

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Wednesday, June 14, 2023

COMMITTEE ROOM

**2023 Report of the Auditor General Follow-up of 2018, 2019 and 2020
Performance Audit Recommendations**

**Re Chapter 2, May 2019 Report of the Auditor General Transportation and
Infrastructure Renewal: Selection and Quality Management of Bridge Projects in
Central and Western Districts and July 28, 2020 Report of the Auditor General
Government-wide: Contaminated Sites**

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Public Accounts Committee

Hon. Kelly Regan (Chair)
Nolan Young (Vice Chair)
John A. MacDonald
Melissa Sheehy-Richard
Tom Taggart
Kent Smith
Hon. Brendan Maguire
Susan Leblanc
Kendra Coombes

[Kelly Regan was replaced by Braedon Clark.]

In Attendance:

Kim Leadley
Acting Committee Clerk

Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

WITNESSES

Department of Public Works

Peter Hackett - Deputy Minister

Don Maillet - Executive Director, Highway Engineering and Construction

Will Crocker - Structures Asset Management Engineer

Jason Rae - Manager, Environmental Services

Connie Roney - Director, Building Engineering, Design and Construction

David Benoit - President and CEO, Build Nova Scotia

Donnie Burke - Executive Project Director, Build Nova Scotia



HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 14, 2023

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

9:00 A.M.

CHAIR

Hon. Kelly Regan

VICE CHAIR

Nolan Young

THE CHAIR: Order. I call this meeting to order. This is the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. My name is Nolan Young, I'll be chairing this committee. I'll remind everyone to put their phones on silent, and I'll ask committee members to introduce themselves, starting with Ms. Coombes.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Just to note, we have officials from the Office of the Auditor General, Office of the Legislative Counsel, and Legislative Committees Office in attendance as well.

On today's agenda, we have officials with us from the Department of Public Works and Build Nova Scotia with respect to the 2019 Report of the Auditor General: Selection and Quality Management of Bridge Projects in Central and Western Districts, and the 2020 Report of the Auditor General - Government-wide: Contaminated Sites.

I'll ask the witnesses to introduce themselves, starting with Mr. Rae.

[The witnesses introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr. Hackett, do you have some opening remarks?

PETER HACKETT: Good morning, everyone. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. As I mentioned earlier, I'm Peter Hackett, Deputy Minister of the Department of Public Works. I'm joined here today by Don Maillet, Executive Director of Highway Engineering and Construction; David Benoit, CEO of Build Nova Scotia; Connie Roney, Director, Building Engineering, Design, and Construction; Jason Rae, Manager, Environmental Services at Public Works; Will Crocker, Structural Engineer at Public Works; and Donnie Burke, Executive Project Director at Build Nova Scotia.

The Department of Public Works is a dynamic place. From building and maintaining our provincial transportation network, to constructing schools and health care facilities, to shaping traffic laws and regulations, our work plays a big role in the day-to-day lives of Nova Scotians.

With thousands of employees stationed in the regions throughout the province, we plan, develop, and manage the critical provincial infrastructure that the people of this province depend on. Your committee has asked us here today to provide an update on our response to recommendations from the Auditor General - specifically, Selection and Quality Management of Bridge Projects in Central and Western Districts, and the 2020 Report of the Auditor General - Government-wide: Contaminated Sites.

Our province is responsible for about 4,100 bridges. Right now, we have more than 40 bridge projects in various stages of planning and construction for both replacement and rehabilitation throughout the province. In April, the Office of the Auditor General released an update on the status of recommendations from the 2019 bridge report. Unfortunately, the Auditor General identified several areas of non-compliance in that report where we are not making enough progress.

Our work on these recommendations was impacted by delays we experienced during the procurement of a new structures asset management system and some delays associated with COVID-19. The system itself is one of the AG recommendations and it will allow us to analyze, track, and manage our bridge assets more effectively and strategically. Additionally, this technical solution is needed to address many of the other outstanding recommendations, as they hinge on the new system being up and running.

It's disappointing that we ran into these challenges, but I'm pleased to report that they are now behind us. This past Spring, we closed an RFP, purchased the software, and hired a consultant to move forward. We are currently in the process of inputting a significant amount of data into the new system and are targeting full implementation by next year.

While our Five Year Highway Improvement Plan outlines our current and upcoming bridge projects, we will always address any instance where a bridge requires immediate attention.

I'd like to shift focus right now to the 2020 Auditor General Report on contaminated sites. Public Works supports environmental management and the remediation of sites in two ways. First, our Environmental Services Division develops and implements environmentally sound construction and maintenance practices while supporting the prevention, assessment, and cleanup of contaminated sites.

Second, the former Nova Scotia Lands, which is now part of Build Nova Scotia, coordinates several important projects throughout the province. This includes remedial activities at Boat Harbour and at historic mine sites such as the Montague Mines in HRM and the Goldenville mine in Guysborough County.

