with budgets. We're a department that's always struggling with trying to keep our budgets balanced. We always have a lot of work. As Deputy Minister LaFleche mentioned, we have winters that are sometimes unpredictable but we still have to make sure the level of service is done. We do the work that we have to do to keep the roads cleared, but then we try to do some innovative things, like you mentioned pre-wetting and going out and doing that before a snowstorm so that's less salt you have to use if you do that. Some of the trucks that we've changed around to have more consistent fleets. That's cheaper to do that with mechanical components that are the same, so it's certainly a way to try to keep our winter budgets down.

On the construction side, just speaking of the bridges, we go to tender a lot more consistently so we get rid of the things like bridge joints that cost a lot of money. We go to things like what they call integral and semi-integral abutments that would allow for the bridges to move sort of fully, as opposed to the joint system having to move. If you don't have any joints, you have no leakage, so you don't have to replace those, which cause other parts of the components to the bridge to deteriorate. So we've done that over the last number of years. That has been helpful to keep the longevity of the bridges.

In our paving program, probably about 15 years ago, we were very random - not so much what we selected somewhat, but we also went to what they call a peer review program. We collect data every year on our major highways, and then what highways we look at being - as part of our five-year plan, we go out and collect the data for that. Then we sit around as a group and determine what is the most efficient and effective way to pave those roads and the most economical way for the most longevity and based on traffic and conditions and that sort of thing.

That's technology that has come across in the last probably 10 to 15 years, which is a way to do work that you're not always going to get the Cadillac, but you're going to get something that lasts for a long period of time for the best value. Like I said, we do struggle with our budgets so we've got to make sure we do the best that we can for the public.

TIM HALMAN: Well you clearly outlined the innovation that has been happening on the equipment side. Could you now clearly outline the past attempts to innovate creating a standard set of criteria to rank bridges and determine the priority of repairing those bridges? What have the previous attempts been at trying to innovate in that area?

WILL CROCKER: In the past with typical bridge replacements, we have our bridge inspection program, which identifies conditions of bridges and the district bridge engineers would use their engineering judgment to determine priorities based upon what they feel is the priority for their particular district. Those priorities are then provided to the head office and prioritized on a provincial basis.

In terms of innovations and stuff, as Peter mentioned, we try to make rehabilitation, as well as new bridge designs longer lasting and make them last for a longer period of time rather than a shorter period of time to make it longer before we're back in there and to try to coordinate those replacements and/or rehabilitations with our paving program. For example, it makes sense to replace the bridge joints before you come through with a paving project or fix holes or problems with the deck of a bridge before you come through with a paving project because then you're not digging up freshly paved road.

THE CHAIR: We'll now move on to the NDP caucus. Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Good morning, everyone. The Auditor General noted in Section 2.5 of the report that staff in the districts are saving information about bridge maintenance in a variety of different systems, such as spreadsheets, paper format, and in the information system, which I assume is an internal government information management system. The Auditor General also noted that the records that do exist are not always clear or consistent.

My first question is, does the department have any existing policy on how records are to be taken and where they're to be stored, et cetera?

PAUL LEFLECHE: Is this a government-wide question or specific to TIR?

SUSAN LEBLANC: Specific to TIR.

PETER HACKETT: Specific to bridges, yes our SIS system is really where we keep all of our information on our bridges across the province. That's what's referred to in this report. Basically, it's not a system that gives you pumped out information. It's information that you put in, and then basically from there, it's the engineering division, the structural division, and the engineering staff in the field who determine what is the next step with that bridge. You do your inspection, and you put the information in. The information would be about what rating it would have, what condition it's in, where it's located, that sort of thing. Then from there, the staff would determine what the next step is for that bridge, whether it has to be rehabilitated or whether it's fine or whether it then has to go on to a program eventually to be replaced. That's kind of what the system is today.

The information is pretty much up to date. There are some issues, as you're talking about, with regard to spreadsheets and notes and that sort of thing. I guess that's one of the things we want to clarify with the public, that the inspections on all the bridges are being

done. The issue here is, is the information in the system? Is it clear in the system? Is there enough information in the system to make good decisions? The inspections on the bridges are being done annually, but sometimes it doesn't appear to be recorded, or it's not updated. That's what we're trying to determine now to go forward. What's a better system to get into?

Across the country, there are systems out there - what they call basically bridge management systems. When you put all the information in for that structure, it gives you criteria that you should be looking at year after year on that specific bridge. It creates a number of decision trees in that program, and from there, it tells you what your next step should be. Right now, we don't really do that because basically it's the engineering staff who determine what's next. That's what I think is a bit of what's in the Auditor General's Report. Other provinces do have those systems, and we are currently looking at going in that direction as well because we see that's the way to go forward.

Just going back to the previous question, on the technology part, when I came here 20-some years ago, we did not have any of these systems. It was strictly the engineers in the field. We didn't have any bridge engineers either. We went from nothing to bridge engineers, to bridge teams, to bridge staff who look after this, to an SIS system. We're progressing in that direction, but we need to get into the next direction of more technology.

SUSAN LEBLANC: You mentioned staffing and people getting up to date with new systems and bringing in a newer system. The Auditor General also found that there were inconsistencies in how things were recorded, and that not everyone understood how to use the systems. I'm wondering if the department has any policies around training on how to complete and record the results of the inspections.

WILL CROCKER: Level two inspections are completed by trained inspectors who have taken a two-week intensive safety inspection for highway bridges course. It's put on by the federal highway administration in the United States. All of our inspectors have received that two-week training as part of the onboarding when they first become employees. There's also refresher training for that course, which is done on a periodic basis.

The level one inspections are done by operations staff, and before they're allowed to complete the level one inspection, they receive a level one training course from district staff, either from a level two inspector or from the district bridge engineer. There's an internal course provided for that.

SUSAN LEBLANC: There were three bridges that the Auditor General identified that were both rated very poorly in terms of their condition and that the department could not provide further information to show that there had been, in the Auditor General's words, "... a conscious decision to leave these bridges off its five-year capital plan."

Can you identify what those three bridges are, and can you explain why these bridges in serious need of repair or replacement were not included in the five-year plan?

[9:30 a.m.]

PETER HACKETT: I don't know the names of the bridges offhand. I know I have them and we can provide them to you. I do believe all three of those bridges were identified to either - as Deputy LaFleche mentioned - some of those bridges are small. They're a culvert-type bridge, but long enough to be a bridge. I think they're on the bridge program, but they're sort of on a different budget to be replaced by - maybe internal or by the field.

My understanding is that all three of those bridges are to be replaced, but not necessarily on the public plan because the five-year public plan is only full for one year and after that it goes 100 per cent for next year, for instance, when we put it together this year - 70 per cent for the year after. I think it's down to 40, 20, 10. So if it's four years out, you may not actually see it on that plan, but you might see it on an internal document somewhere. My understanding is there was work being done, but it's not published. I guess that's what I'm getting at.

PAUL LAFLECHE: Just in terms of safety, maybe we could comment. If there is a bridge that has a safety problem, Peter, what do we do?

PETER HACKETT: On the safety of structures - and I guess that's sort of the most important part of this whole discussion - we're not in a situation with our bridges, even though we have a number of them that fall into the fair-to-poor category. The safety of the bridges is sort of the key part of our department and the safety of the highways. So those bridges are inspected, like I said, every year and if the bridges are to the point that we see deterioration and we can only repair so much, but we've got to keep it in service, then what we'd end up doing is changing the load on the bridge so we'd let lighter traffic go across. Then eventually if something happens and we can't fix it or it doesn't get into the system or something fails on it, then we would close the bridge.