Working across government, including the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables and the Department of Environment and Climate Change, our teams have made great strides in implementing the Auditor General's 2020 recommendations. Oversight bodies in the form of a deputy ministers' committee and an interdepartmental advisory committee have been established and have been meeting to address the contaminated-site issues.

The Department of Public Works has contributed information to an annual provincial inventory that is being maintained by the Department of Finance and Treasury Board. This ensures proper tracking of the number of contaminated sites, as well as the progress being made to remediate those sites.

Finally, a ranking matrix was created to prioritize sites using a risk-based approach. This supports environmental policy for prompt response to spills or other incidents while making certain that Public Works' bases are reviewed to minimize their environmental footprint.

I think it's important to note that Public Works has been assessing and managing its bases for years before the new contaminated-site regulations came into play in 2013. However, with these newly developed tools, we can rank and plan our base-improvement work better than ever, all while continuing to remain compliant under the regulations in the unfortunate event that a contamination does occur.

This work is the product of great teamwork. I want to commend everyone involved for bringing greater alignment and collaboration to our provincial efforts as we continue to manage contaminated sites throughout the province. I'm pleased to report that we recently met with the Office of the Auditor General and received positive feedback about our progress.

To wrap up, I would like to extend my thanks to the Office of the Auditor General for the continued dialogue about the recommendations from both reports. I want to assure this committee that we remain committed to fully implementing the recommendations provided to us.

I'd like to thank you, and I'll be happy to take your questions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Deputy Minister Hackett. I think most of us have been through this before. It's 20-20-20. When the 20 minutes hits, I'll cut you off if you're in the middle of an answer.

It's 9:07, we'll start with the Liberal caucus. MLA Maguire.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: First of all, I'd just like to welcome you back and recognize everything you and your community have been under over the last few weeks and months. I've been following you a bit on social media and talking to you. You've done an incredible job for your constituents. I just want to put that on the record. Great job.

Bridges are obviously important. I want to speak about a little bridge in my community, which I've had several conversations over the years with your department about. That would be the bridge in Ketch Harbour. I'm pretty sure all of you are aware of that bridge. We've had conversations in the past about this bridge - not so much about its structure but more about its accessibility. It did take some damage during the last hurricane. You all reacted quickly, so thank you for that.

But right now, there's essentially one way into that community and one way out. If somebody is walking on that bridge, it's a close fit if a car comes by. If you have an accessibility issue, you have no chance in hell. You've got to either throw yourself off that bridge, get hit by a vehicle, or the vehicles stop. The problem with the area is it is the route to Crystal Crescent Beach. We know there are issues with speeding and people who don't know the road.

So this bridge, for me, it's become like a symbol. Every time I see that bridge, I'm reminded of this government. I'm reminded of this government because I was under the impression that this bridge was going to be fixed. It's now no longer on any list. This bridge is not a bridge that is good for accessibility. It's a symbol of the way this government, especially in HRM, is treating people - our most vulnerable people, people with accessibility issues. We're seeing that. All you have to do is walk out of this building and you will see how this government is treating people who need it the most and are most vulnerable.

So why am I sitting here today asking about a bridge that I was under the impression for the last few years was going to be fixed? Why is it that nobody in that government has stepped up and said that this is an accessibility issue? If there is an emergency - and there

was an emergency during the last hurricane that made landfall in Ketch Harbour - are we to tell the most vulnerable people in that community to stay put? When can we expect for this bridge to be replaced and up to the standard where 99.9 per cent of bridges in Nova Scotia are, where it doesn't matter if you're in a wheelchair, it doesn't matter if you have accessibility issues, it doesn't matter if you can run, walk, crawl, you can use the bridge?

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Hackett.

PETER HACKETT: I'll start the answer and then maybe go from there. I know the bridge, but I'm personally not familiar with the complete issue on the accessibility, and how that ties into the pedestrians at that location. We'll ask one of the staff to address that in a second. I do want to go back to some of the things we just talked about on the bridge itself. If there are issues of this nature that come up with us - I'm not saying this particular bridge, but I'm assuming some of the same things - we often work with municipalities to make sure that if there are sidewalks on bridges, that there is accessibility on bridges, that there is some place for the person who needs that accessibility resource, or even pedestrians, have a place to go.

We usually put sidewalks on bridges so there's an actual place for them to move to. You don't want them moving off a bridge onto a shoulder of a road, or there's no shoulder of the road because the bridge is a place of refuge, but there's no refuge on the shoulder. In most cases, when we get into those situations - if there's extension on the bridge, we have to do something with the bridge to make that work with the municipality. We'd also have to have some sort of widening of the shoulder, sidewalk, that sort of thing, for the public to get to, because we can't strand them on both the bridge and the sidewalk.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Thank you for the answer. The problem with the bridge is that it's a bridge. There is no sidewalk. If you have an accessibility issue, the only other option is to jump into the ocean. I dare say a lot of people - I don't think that's a good idea. I know this is not on the department, but I've done a little poll with my fellow HRM MLAs - not all of them, but a lot of them - to figure out what's happening in their community over the next year or two or three when it comes to infrastructure from this department and other departments. What we're seeing is, in my case, none - which is fine, because we did get a lot done over the last 10 years. The MLA to my left, none. We know that speaking to other MLAs in HRM, none or very little.

This is becoming a theme in this government. HRM versus rural is what's happening. There's a lot of proof in the pudding for people who don't believe that. When the public transit funding was released from this government, the vast majority of public transit is in HRM, so you would think they'd at least get a dollar. They got zero dollars from this government. The money that's coming from these departments - not because of the deputies and the executive directors and the presidents and the CEOs and the managers - has been politicized.

MLAs who are not Progressive Conservative are getting phone calls and saying that their projects have been backed up a couple of years. It's not a question - it's more of a statement by me, that this bridge is a symbol to me, that because the people in my community did not vote Progressive Conservative, they're being punished. Because the people in Mr. Clark's community did not vote Progressive Conservative, they're being punished. The people in Ms. Leblanc's community did not vote Progressive Conservative. They're being punished.

[9:15 a.m.]

I'll give you another example, and this is a little dam that was supposed to be replaced three years ago. I sat there during an election and watched the Premier - the then-Leader of the Opposition - and his candidate at the time rush to make a video because we had found out about this dam at Williams Lake that, if it gives way, will completely wipe out the infrastructure on Purcells Cove Road. They know that. They have a lake that's dying, and we have a potential disaster if this dam that was built in, I think, the 1600s gives way.

So we started the process of getting this thing done, and here we are three years later. I don't feel that we're any further ahead. It's another construction season here and gone. I'm going to tell you why I'm frustrated with this dam: I had a meeting not too long ago with a gentleman who used to be the president of the local Progressive Conservative association in my constituency, who is a past candidate. You know what he said to me? He said that this is not going to be announced until we have a PC candidate in your constituency so that the Premier can stand here beside that dam with that candidate and make that announcement.

Nobody can give me answers on what's happening with that dam. It's been three years. I'm hoping that you can. I'm asking the deputy minister on this one. Listen, the Minister of Public Works, I have the utmost respect for. I don't think she plays partisan games. I think she does what she feels is correct. But as it sits right now, I'm three years in on asking questions about this. That's something that was promised to be done right away by the now-Premier of Nova Scotia, and his own people are saying to me that there was a meeting with the local associations, with the local Progressive Conservative associations from the Progressive Conservative brain trust, and they said, give us a list of projects in the constituencies - the ones they don't hold - and we are going to announce those projects next Spring.

I'll tell you what they are from my constituency, which I was told, and it all falls under you guys. One is that they're going to stand there and announce a new dam in Williams Lake. The next is that they're going to stand there and announce a new hockey rink, which they promised two and a half or three years ago. The next is the widening of Herring Cove Road leading into the roundabout. I reminded them that all three are pretty

much municipal issues. But that individual is well connected with this party as a former candidate and was the president of the local association.

That, to me, is partisan - playing politics with issues in our community and issues in everyone's community. So I ask again: this will be the third construction season that has passed on this dam. I need a concrete answer today for the people of that community. When will that dam be replaced? When will the funding be released? And when can we start construction?

THE CHAIR: Just a reminder, MLA Maguire, that this is on the Auditor General's 2020 follow-up report. But I'll hand it over to Deputy Minister Hackett.

PETER HACKETT: Going back to the Ketch Harbour bridge, did you want some more information on that?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: The information I want on that bridge is when can we expect it to be fully accessible for people who have disabilities and have issues with mobility?

PETER HACKETT: I'm going to ask Mr. Maillet to answer some of that, if he can maybe put some of that in perspective for where it might be on the program or when we might be looking at it, if that's okay.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Maillet.

DON MAILLET: Well, with regards to the bridge, it's safe. It's sound for the motoring public and for the pedestrians crossing that bridge.

The bridge itself was designed a long time ago. It's a wood structure. It's inherent to probably providing the space that our new designs accommodate the accessibility issues, which - we certainly have that in our new designs. So right now, we have a problem. The bridge is sound. It's rated at a decent rating. We have lots of other bridges in the province that need to be replaced, that are probably in worse shape.

What we could do is probably look and see what modifications could be done to the bridge, realizing that there are limitations with the bridge associated with the timber work and how we could cantilever a sidewalk off the bridge. Again, we could look at that - only because we feel the bridge is in sound condition, and it's probably not at the point where it needs to be replaced. Is that okay?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: That's perfect. For me, I know that the bridge is in good shape. Again, you literally can't have a bicycle on that bridge at the same time that a car is going by. That's the problem. Somebody who has mobility issues - and we've had lots of

near misses there. The question I keep getting is: Who's responsible if somebody gets hit, when we know this is an issue in the community?