The way we have our inspection program and the way we have our structural engineers doesn't really allow for, we would expect, some sort of major failure. It's more of a gradual approach. So the issue on a lot of these things with poor and fair and those ratings is that it's not the bridge really having some type of big failure - it's more in the fact that the bridge would have to come out of service.

The program we have works very well. The software system needs to be upgraded, but the internal program that we have - we ensure that the bridges are safe. If they're not safe, then we would take it out of service or reduce the load.

PAUL LAFLECHE: Just on the point of safety, too, we're here talking about the normal deterioration of a bridge over time. There are specific events which occur from time

to time, which result in bridge inspections. I'm thinking of, say, a vessel hits a bridge, a transport truck without the clearance accidentally goes over and hits part of the bridge structure, et cetera. There's some sort of freak storm event that affects the abutments. These are one-off events and we have to take care of those on an emergency basis.

SUSAN LEBLANC: In your response to Recommendation 2.2 of the report, the department said that you will ensure the process currently in place for decisions around bridge repairs and replacement is formalized. Could you provide more detail on how exactly those decisions are being made right now and by whom? You've talked a little bit about that already, but if there's anything more to add, and if there are no documented criteria to rank them.

Right now, the Auditor General is suggesting that you formalize the process. What is in place now, and what are you doing to formalize it?

WILL CROCKER: Currently, bridges are inspected, and they receive a rating. If there's a concern identified by the inspector in terms of an immediate concern, that gets identified to the bridge engineer. Otherwise, all the bridges that are inspected have their ratings. The district bridge engineer has their priority list, and that's some of the external spreadsheets that were referenced in the report. They have their own prioritization sheet. They know the bridges in their district. They know the condition of them. They know their ratings. They will identify the prioritization based partially on condition, location, and traffic volumes.

All those sorts of decisions come into play as to where the dollars for either replacement or rehabilitation are spent. The process is that they would identify from their district priority program or spreadsheet and discuss with the district director. They then provide their district priorities to head office, and that would be then for consideration for a provincial priority list, which then gets developed into the five-year plan, as Peter mentioned.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Is that consistent across the province and across all the different tiers or levels of bridges? Is the same criteria used to assess all types of bridges all across the province?

WILL CROCKER: Each district has their own spreadsheet. The layout, the format, and the information in it probably varies. The same engineering judgment goes into it. Obviously, public safety is number one regardless. Beyond that, it's to try to keep the good bridges good and from deteriorating further and to reduce the number of bridges that are rated in poor condition.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Inspectors did not complete all regular inspections, we learned from the report. Last fiscal year, 2018-19, 23 per cent of bridges in the Auditor General's sample requiring a level one inspection did not receive one. The rate of non-

completion in the same sample was 21 per cent in 2016-17 and 0 per cent in 2017-18. I'm wondering if you can provide an explanation for this fluctuation.

WILL CROCKER: That is just a snapshot, and it might be just luck that those are the numbers that came out. Part of it stems back to the software system being able to provide accurate data of what has and hasn't been done. Again, the inspectors have their own tracking spreadsheets of what has and hasn't been done.

The main key to keep in mind is that, regardless, we have the level two inspections which are done on a four- to five-year basis, and the level ones are done on an annual basis. Level one is more geared towards maintenance issues or identifying smaller issues with the bridge. The fact that 20 per cent or 23 per cent of the bridges might not have received an inspection, we're confident that those were in fact done. It just might not have been tracked or recorded properly.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I get what you're saying, but it still doesn't give comfort. We don't really know. They might have been done, and they might not have been done. There's no report or tracking of that. I think Nova Scotians would feel better about the safety of their bridges if we knew what was done and what wasn't done, and it was consistent.

I'm going to move on to climate change mitigation for a second. Last week, July 4th, an expert panel convened by the Council of Canadian Academies released a report identifying the top impacts Canada can expect from the climate crisis. As it happens, the cover of the report on these risks was a picture of a flooded bridge. The report charted the key areas that are vulnerable to the climate crisis, and the two that were by far the most likely, that had the most catastrophic impacts - and this is the language that the report uses, "catastrophic impacts" - will be on coastal communities like Nova Scotia and on physical infrastructure, including bridges.

We know that your department has estimated it needs \$2.1 billion over the next 10 years to get on top of bridge repairs. I'm wondering, when you figured out that number, have you taken into consideration the impacts of the climate crisis?

PETER HACKETT: The bridges that are currently in place, that are in service today, would have been designed based on previous climate situations - I guess, previous years. As Mr. LaFleche mentioned, we go back, and some of our bridges have been there for 100 years or more. Some of the old truss bridges have been there for a long time. We have bridges that are 80 years old and 70 years old. Those bridges are there. We haven't done a lot to them with regard to any kind of update for climate change unless there was something needed, if there was repair required. For instance, if the abutments had issues with them, we might put extra armour rock in them or put some type of ice protection in, that sort of thing for the existing bridges, but only if something was required.

On new bridges, new construction, we've gone to a larger size bridge over water to make the opening larger. We have lifted the bridges higher. I think we're up to 200-year storms. Are we doing the design for 200-year or still 100-year? (Interruption) 100 year storms, and there's a climate change coefficient there as well. The bridges are built with climate change in mind. The culverts we put in now, our newer ones, are upgraded with climate change in mind. We try to build those in as best we can.

One of the things that has happened - you mentioned climate change, and what we're doing is not different than any other province. We're sort of staying consistent with other provinces in our structures. What other provinces know about climate change - we try to work together on that. The other thing is that we also look around the structure itself, like the road. If you looked at the flooding situation that happened in High River, Alberta, a number of years ago, the bridges stayed in place and the roads disappeared. We have to look at not just right at the river, but around the entire river into the bridge to make sure we have enough scouring protection for that as well. Those things are taken into consideration as we go forward. On our existing structures, it's kind of as they come along, I would say.

SUSAN LEBLANC: With the remaining time I have left, I just want to ask a quick question about the ferry. I am the TIR Critic for the NDP. I want to know - from Mr. LaFleche, I guess - what are the penalties for the delay in the service if we continue to have a delay in service of the Yarmouth ferry?

PAUL LAFLECHE: We didn't bring the staff here who have the ability to answer the exact question. I'm not sure what you mean by penalties. Could you talk about that?

SUSAN LEBLANC: In the agreement with Bay Ferries, which the public doesn't really have any access to, I want to know if there are penalties in place if the ferry service is delayed. There's a contract in place. The people of Yarmouth are expecting the ferry to be running this summer, for good reason, because we know that it benefits Yarmouth and the whole province. What is the province doing to make sure that those people are not going to suffer financially if the ferry continues to be delayed?

PAUL LAFLECHE: A couple of questions there - first, the only thing that I know of that is not available to the public is the management fee number. That's one number in the contract. I believe we have released the contract, and we can get you copies of that so you can actually have your own staff go through it and examine what you need to know there. The only thing you won't find out is the management fee. That's one number that's blanked in the whole contract, but all the other clauses with all the other numbers are in the contract.

As for mitigation, I think you were referring to mitigation for businesses or parties that may be affected. Is that what you were talking about? Are you talking about people who might be affected because the ferry is not sailing?

SUSAN LEBLANC: I'm wondering if there are penalties in place that the province will level against Bay Ferries if the ferry service continues to be delayed. If those penalties are being collected, how might they be used to benefit the people who are currently suffering from the lack of the ferry service? It's a clear question.