Second would be the partisan element. I won't ask you to comment on the partisanship that's happening in this province, but I'll ask you to comment on that dam, please.

PETER HACKETT: We've had some progress and discussions on the Williams Lake dam. I know we ourselves have talked about that as well. We've had some conversations on responsibility of the dam and ownership of the dam. There has been some legwork done over the last little while. I'm going to ask Dave Benoit to comment on where we are on the progress of the Williams Lake dam.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Benoit.

DAVID BENOIT: I would start out by saying that it was one of the first issues that was brought to me when I got the role, and I had my first meeting with our minister - to make it very clear that this is something that we need to resolve. That was only five months ago, and I can appreciate that you've been waiting three years. I'm not trying to say that's not relevant or anything like that. Of course it's relevant. It's relevant to the people who are there as well.

To be honest with you, I think we're very close to a solution - the details of which we're continuing to work on. It doesn't sound like it should be all that challenging a topic, but in fact, there are a lot of stakeholders in this process. We want to make sure that we've addressed all of them, and that we've had an opportunity to make sure we've heard from all the voices, so that when we finally get to the solution, people aren't then being upset or trying to resist the solution.

What I can tell you is that my team is working very diligently in order to find a solution forward. We have a couple that we've identified. We're now going through the details of figuring out which ones are the most feasible and which ones make sense for long-term sustainability. We're looking at it, not just as a fix today, but to make sure that this is fixed for the long term. That takes some time.

I'm hoping that in short order we'll have all those details together. I do expect that from my team. Then we'll be going forward. I will say though - just to set expectations - that this is probably a two-year fix, no matter when it's started. That's partly because of the planning, and partly because of regulations when you can work in the water in accordance with the Environment Act. I don't want to unnecessarily raise expectations, but I do want to tell you that since I have arrived, we've been very focused on that - trying to get the details together.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I appreciate that. I do know that the department does work hard on these things, but it is frustrating when you have issues that you watch people campaign on - I know that's not on you - then three years later, it's still not fixed. Then hearing that we'll re-announce it once we get a candidate for your riding, which is, in my opinion, pretty slimy. Just get it done. I don't care . . .

THE CHAIR: Order.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I'm not calling anyone slimy.

THE CHAIR: I don't know if that's appropriate. Can we get back to the 2020 Report of the Auditor General? MLA Maguire.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I'm talking about bridges. It's pretty underhanded, I will say. It feels that way to me.

One of the things that I would like for you, deputy minister, to do - I would like a breakdown of the amount of money on infrastructure, roads, and projects that are being spent in rural Nova Scotia compared to HRM. Again, I believe that there is a trend here. I know that when we were in government, we treated everyone equally. It didn't matter if you were represented by the NDP, Progressive Conservatives, or Liberals. It didn't matter what part of this province you belonged in. In fact, I'm pretty sure that Premier McNeil built a school in Premier Houston's riding when the Premier was in Opposition and criticizing him every single day. He didn't care, because he listened to the bureaucrats, he listened to the people that made the decisions, and he said, these is where this needs to be done.

It may take some time, but could you please table the amount of funding from your department - I'm not picking on your department, because I'm going to be asking this from everybody who appears in this committee. How much funding, how many projects, over the next two to three years will be going forward in rural versus urban, because you need more work?

THE CHAIR: MLA Maguire, I just remind you to refer to the honourable members by their title. We refer to you as MLA Maguire and expect the same from others.

PETER HACKETT: You're talking basically about the highway plan, I'm assuming, or you're talking about the entire capital plan for government?

If you're talking about the highway plan, I'll talk about that a little bit. If you're talking about the other capital projects for government, they'd have to go to the client departments. We just deliver the projects. We get the funding from the client departments - the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Department of Justice, and Department of Health and Wellness. Those departments carry those budgets, so you'd

have to ask them about how much money they're spending in each. I mean, we can tell you what we're tendering, but they would have to tell you what their budgets are for each year for each constituency.

As far as the highway department is concerned, yes, we have our five-year plan, as you know. It was released in January. We're well under way in the construction in this year, in 2023. It's a full plan. Roughly around \$500 million, I think is what we're delivering - trying to get delivered. Obviously, it's a big plan and it's a lot of work.

We can give you the numbers, but we would prefer to give you the numbers when the tenders are closed and when the numbers all come in, which, as I said, can take a little bit of time. Giving out numbers for projects is premature for bidding and tendering and that sort of thing. When tenders become public, we can certainly gather that information and give it to you during the year or at the end of the year.

Going forward into out-years, those plans aren't full, right. The same thing - until we actually get full numbers for those in out-years, we wouldn't be able to give you a number that would mean very much. You can look at the five-year plan and see what work is being done on that plan, but we can certainly get the numbers for you once the projects get tendered and announced.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: If we could do a year-end with your department, obviously, we'll have to put - I don't know if we'd have to . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. That concludes time for Liberal questioning. We'll move on to the NDP caucus.

MLA Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I'm just going to ask a couple of quick questions and then I'm going to pass it on to my colleague online.

As we all know, this week the RCMP closed Lake Road in Colchester County indefinitely after a bridge collapsed under the weight of a truck. My first question is: When was that bridge last inspected, and what were the results? What condition was that bridge in?

PETER HACKETT: We have that information. If it's okay, Mr. Chair, we'd prefer not to release that information at this time, because the bridge is under investigation. Because the accident is so recent, there would be - the cause of the accident - it's being done by our risk management team.

That information is there, but we would like not to release it at this point, because it's under investigation for the cause.

THE CHAIR: That's fair.

[9:30 a.m.]

SUSAN LEBLANC: I don't know if it is fair, because before the accident happened, the information would be the same. You already knew what the condition of the bridge would have been, and when that bridge was last inspected. Those two things would not change depending on the results of the investigation.

Yes, if you want to not talk about exactly what happened and why the bridge collapsed, that's fine. I understand that maybe that truck was not - there's something about the type of truck that was on the bridge - but certainly I think the Public Accounts Committee would be in its right place to ask for the other two pieces of information: when the bridge was last inspected, and what condition the bridge was in at that inspection.

PETER HACKETT: We can get the information. Before I table anything in Public Accounts Committee, I'd like to check with the Department of Justice. What happens in these situations - we lose control. We don't have control of the structure anymore. The structure now goes into investigation with SNSIS. It goes to the insurance. It's got to be determined how these things were caused. That information could become part of a legal trial.

I'll just check with the Department of Justice. If we can give that out, I'll table it here at Public Accounts Committee.

THE CHAIR: With respect, we're on the follow-up report of 2018, 2019, and 2020 performance audit recommendations within the Auditor General's report. If we could stay on topic, MLA Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: This is absolutely on topic. There are a number of recommendations in that follow-up report about bridge inspections. Respectfully, Mr. Chair, you were not at a meeting a couple of weeks ago when we discussed the fact that when we have department officials in front of us, we can ask things that may or may not be exactly on the subject of the topic at hand. I thank Deputy Minister Hackett for that answer, and I would say - in keeping with the way the Public Accounts Committee is trying to work - that my colleagues would agree with me that those two pieces of information are very important.

I think that yes, for sure, check with the Department of Justice, but otherwise I think we should follow up, and the Chair should remind the department to get that information as soon as possible.

Keeping on, I suppose these may be null and void, but I'm wondering if you can provide the committee with the most recent inspection report of that bridge.

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Hackett.

PETER HACKETT: I will check to see if I can release that.

SUSAN LEBLANC: In the five-year highway plan, the road was slated for repaving. In general, would that repaving include the replacing of the bridge? Was the bridge scheduled to be replaced? If so, when? When the road is repaved, would that just be a repaving over top of the bridge without working on the bridge - specifically and in general?

PETER HACKETT: I'm going to hand that over to Mr. Maillet to answer.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Maillet.

DON MAILLET: This is specific to the bridge on Lake Road?

SUSAN LEBLANC: Yes.

DON MAILLET: The bridge on Lake Road had a wooden deck. We would not have paved that. The infrastructure around the bridge rehabilitation and replacement are independent of road construction. We treat both assets differently when it comes to rehabilitate the road or the bridge or replacements.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Deputy Minister Hackett has already alluded to the fact that there is an investigation taking place. So my question was: Does an inspection take place when a bridge collapses? Who does the inspection or investigation, and can the committee be provided a copy once it's complete?

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Hackett.

PETER HACKETT: What happens in these events - and we've had them before - is there will be an inspection done by risk management, Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services. They'll hire an independent engineering firm or engineer to come and inspect the bridge or look at the bridge to look at the cause of the failure. There will be a report provided to Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services after that's done. Then the investigation that continues on from there about cause, liability, and that sort of thing. I can only assume you can get a report. It would be made public, but that would be a question for Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services when the report is completed.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I'm going to now hand it over to my colleague, MLA Coombes.

THE CHAIR: MLA Coombes.

KENDRA COOMBES: Keeping on this track with regard to bridges, in other provinces, a public database is available where people can see the conditions of bridges and have information such as their last inspection date. I think much of what we're discussing right now regarding the Lake Road bridge is very relevant to this. It's something that the AG in the report had also identified as something that would be important for people to know. My question is: When will we have a public database in Nova Scotia for bridges?

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Hackett.

PETER HACKETT: I'm going to pass this question over - maybe Will Crocker, our structural engineer, would like to come up and speak.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Crocker.

WILL CROCKER: At the moment, all of our bridge information, in terms of location, is available through the public open data system. In terms of what is or isn't made public in terms of condition, it has yet to be determined, what we're going to make available through that system. All that is tying back into our working towards the recommendations from the Auditor General within developing a new asset-management system to help us better manage these structures.