[2:45 a.m.]

PAUL LAFLECHE: Bay Ferries will only get money that it actually expenses under the contract. It's probably best for you to read the contract. We'll get you a copy of it. In other words, we're not paying them anything unless they have expenses. Whatever expenses they have, they have to document.

As for anybody who suffers because there is a lack of a ferry, at this point I am hopeful that there will be a ferry so the suffering would be temporal in nature. As the Premier has said last week, I think, we will be tasked to look into that at some point, but we're not there yet.

We haven't given up on having a season. I understand that there is a lot of mystery whirling around, but if you actually read the contract and you actually look at what the Premier has said, I think that will clear up any misconceptions there.

THE CHAIR: That ends the NDP's time. We'll now turn it over to the Liberal caucus and Mr. MacKay.

HUGH MACKAY: A lot of the questions and discussions seems to be about information, about data. As we discussed yesterday at the Health Committee meeting, we're in the data revolution, following the technology revolution. Data is so important, but only as good as the management system that's available for it.

Deputy, you mentioned that there is some initial work on looking at GIS. For those maybe not familiar with that term, that stands for geographic information system. What that does is relates things in the spatial context and then you attach additional information to that regarding the asset. In this case, I guess we'd be discussing tangible assets such as bridges, roads, culverts and so forth that TIR has. The idea of a GIS is certainly advanced, I think. That's a good approach.

I'm wondering, if you are undertaking this, are you doing it in collaboration with other departments such as the Department of Internal Services or others so that we have an enterprise-wide asset management system or is this something TIR would be doing on their own. If so, would you be using provincial resources such as the community college system and so forth?

PAUL LAFLECHE: At this point, MLA MacKay, we're at the front end of this. We picked a couple of pilot areas where we are working with other departments and

agencies on this. The new Department of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services is the lead in geographic information systems.

We are the lead in owning assets, if you will. So we're trying to put those two responsibilities together to develop a system, which will not only track bridges and roads, but will track buildings and major assets in those buildings and track properties. There is already a property online system, but it doesn't specifically address what we want to know.

Our goal at the front end is to show the people of Nova Scotia through our political elected representatives that such a system would be useful and can be done on a cost-effective basis. So we're piloting a few different areas, if you will, where you can zoom in on any particular block, say in downtown Halifax - I'll just pick that out of the air - and then find out what the provincial properties are, what those properties are used for, what's in the property, what is the land owned around the property, et cetera.

If you had a dream of you and me - and of course we're from this business so we like to dream - this is far beyond anything - this has a number on it, right? We could find this on the property. That's a long way down from where we are. We're trying to get to the quick and dirty big questions: who owns the property, what's on the property, what is the value of it, what is it used for.

Some of this is to determine if there are properties or assets of government, which could be better utilized by someone else. It could be a municipality, it could be private sector, it could be the federal government, or it could be non-profit groups. We have a lot of assets just sitting around. In any given week, we'll get requests that come in and say, do you have X? Or I have seen that property out by the intersection of Y and Z, is that available? Sometimes we look into it, and we find out, yeah, that's available. X is available, and maybe we're not really using it, and we can transfer it to a suitable non-profit group or municipality that would better utilize it and create value and jobs for Nova Scotians.

Right now, that's done on an ad hoc basis. It's done by someone driving around or identifying something or some group like a rotary group saying, we need a tractor, or we need a pickup truck. We would like to get to a more systemized thing where we would be able to list the surplus assets that we have. That's a dream that you and I can share. We'll be long gone before we get to it, but we can probably get to a higher level of that dream in the near future.

HUGH MACKAY: Thank you for that very fulsome response. I'm going to pass over to my colleague now, Mr. Jessome.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: I'm at risk, perhaps, of getting into the weeds a little bit, but in the interest of adding some context and confidence to the work that is undertaken to assess

our infrastructure, bridges specifically in this case, would our guests be able to offer a more finite synopsis of what goes into the process to assess our bridges and decide where they fit in terms of what needs to be fixed immediately, later, in the distant future, et cetera?

PETER HACKETT: Into the finite, I'm not sure how finite I can get into this, but I can explain some of it anyway. We'll mention that we do have our bridge inspections and our bridge engineers in each district. They inspect the bridges, and they rate the bridges every year. That's a rating of 1 to 9. Then in that rating system, you'll get down into the ratings between 1 and 4, which will get you into a fair to poor area. That doesn't mean that the bridges are at the end by any means. It might mean that it has a rating of a 1 because there's a piece missing off of it like a rail, or it could be a hole in the deck - not a failure, but it has to be replaced, but it's a large issue that you should get repaired.

Then from there, if it can be repaired, then the district bridge engineers will basically repair it or put it as part of the rehab program. If it gets to the point in those bridges that they're into that 1 to 4 rating, and they continue or stay where they are, and you can't get ahead of it, then they get on the system to say that they have to be replaced. The information for that structure is sent into head office, into our office, and we start to prioritize them based on our five-year plan. Then you're going to look at things like when it can get designed. Then we get the geotechnical work done for it, and then we get the engineering work done for it, and then we put it as part of the plan.

The difficult thing with some of these is that some of these bridges are large, and some of them are very expensive. You have to make sure you budget for those, and that's where they'll show up in the plan. Is it going to be three years, four years, five years, two years - whatever you have for your costs.

To take an example, we'll use the Sheet Harbour Bridge, for instance, which was replaced a few years ago. That bridge was an old style design. We don't have many of those left in the province, and it's good that we're getting rid of those because they're complicated to inspect, and they're complicated to keep in service. It was an old truss bridge. It was identified as being to the point that it had to be replaced. The staff in the field kept repairing it and repairing it and repairing it to keep it in service, but the repairs started costing a lot of money to do that.

Then you put it on the program, but as I mentioned, all the design work and the geotechnical work has to be done, so we're looking at four or five years down the road. You do as much as you possibly can, but the rehab costs are still going up and up. That's where you balance between how much money you're putting into rehab and how much money it is going to take to replace it. That bridge is about \$16 million to replace and it finally got itself pulled onto the program to get replaced. Sydney River bridge is the exact same bridge that was done a year or two before that.

What I'm basically saying is that when it gets into that 1 to 4 range, our staff looks at those bridges and looks at the rehab that has to be done first. If the rehab is fairly straightforward and fairly cheap, then they can do that in the field and you can basically maybe get that bridge from a rating of a 2 back up to a 5. That's pretty good. Or you try to keep it at that 3 or where that level is by rehabbing it, but if you keep doing it and doing it, eventually it has got to be replaced.

To the member's comment about the rating, that's where we're basically at right now. A lot of it is based on our engineering staff and myself and our head office staff, trying to prioritize these of when they should go into the system. We do have our own internal system that we use, but it's not a published system or on the actual bridge management system. We'll look at where the bridge is located, we'll look at what the impact is to a community, we'll look at if there is a detour that we can use if we had to close the bridge. We look at what the service is to the economy of the province, so if you're looking at something on Highway No. 102 and you look at it as being an issue - we just found an issue with one of our bridges out there just recently that we're going to have to basically take out of service sometime soon, but we'll put a temporary bridge in to do that. We'll put a temporary bridge in because we know that's a link to the province. We can't detour people out there.

These decisions are all made from ourselves. They're engineering decisions internally, but what the Auditor General would like to see is more caveats in there to say that based on these caveats, you should be replacing or rehabbing a bridge. So things like traffic volume, type of highway, condition of structure - climate change could be something. They want us to have more of a decision-making process.