KENDRA COOMBES: I want to keep on this track with regard to what should be public information. That is, why can't the information from this bridge or any other bridge collapse be made public as to the whole information - why it collapsed, responsibility as to why it collapsed, condition of the road? What actual legal standing does the Department of Public Works or the Department of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services or the Department of Justice have to withhold this information?

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Hackett.

PETER HACKETT: I'm going to go back a little bit and talk about the bridge system as it currently stands. Then I'll talk a little bit about the Lake Road bridge.

KENDRA COOMBES: No, I want the information as to the legal standing that is there to withhold this information from the Public Accounts Committee.

PETER HACKETT: You're talking about the Lake Road bridge?

KENDRA COOMBES: That bridge or any other bridge that has collapsed.

PETER HACKETT: In the Lake Road bridge, on this particular bridge - or if you looked at other bridges that have collapsed over the last number of years - nothing recent, but we had a few a couple of years ago - if there is an incident that's involved in a structure,

and it's caused by a third party, that ends up going into our Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services group, risk management. It becomes more of a legal issue.

The information is held by them. They'll collect the information, and they'll find out who the liability was. It becomes who's at fault, who's got to replace it, who pays for that. That's why it becomes a discussion between the government and a third party. All that information is collected by them, and they start looking at it as basically a legal issue. The department stands back as another party who is being looked at from risk management and from those lawyers. So we step back from that. There is a process they go through. At the end of the process, the information, it's my understanding, would be made available. But once again, you have to speak to Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services on that.

That's why the information is not - I have to figure out what we can and can't release at this point. It's early days on that issue, on that item. I have to know what Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services is doing to collect the information and what they have involved.

When these incidents happen, we don't take them lightly. I don't think they do either. That's why they would want to keep on to the information. But that's something I'll have to ask - what we can and can't release.

KENDRA COOMBES: In the 2019 report, deputy minister, an estimated 600 bridges were listed as in poor condition. If that is true, at the time of the report there were 600 bridges in poor condition. Say one of them collapses tomorrow or today or next week or a year from now because the work that needed to be done was not done, who's responsible? We know that they're already in poor condition.

Isn't the Government of Nova Scotia responsible for replacing any bridges that are in poor condition? Regardless of what happened in this situation, I'm talking about all bridges. So 600 bridges were listed in 2019 as in poor condition. I doubt 600 bridges have had the work done that needs to be done on them. So who's responsible if there is a collapse on that bridge? We already knew about them.

PETER HACKETT: I'll start this, and I may ask one of my colleagues here to finish for me. The way the inspections work is we inspect each bridge annually. We're expected to do a Level 1 inspection, which is a visual inspection of every bridge. Then I believe every six years we try to do a Level 2, which is a more in-depth study of the bridge, and then if required, something deeper than that - we do a Level 3.

The ratings and conditions on those bridges can vary, depending upon what the issue is, and that's what might give them a poor rating, but it doesn't mean they're in any kind of peril. It just means that there have to be some repairs done to that bridge. It depends on the case. If we feel a bridge is not safe, if we feel that there's something out there that

would limit the loads on the bridge or the bridge has to be taken out of service, we would just take it out of service.

We have to put in detours, and sometimes that's inconvenient to the public, but we would do that if it's something that has to come out and it's going to be unsafe, and we know it's unsafe. We would not keep it in service. If it inconveniences the public because we have to take it out of service, we have to inconvenience the public. We try to make something that works for them. We wouldn't make them drive hours and hours - we'd try to work out some way to find some alternative route. We certainly wouldn't leave something in place that we thought was unsafe.

[9:45 a.m.]

Under the condition ratings, I believe it's 1 to 9 or 1 to 10. I'm just going to let Mr. Crocker speak about that and about what those ratings actually mean.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Crocker.

WILL CROCKER: As he mentioned, we inspect our bridges, and they receive a rating from 9, being excellent through to zero, being closed. When you look at the numbers, anything rated a 3 or 4 tends to be on the poorer side; 5 would be considered fair; 6, 7, 8, good; and then higher, excellent. The important thing to consider when you're looking at these inspection ratings is that a rating of poor does not necessarily mean it's unsafe. It just means that work has been identified that needs to be taken care of and prioritized as part of our overall management of our structures.

At the end of the day, if, during an inspection process, or it's brought to our attention in some other fashion, if a bridge is thought to be unsafe, it will get addressed immediately, whether it's through closure or weight restriction or some other fashion.

THE CHAIR: MLA Coombes, you have about five minutes left.

KENDRA COOMBES: As of 2019, there are 600 bridges. Can someone please give me the updated number as to how many bridges we have in poor condition?

PETER HACKETT: I'm going to give that to Mr. Maillet.

DON MAILLET: The percentage has dropped from 14.9 to 14.1 per cent.

KENDRA COOMBES: At some point, can someone please give me that in an actual number? The other question I have is, how many other bridges are at risk of collapse?

DON MAILLET: At this point, if that bridge is in condition to collapse, we'd have it closed, so I suspect that any bridge in that condition would not be in use.

KENDRA COOMBES: My understanding is that the department's current approach to meeting the Recommendation 2.1 is to purchase new software, but the AG's 2019 report noted that the software at the time was capable of recording this data and despite this, the department was not tracking. How will this new software ensure that bridge inspections and repair records are kept current and complete? Will this work be ongoing?

PETER HACKETT: I'm going to ask Will Crocker to talk a bit about the new software.

WILL CROCKER: It's important to note that since the recommendations came out, we have been working on a number of initiatives, part of which does include the software. Our current system records basic asset inventory information and all our inspection records. What the Auditor General's Office identified was that some of the tracking processes were needing to be improved. It's currently done through other means in district offices through tracking spreadsheets and other means. The new software system will allow us to keep this in one centralized location.

It will also include additional information on our bridges, allow us to better track these maintenance needs, better track what has already been done to the bridge in terms of its history, who's responsible for various requirements, as well as tracking the inspections as we currently are doing.

KENDRA COOMBES: As much as I want to move on to another question, the question wasn't answered. The AG stated that the software at the time of 2019 was capable of recording data, and despite this, the department was not tracking it. One of my questions is: Why was that?

PETER HACKETT: I'm going to put that back over to Will.

WILL CROCKER: It's not that we weren't tracking that information. As I said before, the software that we have stores that information. We just have different systems. It's not a centralized location. This new software system will be a centralized location to help us track these requirements to help ensure that something isn't missed or lost or somehow not addressed in a timely fashion. It's not that we're not doing this. We are doing these things. We are tracking in spreadsheets. We are making sure our inspections are done. It's just not being done in one localized spot and tracked in one localized software system.

KENDRA COOMBES: Is the new software in place? If not, when will it be?

WILL CROCKER: We had to go through the procurement process, which took some time, as previously mentioned. We are currently in the implementation phase of the software system. It is anticipated that it will be operational early next year.

KENDRA COOMBES: My understanding is there was supposed to be a new bridge inspection procedure that was to be finalized . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. That concludes the NDP questioning. I'll move to the PC caucus, starting with MLA MacDonald.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: A couple things I would have asked Mr. Crocker, but he's off the hook, because my colleague has asked him. As we're making these changes and changing bridges, one of the things we have to look out for is the environment. I'm not sure who the Deputy Minister wants to put this to, but what's the Department of Environment and Climate Change doing to minimize the environmental impact at our bases, where we hold salt and all that stuff? I'll let the Deputy Minister decide who wants to answer that one.

PETER HACKETT: I can start. We have 76, I think, bases across the province that we have a responsibility to inspect for things like salt management, diesel, things in the soil, creosote, that sort of thing, that we've left behind, or residual materials around those bases. We do have a program in place that we look after that, and it's a pretty rigorous program. We started that a number of years ago - it was in the 1990s. Prior to that, we probably weren't doing a whole lot. The rules on environment were different back then. Since then, we've progressed with that and made it even better to inspect all those sites, to be diligent and proactive. I am going to let Jason Rae speak a bit more to what we're actually doing at those.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Rae.

JASON RAE: We are working, doing lots of work on our bases. One of the things I just want to make sure I reiterate is that our highway bases are active industrial sites or commercial sites, so there's work ongoing on these. In most cases, these bases have a history of operation, so that the contamination, if there is any on site, is historic, which is a little bit more difficult to handle, but it's not impossible to handle or mitigate.

One tool that I want to just mention that has come out of some of the committees that I've been working on is our risk ranking matrix. That basically allows our bases - we have an inventory of our bases, and that allows the higher-risk bases to be looked at first. That means anything with higher contamination, proximity to population, or the contamination itself, those get attention first.

Another thing that has come out of our committee work - actually one point I want to make on the risk ranking matrix is we met recently with the Office of the Auditor General to review our progress on that file with that tool. We received positive feedback on that, so that is moving in a direction that the Auditor General's Office is looking for.

Another item we work on with our bases is something called our base best practices project. That's a manual for personnel at bases. It lists all the different types of maintenance that need to be done on the fuel-management systems - any of the maintenance on those, including inspections. Also, we're going through a process of updating our fuel-dispensing standing offer process, so any of the older fuel-dispensing systems on the sites are being replaced with new updated ones. At that time, we're moving away from underground storage facilities for fuel and taking it to aboveground, which is easier to maintain and inspect.

Another item I just want to comment on is our base-cleanup initiative. That's dedicated funding that comes out of my division's operating budget that allows managers or area managers to do specific projects at the bases in their areas. The goal with that is those folks know their bases the best. They know the quick-hit items like doing specific types of garbage removal. We dedicate funding for them to work on those projects and to minimize the environmental impacts of those bases.