In some cases, that's really good because it could basically funnel into what bridges you want done, but you can't take the human element out of it as well because I could say to somebody, this bridge on Trunk 7, for instance, is in worse shape than this bridge on Highway No. 102 - however, I can find a detour for the Highway 107 bridge, but I have to repair Highway No. 102 or vice versa. So you have to have some human element involved in this. You're not going to get every caveat in place to let the computer system make every decision for you, because it just can't.

In its current form, we have a pretty good system for replacing these things. We also have a very good system with our staff that we look at a bridge and we say, should we push this bridge out and move this bridge in. If the staff comes back and says, this bridge needs to be replaced, then we'll go and replace it. So we have a lot of discussion over structures prior to basically putting them into the replacement program.

If we had a different type of management system, maybe it would be less taxing on us, but there is some human element that you're going to have to keep anyway and we certainly have that in place today.

BEN JESSOME: I do like a good story about a bridge. That was very comprehensive, thank you.

If I understand correctly, there are mandated, ongoing reviews of the infrastructure. Is there any trigger or arm that can be leveraged by people in the public to say, we think that this bridge is in dire need of an inspection and potentially a fix? Is there a capacity for somebody - Joe Blow - to approach their MLA or the department and make an inquiry?

PETER HACKETT: The public is always open to come to the department and talk to the local area managers, talk to the district directors about any highway concern they have - whether it's the road or a bridge. We do get a lot of those, obviously. We probably get thousands and thousands every year and our staff will go out and look at a structure. If there is a problem with it, they will do an inspection on it. It may not be a large inspection unless it requires a large inspection. They will go out and provide the feedback to the member of the public or an MLA.

We do get a lot of questions on bridges when it comes down to safety of a bridge, condition of a bridge, when the bridge is going to be replaced - because we see them on the program and they want their bridge replaced right away - what type of bridge you are going to put in if you have a replacement bridge.

We are also in a situation where the province in general has to consider the amount of infrastructure that we have. As we mentioned earlier, there are 4,200 bridges in this province. We are adding more to the inventory all the time with twinned highways and new highways. We are also adding new roads to the province. We have 23,000-plus kilometres of roads in the province that the province looks after. I think 90 per cent are ours. Of all the roads in the province, 90 per cent are ours, and the rest of them belong to municipalities.

We look after 23,000 kilometres of road. That's a lot of infrastructure when you're trying to get into a situation - as the deputy minister mentioned in his opening remarks, all jurisdictions are going through the same thing. Aging infrastructure is a very important issue. Climate change is a very important issue. The issue right now is that we have a lot of infrastructure. We also have to look at getting rid of infrastructure in the province as well, which is a tough thing to do, but if you continue to add, there has to be funding to go with it. If there isn't more funding, then we have to look at taking things out, which has been done in the past.

Many years ago, roads were taken out of service, they became K-Class roads, and they were no longer maintained. We have to look at that as a province as well because it's getting to where we are getting older infrastructure.

[10:00 a.m.]

BEN JESSOME: Mr. Hackett, before my line of questioning, you produced some testimony to the progression. It started out with an individual engineer or what have you in the department, and now we're moving towards some type of a GIS system that collaborates everything that we know and demonstrates where our assets are and what type of condition they're in.

It seems that there has been a progression towards a more productive and efficient system. I'm wondering, more specifically to the point in time that the Auditor General's Report was produced, what has been worked on at the department since that report was made available to yourselves.

PETER HACKETT: A couple of things in the report that were brought up were kind of quick for us. There was an item about continuity in the system as it exists today. What's in there right now is the same information that is being placed by each bridge engineer across the province, so the continuity of that, and to make sure that what's supposed to be in there is in there. We just hired a maintenance planner with us to start to help us with that part of it. They'll be working with both our maintenance group and with our structures group for a little while to try to get some of these items up to date that we promised in the report.

Also, Mr. Maillet's group has an operations engineer which is an audit engineer. That position has been vacant for about a year. They're in the process of hiring for that person as well. That will also help with some of this auditing process in the short term. Will's group has just currently gone through an evaluation for a new bridge maintenance system. Is that correct?

WILL CROCKER: They're in the process.

PETER HACKETT: They're in the process of reviewing and what the cost of that would be. We have some approvals for me to go start investigating this, what the cost associated with that system would be. We're in that part of it. Prince Edward Island, which does have a relatively new bridge maintenance system - they're coming over sometime I believe next week to do a presentation for us as to how theirs works. In the very short term, we're starting to expand to see where we have to be in the next little while. We do understand that we have to get to the next step of a bridge maintenance system.

BEN JESSOME: The paramount concern for everybody is safety. I think you have demonstrated some reassurance for everybody here today. I would like you to answer the question clearly - should anybody be concerned that the bridges that they're travelling at any point are unsafe? I know that nothing is 100 per cent, but I think it's fair to say that there has been some demonstration here today that things are being carefully monitored. There are professionals at the department who are keenly trained to decide what's safe and

when something needs to be put aside or fixed or closed down. Around the safety component, can you add some reassurance for us today?

PETER HACKETT: I can't say 100 per cent on anything because I wouldn't know the intricacies of every bridge. That would be looking at things like foundations and back walls and that sort of thing, but based on what we inspect and what we know, the bridges are in good shape. If they aren't in good shape, obviously like I said, we start to take them out of service or reduce the service on them.

On occasion, there are surprises that happen to us that we never identified. We saw in a couple of cases in the last two years, we've had some bridges - the Mira Gut Bridge is an example that we did an inspection on the Mira Gut Bridge because it didn't seem to be functioning properly and through the inspection found out that the bridge was basically beyond its life. It could probably have been used a little bit, but I think at the end of the day it was just in the public's safety to take the whole bridge out.

Another bridge very similar is the Nappan Bridge in Cumberland County. That bridge is on Trunk 2, I think - another old arch truss structure that we're happy to get rid of because these old steel truss bridges are probably going to be some of our bigger problems as we go forward, and the less we have, the better.

That structure went through an inspection and we found out one of the members underneath looked like it wasn't functioning properly. We closed the bridge. We did an inspection on the bridge. We weighed the fact of replacing it or rehabilitating it. We found that it was a better cost to just replace it.

Some of these things aren't always picked up in that exact inspection, but we inspect them enough that when we go through them, we find - here's an issue, here's an issue. For a good chunk of it - or a lot of it - for the most part, we're pretty confident, but 100 per cent, I couldn't say because I wouldn't know every structure. Like I said, 4,100 structures - a lot of issues with them. Some are old. There aren't a lot of issues with them, just a lot of structures, but fairly confident that we have a fairly good system out there.

THE CHAIR: We'll now move back to the PC caucus and Mr. Halman for 13 minutes.

TIM HALMAN: The Auditor General Report indicates that there are 600 bridges that are classified in poor condition. Should the department release the names of those 600 bridges?

PETER HACKETT: We certainly could release the names of the bridges, but we wouldn't want to give out all the ratings on those. Every rating on a bridge doesn't mean that the bridge is in any kind of structural trouble. It just basically means there's an issue with the structure that needs some attention to it.

By sending out that information and a bridge with a rating number next to it, it gives out the wrong information to the public. You need the details behind each bridge to understand what the issue is. From that, you also have to understand what the department is preparing to do with it. So if it's got a rating of number 3 - like I mentioned before, it has a hole in the deck, but it's off to the side, it's not hurting the driving surface. Yet that's an issue because the longer you leave a hole in the deck, the more it gets salt and snow and rain and everything in there, the more it will rust out and become a problem in the future.

It's not an immediate problem, but it could be a problem. However, if you took that and you didn't understand that part of it and you just saw that it's a rating of 3, it puts a bit of public surprise into it. You don't really want that.

We want to make sure that the information we have is good for us internally, but the information that we have to release, that people understand what these things actually are so that there's no panic involved. The ratings are meant more for the internal staff to basically go out and figure out what work they have to do, as opposed to the public looking at the ratings and taking a reactionary point to it.

PAUL LAFLECHE: I was just going to say, in the material we sent Ms. Langille, there is a national bridge inventory general condition rating guide. Poor is actually about halfway through the rating system, but this would be a good thing for people to look at to understand the relevance of the different terminologies and what they mean. Maybe Mr. Crocker could go through some of that and talk about what this means.

PETER HACKETT: We have released information on the bridges in the past through FOIPOP. That's usually the way that we have sent the information that the people have asked for. I just wanted to clarify.

TIM HALMAN: I think there could be a more transparent way to get that information out. I'm of the opinion that people can judge the bridges themselves. I think they're capable of doing that, provided, of course, you provide the clear criteria. Of course, that's my concern, and I think that's the concern of the Auditor General Report, that internally at times, there's such gaps that you don't have the necessary information or classifications or systems to determine what bridges should be a priority and how those bridges should be ranked in terms of addressing those infrastructure gaps.

Let's take a look at some of the internal gaps, specifically the required annual reviews with contractors. It states in the AG Report that the act of completing the required annual reviews would allow for the department to see whether contractors are meeting with the department's quality standards. Am I correct in saying that none of the required annual reviews were completed by the department? Am I correct in saying that?

WILL CROCKER: That annual review with regard to contractors is separate from the overall bridge inspection. The contractor side of things is with respect to bridge construction projects. Mr. Maillet can talk to that.

DON MAILLET: We have a process in place where after the bridge is built to the standards outlined in the contracts, we do an annual warranty inspection of the bridges that were done the year before, and any deficiencies noted at that time are brought up to the contractor for repair.

TIM HALMAN: Do we know the total number of projects that have not undergone the completion of a required annual review? Do you have a number?

PETER HACKETT: Are you talking annual review for a contract being completed on a bridge? I don't have a number myself. I don't know if you guys have a number offhand. We can find that out for you.

TIM HALMAN: Could you outline how the department assesses a contractor's bid? What's the criteria that you use to evaluate a contractor's bid?

DON MAILLET: We have a system where we do a compliant low-bid process. When the bids are received by the contractors, we analyze them for compliance within our own criteria around safety, around insurance, around compliance on all that stuff. If they do hit all those criteria, we award to the low bidder.

TIM HALMAN: Looking internally at some other gaps that have been identified by the Auditor General, specifically with respect to warranties, I'm curious how the department will improve monitoring contractor warranties to make sure it recovers eligible costs. Could you talk us through that? What's the plan being put in place to address that gap?

WILL CROCKER: The department has recently implemented a bridge commissioning process. Once a capital project has been completed on a bridge, an engineer from head office staff will go out and review the work that was done and make sure that everything was done. That is part of the commissioning. Then as well, there's a warranty process which has been developed and just recently implemented to ensure the responsibilities are laid out as to who is responsible for what and at what period of time to ensure that the bridge is reviewed prior to any warranty expiring to see if there's any deficiencies that might need to be addressed by the contractor.

TIM HALMAN: Has the province lost public money as a result of the failure to monitor contractor warranties that would have otherwise come at the expense of the contractor?

[10:15 a.m.]

PETER HACKETT: Not that we're aware of in loss of funding. Some of the warranty issue here was an internal issue. As Will mentioned, we have a policy in place that should be followed. The department went from all projects having a one-year warranty, and it kind of gets into a complicated area of accounting - I won't get into that because I'm not an accountant. We had a one-year warranty and then went to a three-year warranty. Once we were in the one-year warranty, the project stayed with the project engineer for that period of time so that at the end of the one-year warranty, it was evaluated and then if the contractor had to come back and do warranty work, it was done.

We went to that extended three-year warranty. The warranty work then turns from being a capital project and goes into a maintenance issue, two different funds of money and two different bodies of people. You have the project engineer, and then it goes into the maintenance group. That's where some of the problem occurred. Who is taking responsibility for the warranty? As Will said, the policy is now in place. We kind of got it back up to where who's looking after what. For the most part, the gap was not that long, I don't think, when all that occurred. I don't think we have lost a lot of money, but certainly, I think it was a process that we didn't really see as being an issue. We thought it just flipped from one to the other, but that wasn't quite happening at the field level. Now with our policy in place, we should be fine. That was a very short period of time.

TIM HALMAN: It comes back to our initial conversation of who is taking responsibility. I think it speaks to the decision-making power structure, where there's gaps. It's evident that there are siloes that have developed over the years. Whether it's internally or externally, at times, people aren't sure who's responsible for what. Of course, we all know that that can create an element of difficulty and chaos.

I'm curious as to the decision-makers. Who are the decision-makers in the department who have to rely on this at-times scattered information that the Auditor General has pointed out? Who are those decision-makers?

PETER HACKETT: You're talking about scattered information. As we explained earlier on the bridge inspection information, the bridge engineers and the district staff have that information and from the way it's set up right now - for each one of them, it's good information for them, and it's good information that flows back to us. The information in the information system is not necessarily used for those decisions, I guess is what I'm getting at.

As we mentioned earlier, the decisions flow through the staff, and the staff make decisions on what should or shouldn't be repaired or replaced. The software system doesn't provide those decisions. The software system just provides the existing data of what we collected. It doesn't really give you any kind of decision trees. There's really not a gap, I guess is what I'm going to say, within our staff. There's no real gap with regard to what

we do. It's all done basically by the individuals, by professional engineers, engineers at the department, who take full responsibility or take responsibility for the highway system. We take responsibility for the safety of the highway system. That's all done internally, and we all understand that. That's part of it. I don't see the gap with that.

The gap with the warranty issue that we're talking about, like I mentioned, was a gap that we didn't recognize because it was more of an accounting issue than it was an engineering issue. We would take responsibility for that amongst ourselves. It may have been on the warranty. We don't think we lost anything on that, but even if that bridge went into service, which it did after construction, it would have been inspected the year after and the year after and the year after that. The only thing we would have missed on it was whether it was still under warranty or not. I'm just saying for that gap, which was a short gap.

That's all I can really say about the gaps that have been identified.

TIM HALMAN: What action plan or steps are being taken now to deal with that gap with respect to warranties that you have alluded to with respect to accounting and engineering?

PETER HACKETT: We have identified the individual in each district who takes responsibility for that warranty based on our policies. When the bridge goes into service at substantial completion, the information is passed along to the construction manager - I believe that's who it goes to now - and they will take responsibility for the next three years to ensure that the warranty is completed. The issue, like I said before - once you get into that three-year period, there's an accounting issue because you go from capital funding to operational funding. Who's going to cover the operational funding? We have identified that would be done at the field level. That's where the money is going to come from. We have that figured out.

THE CHAIR: We'll now move to the NDP caucus - Ms. Roberts.

LISA ROBERTS: I want to quickly go back to the Auditor General's recommendations and specifically your responses to the recommendations. I was struck that in quite a few instances, the department committed to completing certain recommendations within six months, which is a short time frame. I recognize that we're only a month and a half in since the audit was officially published, although you would have been aware of many of these issues from earlier.

I'm wondering if we can go through those. One of the recommendations that you accepted was related to hiring a maintenance planner or that was part of your response. Is that on track to be complete within the six months?

PAUL LAFLECHE: I don't want to get the name of my MLA wrong, but the score sheet here is not quite correct, so that's why I'm confused all the time - the seating arrangement.

We do have a table here of how far we've already advanced on those recommendations. I'm going to scour this and I'll give you the table, if I can find it. It's in this mess here on my desk, but maybe Peter can talk about hiring in government - always a challenge.

PETER HACKETT: On the first part, the maintenance planner, we were able to get somebody internally into that position fairly quickly, so that person is currently in the position. They're in within six months, but we've got to get them up to speed about what we want them to do here. It will take a little bit of time to get them to start looking at this information, but we do have that person in place.

LISA ROBERTS: Thank you for that answer. Also in response to one of the Auditor General's recommendations, the department made a commitment to hire a quality assurance position. I wonder if you're on track to complete that within six months, but also if you could comment on why that position had been vacant and how long it had been vacant.

DON MAILLET: We are in the process of hiring that position. That position has been vacant for a couple of years. We had some personnel issues around that specific position and the person that would have been the manager that had hierarchy over that position - actually, we're in the process of hiring a new manager and that took some time as well.

Everything took time, but the main reason why we didn't fill the position was that the manager's position and that position were vacant at the same time, so we did the manager's position first. We had to replace that position within six months because they had left as well. So it was a long process, but we're in the process of hiring that position now.

LISA ROBERTS: Can you remind me or speak quickly to the role of that position in responding to the Auditor General's recommendations related to these bridges?

DON MAILLET: That specific role audits the contracts to make sure that the bridges or the roads are built to the standards that we specify in the contract. So they'd go and audit the project in detail in the project engineer's office and they'd write a report as to where we deferred away from what we said we were going to build.

LISA ROBERTS: Just help me out here. Given that obviously the work of both signing contracts and the work on our highway infrastructure and other infrastructure has been continuing, has that work simply not been happening for the past several years then?

DON MAILLET: For two years, yes.

LISA ROBERTS: How should I understand that as an MLA? Is that something that should be concerning? Obviously, it was concerning to the Auditor General, but I wonder if you can give me some more context for that.

PETER HACKETT: The position is an internal audit position. It hasn't been two years. It's probably more like 16 months - is what it has been vacant for. I think it was in the late Fall of 2017. There are other people in that - not in that direct position but worked in that group. So the information is being collected. The auditing reports that we should be doing internally weren't being completed over that last 16 months. You are correct. That's where we have to get ourselves back into that position.

As Don mentioned, we have had a number of staff turn over and that sort of kept that position vacant for that little period of time, but it is an issue with trying to get things moving along within government to hire.

LISA ROBERTS: We've already discussed quite a lot around the bridge warranties so I'm going to skip over that one, which the department also committed to having a monitoring process related to warranties within six months. Quickly, formal documentation of bridge inspector training is another thing that the department committed to do within six months - are you on track?

WILL CROCKER: It's not a concern that the inspectors aren't getting trained - it's just that we don't have the documentation. So the preparation of that document outlining the specific training requirements for an inspector is ongoing.

LISA ROBERTS: Do you expect that you will, in fact, accomplish that within six months?

WILL CROCKER: Yes.

LISA ROBERTS: Thank you. I'm going to go back a little bit to climate change and following up on this report related to the expected costs on infrastructure - of catastrophic climate impacts. We asked the Emergency Management Office if it had made an estimate of the investments we need to make over the next decade to make our critical infrastructure, like bridges, more resilient to the climate crisis. The Emergency Management Office told us we should ask each department directly.

Mr. LaFleche, do you have an estimate of the investments necessary to make the critical infrastructure your department is responsible for ready for the increasing impacts of the climate crisis?

PAUL LAFLECHE: We are working on that. As you know, we've got several sensitive areas in Nova Scotia where this - just getting beyond climate change, post-glacial Ice Age rebound is causing effects in some of the lateral areas of the province.

We're doing studies where we can. You might know that MP Casey has been very vocal about the study in his area. We are doing a joint study with New Brunswick and the federal government on the whole Chignecto Isthmus to determine what is happening there and how we should best adapt to whatever is causing the higher sea level rise there in that area.

In terms of other areas of the province, we have some sensitivity in southwestern Nova Scotia that we are looking at and we're trying to get a handle on. Recently there were a couple of announcements, particularly of a major climate change mitigation capital funding between us and the federal government to raise a series of dike structures and repair aboiteaux in the Bay of Fundy.

We're doing it as we go. We're using opportunities that become available for funding to either study or immediately remediate structures to adapt to climate change. Do we have all the answers for every single case? No - never will. It's always a work in progress. We're doing the best we can and I think we're making significant progress on this file.

We are very pleased on the Bay of Fundy side. I think we're well covered there. I think we're well covered in the Chignecto Isthmus and the extreme southwest of Nova Scotia where there is some lowering of the crustal area around the coast - that's something that we've got to take a look at for the roads there. We are on that and we've worked a bit with the local municipal councillors in that area.

So we're doing the best we can to get that done as opportunities arise and hopefully long before there is any urgency, we will have climate-proofed, to the extent one ever can, our road infrastructure.

LISA ROBERTS: A lot of what I think your answer just addressed is adaptation, and we are at the point where we cannot avert the change, the quite dramatic change, that is happening to sea-level rise and in our climate. There is also still mitigation. I'm wondering if, at the level of leadership in your department, there is consideration of mitigation, including greenhouse gas reductions at all as infrastructure is being planned.

I'm sometimes struck at seeing a new overpass on Highway No. 103 yesterday just past the old water treatment plant. Is that an interchange because there's another community there that will be very difficult to service through public transit, for example? What is your department doing to look at how your planning and infrastructure investments are in line with climate change mitigation?

[10:30 a.m.]

PAUL LAFLECHE: You mentioned quite a few things there. Maybe I misinterpreted your original question. In terms of mitigating the effects of climate change, of course, my colleague Simon d'Entremont at the Department of Energy and Mines is the lead on that. We work closely with them in public buildings and public highway infrastructure to ensure that we do all we can to reduce greenhouse gas effects when we build that infrastructure. It would take a lot of time to go into the building issues and what we have done in that area. What we're doing on the highway side, maybe Peter can address a bit.

I just want to point out that the overpass you're referring to is not an interchange. It's an overpass, and it's a highly popular and sought-after overpass for access for alternative transportation, and we're building more and more of those. As we twin sections of highway where there's no ability now to get across the highway where there might have been before it was twinned, we have to provide access for active transportation. Also, there may be some residual landowners who have historic rights that we have to deal with. That's why you see those types of structures.

I know there's a popular radio show guy who criticized that very structure and the doubling of the size of the Ingrandport interchange because he didn't understand about twinning. We don't do those things for nothing. We actually think through them, and they're well thought out.

We work with AT communities across the province. One of the recent examples of what we put in was the bridge just at the Ingrandport connector road. That delayed the opening of the road, and we got heavily criticized for that. That active transportation structure is highly popular with all of the AT groups and the biking groups. We felt that there was a major safety concern by trying to get them across the connector road without putting in that bridge.

We did another one on Cow Bay Road. When we twinned Highway No. 105, there was a lot of controversy around that. I think the Chair would know something about that. It went back and forth for a long time. In the end, we decided that the safest way to get bicycles and walkers through there was to create that structure over Highway No. 125. Again, sometimes these are controversial, and we do get beat up for them. We have to make decisions, and our political masters make political decisions to do what they think is the right thing for the public. Not everybody agrees that those structures are good, but they do provide access, and they're part of what we would consider a tourism blue route network around the province for bikes.

THE CHAIR: That's good. Thank you. That ends the time for the NDP caucus. We'll now move to the Liberals. Mr. Horne.

BILL HORNE: Thank you for being here today; I'm very pleased that you are. Highways are an important part of our existence and use. It's very important that we understand.

A couple of things - one is the needs assessment being done for highways, roadways, and bridges. One hasn't been done, and it's done I guess every 10 years. I'm wondering how that stands now. When do you expect it to be done?

PETER HACKETT: We're currently looking at the need assessment study for our capital paving program, our bridge program and our fleet, which is part of our capital program as well - our vehicles.

We're just in the last parts of that study and that report should be completed very shortly, and then we'll present it to the minister and then we'll decide what our next steps are after that. It was probably back in 2008 or 2009 that the last one was completed. We're getting pretty close to being done.

BILL HORNE: Also, on the question of selection of quality management of bridge projects in Chapter 2 of the Auditor General's Report - Page 29 - one of the bullets I'm finding a little confusing. It says no annual quality assurance audits have been completed since October 2017. What does that mean for our roads and our bridges?

PETER HACKETT: As Don Maillet mentioned earlier, internally the department, we do a lot of our own tendering in conjunction with the procurement office, but most of our tendering for the highway side is done internally. We have a team of tendering staff that put together the tender documents and we have an IT system which is a BidEX system, so all the bidders can bid electronically.

Because of that and because of the fact that we do a lot of our own work internally, we have an internal audit system, which basically does reports on how our capital projects are being done. They recognize if the policies are being followed, if the specifications are being followed. Not on every job - they just do sort of random audits.

We do have that team together. There is a manager there. There was an engineering aid with that group. The audit position, which we called an operations engineer, has been vacant since the end of 2017. We mentioned that earlier. We're in the process now of putting that position back in place.

THE CHAIR: Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Actually, I'm relating to something that my colleague has mentioned about giving the rating out to the public. To me, as a user of certain bike routes, it would actually worry me to know, if I don't understand - I was just cycling this Sunday in Musquodoboit and I looked at the bridge that I crossed and I thought, wow, this

is a really big structure. I know you're categorizing them by length, and I believe that bridge is quite long, but the usage of that bridge is very light.

Are we not considering what the volume of cars and maintenance required compared to - are these 600 poor bridges, could that have been one of them that gets used so little that it's considered a poor - if it was, I don't even know. It looked to me absolutely fantastic and large, but how do we rate those 600 poor - and the usage and the number of cars that are using those bridges?

WILL CROCKER: In terms of the actual rating a bridge would receive according to the MBI rating system, the use - all those sorts of things are not taken into consideration for the rating of the bridge.

Items such as what you were just talking about with regard to the location, type of highway, traffic volumes, impact to the community - those are the sorts of information that we take in deciding what actions we might take on a particular bridge, in conjunction with the bridge inspection rating.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: That goes to my point. If we publicize all these ratings, people are going to panic for no reason. There are many issues that relate to - and it's best left to the engineers who are professional, who know what the poor standard is and not the public to get worried about the smaller bridges.

The other comment that I really wanted to make - and I don't know how much the department was involved in, is the uplift of the Macdonald Bridge. To me, that was an amazing thing that happened in Halifax. To see it actually driving underneath and where there's a piece missing - this was an incredible thing that was only done in Canada twice - one in B.C. and one here. I just wanted to know what your involvement was, if there was any, on the commission and the maintenance? How do you rate that as an accomplishment for your department?

PAUL LAFLECHE: You're quite right on the Macdonald Bridge. This was only the second time that they tried to do a re-decking while the bridge was open. It was a deliberate decision for the Bridge Commission management to do that. There were a lot of complaints about it, but the other option was to close the bridge for a couple of years. It's six of one, half a dozen of the other.

At the end of the day, we believe they made the right decision, which was to keep the bridge open and do the re-decking in this very innovative way. They worked very hard on it. We provided them some assistance and advice, but it was really their job. We have to say that we're very proud - that's our Crown corporation. It reports to the minister. We're very proud of the work they have done.

We think that saved the public considerable grief despite the fact that the public thought there was grief. They don't know what grief they were going to get. They went on and on about the infamous bump - they could have had no bridge with no bump for two years. That might have been a bit worse. Yes, they endured the bump for two years, but they had an open bridge with a bump. Again, it's how you look at it that matters.

Do you want to say anything about the engineering of the bridge, Will? No.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: To me, it was an incredible thing that was happening here. We lifted it for a reason, and I think we are very grateful. I'm just hoping that it's going to last a very long time as a result of it. I'm sure the cost of a whole new bridge would have been a lot more and a lot longer as well. I just wanted to make a comment to that.

PAUL LAFLECHE: Thank you for that, that is quite right. I don't know if everybody knows but we also raised the bridge - or will be raising it, I'm not sure if they have done it yet - if they have not, by a little over a metre or a metre and a half. Although that sounds insignificant, that is significant for Ceres terminal. That was one of the objectives. Not only was it a great job in terms of its efficiency and cost. It also allowed us increased activity at the Ceres terminal. As you know, everything we get to the Ceres terminal decreases truck traffic on the street right here.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Maguire.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I have three things. Just quickly, Mr. LaFleche, you talked earlier about something I was always curious about - the freeze/thaw cycle - and how it has been something we face hundreds of times during the winter. It obviously puts a bit of a beating into our roads between the water mains and things being dug up for lawns and stuff like that.

The answer is probably no, but is there any other material that can be used that's more malleable for our winter conditions?

PAUL LAFLECHE: We do a lot of experimentation, and I'll let Peter or Don speak to that. We do a lot of experimenting. We have changed our mix around the province. It's not the same in Yarmouth. If you look at some of the roads there, they plasticize. They don't pothole, they bend. (Interruption) Yes, it's too hot, right. Whereas they pothole in other areas. In other areas, you have a lot of glacial surficial till that forces through boulders like in central Canada. Everything's different, but we do experiment. We try different things. Some things work, some don't. We had an opportunity earlier, but we ran out of time, to get into the whole chip seal versus asphalt thing.

Do you want to say anything, Don or Peter, about road surface?

PETER HACKETT: Very quickly, we're going to employ UNB to come look at our asphalt, do a forensic study on our asphalt for the last 5 to 10 years to see what's working best for us and to see what isn't working. Just FYI.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: It was just something I was curious about because I know in Nova Scotia it's completely different than Alberta, like you were saying. I know people will complain about the roads, but when it's thawing and freezing so often, it's very difficult.

I want to close with this - you have an employee who's leaving this year who has had almost 40 years of experience. I want to thank everybody in HRM in particular he has had to deal with several times, dozens of times, hundreds of times - Mr. Hugh Burns. That's a lot of experience going out the door. Mr. Burns has been exceptional in that role, in that position, and I want to on record congratulate him on a long career. I hope he gets that time to finally fish. I don't know how you're going to replace him, but it's not going to be easy.

[10:45 a.m.]

PAUL LAFLECHE: I may not be signing the paperwork, so hold tight. (Laughter) We have a large number - Hughie Burns is a great case of people who have served the public well for a long time through many governments. He's the operational supervisor here in the Halifax central area, but we have employees - we have at least one who has done 50 years. These are people who have really contributed to the province. After 35 years, they're not adding anything else up.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I really appreciate his service. At the end of every summer for the last six years, I've tried to convince him to stay on. This year, unfortunately no. I think everybody around here - we deal with the bureaucrats, whether they're here for 35 or 40 years or two or three years, they all do an exceptional job, so thank you.

THE CHAIR: That ends the question period - if you want to make some closing statements before we move on to committee business, Mr. LaFleche.

PAUL LAFLECHE: I didn't finish answering Hugh MacKay's question. I'll just do that quickly. The software that we have for the provincial information system was not initially developed, but is being completed by the Centre of Geographic Sciences. We're working closely with them and we are using that provincial asset as we do this work.

I want to touch on MLA Maguire's comment about the operational supervisors. If anybody has any worry about any bridge, any road, any structure, please do call the maintenance or operational supervisor in your area. All MLAs should have access to their cellphone numbers. We can get you that if you don't. They are your point of contact. I realize that the general public has to go through a call centre, which is also very efficient, but we try to provide MLAs with the best service. If you don't know who your operational

or maintenance supervisors are, let us know and we'll get you their names. They can go over any structure.

We are on road tours this summer - Peter, Don and I and others, Mark Peachey. Anybody who needs us to go to their particular riding, let me know. Of course, I'm sort of crutching it out there on the tour, but we will definitely go to any number of sites that we have to, to look at things and to work with the members of the local public, concerned citizens, to ensure that they are being listened to. We can't always do everything for everybody, but we can at least listen to them, so we'll be out there on the road.

I want to thank you. I want to thank my staff here, and of course, I want to thank the Auditor General and his staff for the great working relationship we have had on this file concerning the auditing of our bridge maintenance.

THE CHAIR: We'll move to committee business. First of all, correspondence. In your packet you have the Department of Municipal Affairs on housing - information requested from the May 22, 2019 meeting. Any further discussion or information that needs to be brought up on that letter? Hearing none, we'll accept the letter as tabled.

Auditor General briefings - the subcommittee has discussed and agreed that it would like to continue with having the Auditor General provide briefings in advance of the meetings. This item was on the record of a decision that was put forward of the full committee on the June 12th meeting, but was not specifically dealt with. Does the committee agree that the Auditor General briefings should continue? Hearing no opposition, we'll agree that does continue.

Witnesses to come - in the May 29th Report of the Auditor General, Chapter 1 - Diversity and Inclusion in the Public Sector. This chapter involves four departments - the Public Service Commission, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Community Services, and the Department of Justice. All of the deputies can be available on October 11th except for the Deputy Minister of Community Services. They have indicated that the associate deputy minister is available and could attend if the committee is agreeable. If the committee is not agreeable, we'll have to look at booking these people back into the new year.

Does everybody agree to have the Associate Deputy Minister of Community Services attend instead of the deputy minister? Hearing no opposition, we'll go ahead with that, Ms. Langille.

Use of P3 for twinning of the highways between Antigonish and Pictou - Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal has been contacted to appear on September 11th. The deputy is not available, but the chief engineer, Mr. Hackett, could attend. Does the committee agree with having Mr. Hackett attend?

Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: Over the past several months, we have been committed to focusing our meetings in this committee on the reports and responses to the reports of the Auditor General's Office. Last meeting, we diverted unintentionally from that commitment. Therefore, I would like to make a motion in keeping with that commitment to stay focused on the work of the AG's office. I would like to move that the topic for September 11th, the use of P3s for twinning of the highways between Antigonish and Pictou, be recommended to the Natural Resources and Economic Development Committee for consideration as a future topic.

THE CHAIR: Could I just ask for some clarity from legal? This was a topic that was brought up at the subcommittee meeting and agreed upon, then brought up at the last full committee meeting and agreed upon. Is that something that can be changed now all of a sudden, Mr. Hebb?

GORDON HEBB: The committee would first have to rescind the motion. If this committee decided to hear it, I think that motion would have to be rescinded. Otherwise, you would be asking that the topic be dealt with by two committees. I think you would have to rescind the previous motion before Mr. Jessome's motion would be in order.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Halman.

TIM HALMAN: We agreed at subcommittee that this topic should go forward. A motion was brought forward at the full committee and approved. The topic is of importance to Nova Scotians. I have always said that, where appropriate, when a topic is in the provincial interest, and I believe this to be in the provincial interest, the topic should go forward. It has gone through all the formal channels, and now you want to change that. No. That's unacceptable. The topic has gone through all the formal mechanisms for approval, and we should proceed with this topic on September 11th, with Mr. Hackett as the witness.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Roberts.

LISA ROBERTS: I would just add that this topic falls squarely in the mandate of this committee, which is looking at the effective administration and expenditure of public funds. That's why it's the Public Accounts Committee. There's nothing in the mandate of our committee that says that we may only look at Auditor General Reports.

We are keeping up, at this juncture, with the reports of the Auditor General. We're not far behind, and I, too, feel like having gone through the subcommittee process, having gone through the full committee and gotten the support of the full committee to call this topic, we absolutely should push ahead for September.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I agree with my colleagues. As my colleague for Halifax Needham has just said, it is about the expenditure of public funds. In this case, the evidence that has been released in a recent report suggests that there is a huge discrepancy in the amount of money that the province could be spending. I think that we cannot afford, as a province and as a committee, to ignore this topic at this committee.

When we debated what was going to be brought forward and what wasn't at this committee, it almost feels like a year ago - I'm not sure when it began, maybe six months ago - this was exactly the reason why myself and my colleague were opposed to the changes that were being brought forward. These kinds of things need to be in this Chamber as public as possible - not hidden away in a small committee room where very little public has access to the discussion.

I strongly oppose the motion, and I think that we should stay, as Mr. Halman has suggested, with the meeting on September 11th, with this topic, with Mr. Hackett as the witness.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Halman.

TIM HALMAN: My colleague from Dartmouth North makes some very important points. Let's not forget the big picture. Let's not forget what has transpired here in the last number of months. The Liberal caucus has limited the scope of investigation, thereby limiting this committee's ability to question public expenditures and to question the execution of public administration, and then they limit the time in which we can meet.

Now today, because this topic isn't perhaps within their advantage, they want to now change a decision that went through all the formal mechanisms, all the formal channels - subcommittee, committee. Now because, for whatever reason, you feel that this isn't working to your advantage, but it's clearly in the public's interest to have this topic at the Public Accounts Committee, you now want to modify that and change the rules. That's unacceptable to those in the Opposition. I know it's unacceptable to Nova Scotians. So where do they go next with this?

BEN JESSOME: I'd just like to state for the record that with the exception to being televised, every other committee is just as accessible to all Nova Scotians as any other committee. The media is as much present in the other committee room as they would be here. The public has every opportunity to attend these meetings.

In our other meetings, every member has the same capacity to ask questions. There has resoundingly been fair time to ask questions at meetings outside of the Public Accounts Committee. We are just as accountable through other committees as we are here at the Public Accounts Committee. The only one piece that is different is that it is televised via Legislative Television. There are transcripts from all the testimony that goes on at committees.

This concept that there is something sinister about our intention to try to re-orchestrate committees in a way that we believe is more efficient, that enables specifically the Public Accounts Committee to focus specifically, as we've been discussing for several months, on the work of the Auditor General and the responses that departments are required to have - there's nothing sinister about what's taking place here. There is just as much capacity for Opposition members to ask questions at other committees and the media to attend, the public to attend.

In saying all that, I would like to amend my initial motion.

THE CHAIR: Order please. That limits the time for the committee today. The next meeting will take place on August 14th here in the Chamber.

[The committee adjourned at 11:00 a.m.]