I just want to loop back around to where I mentioned the integrated advisory committee. That's something that came out of the Auditor General's Report. It was recommended that we have a more collaborative approach. With that, it gives us an opportunity to share our processes with other departments and talk with them, including the regulator. The Department of Environment and Climate Change is also part of that discussion. We can give feedback on the different processes. It's much more collaborative and just leads to a better process in the end.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: I do have a question that bothers me. I'm sure you'll be able to explain it because I assume it'll be going to Mr. Rae. Why do contaminated sites take over two years to get done? Can you explain? I'm sure most people are trying to figure out why it's taking us two years to do it. I assume the deputy minister is good with Mr. Rae.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Rae.

JASON RAE: That's a really good question. Generally, with the two years that are listed in the contaminated site regulations, that's for a very simple cleanup - a roadside spill or something, an incident that's recorded or that's happened, and we're forced to action, to do the cleanup. Like I mentioned earlier, a lot of our bases are more sites with more historic contaminations, so it has differing types of contamination, larger areas. The two years that are mentioned in the regulations are really a guideline.

We have a very good relationship with the regulator and with the Department of Environment and Climate Change. We're in constant communication with them and doing applications for time extensions on the remediation, where the management is a work of business. It's how things work. We have a qualified site professional in-house within my division. That engineer manages these files. He's aware of the processes and is making

sure that we manage when a consultant's involved or if an application is put into our department for a cleanup on an incident on a roadside, that it's done the right way. We have someone in-house who reviews those and ensures that the site professional who's representing the third party - if it's a third-party impact situation - that the report's done and it makes sense. The end goal is that it's a one-and-done situation so that we can get in and do the cleanup and then move on.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: I am going to ask a question. I expect the deputy minister is going to ask Mr. Crocker, but I'll ask him anyway.

From the original report, the department had committed to having this new system in place in two years. Now it's December 2023, and I do remember you mentioned procurement. I know that Mr. Crocker said it's the first quarter of next year/early next year, with no date. Where are we with the implementation and how long is the implementation expected? I have an IT background, so that's why I'm asking the question. I find a lot of times people will come into an implementation and say, "Oh, we'll get this done in six months." A six-month implementation, you're going to be fixing for the next two years.

I'm just wondering, what's the timeline for the implementation from when you've got it until you're going to be trained and roll it out? Do we expect that we're at a point where the first part of next year is a realistic date?

WILL CROCKER: In terms of the phasing of where we're at with the system, it was awarded - I forget the exact date - but a number of months ago, and vendors have already taken the data from our current system, implemented it into their system, and done the appropriate background database work to make sure the connections within the various data fields are made correctly to allow us to proceed to the next phase. We're at the point now where we're starting to identify what other systems we might connect into within the department, what other data sources we might pull in that are relevant to bridge asset management.

That's part of what's going on now. Parallel, we've already identified numerous additional data fields that are required or will aid us in those decision-making processes to go into this new system. All those previous spreadsheets that I talked about, we've identified the data management fields, how they're going to relate to the structure itself, and identified those to the vendor to be put into the system. Right now, we're at the stage where we're starting to build the core of the system.

The vendor is doing a process where they're building a component of the system, allowing us to test this base component, and then moving forward to the next phase, making sure we get the core of the system right, what we need for our needs. As we move forward, once the core data is in place, we'll then start doing some of the analysis components of the system, allowing us to compare different projects within the system, and to compare and identify what might be better to do first. If you have - as previously mentioned - 600-

some-odd bridges that are in poor condition, how do you really identify which one comes first?

This system will allow us to help prioritize that, and moving forward, I'm looking forward to building the system. It should be noted that at the end of the day, regardless of what the system tells us, we're still maintaining the safety of our structures through regular maintenance inspections, and if something does need to be addressed immediately, we address it.

[10:00 a.m.]

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Thanks for that technical. I apologize for anybody who - I enjoyed your technical brief on it. I will defer the rest of my time to MLA Smith.

THE CHAIR: MLA Smith.

KENT SMITH: I may or may not use all the remaining time, depending on the answers to the questions. As often happens in committee, we come prepared with questions, and through conversation and through the other parties asking questions, they often get answered. Mr. Crocker, thank you. You've done a comprehensive job of answering some of my questions related to Recommendations 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4. I just want to give you the opportunity to make sure that everything that you wanted to get on the record is on the record, in terms of formalizing the bridge repairs, the quality assurance system. Is there anything, after speaking for the last minute, that you thought, "I should have said that, and I wish I had"? I'll give you that opportunity, and then I'll move on to my next question.

WILL CROCKER: Really, these things take time. Yes, it does seem like it's been a long time that we've been building this system, but going through the process, we went through the proper procurement channels to make sure we did that process correctly. We have an archaic system right now. We want to make sure that we're not repeating that same problem.

While it's unfortunate that it is taking a long time, I think we're doing the right process, we're going through the right channels, and building the right system so that for the next seven years, which are the terms of the contract, we'll be good, and before that time is up, we'll be evaluating how well it's performed for us, and then moving forward from there. Really, it's about making sure we do a good job, doing the right thing.

KENT SMITH: The important takeaway for me from this is that earlier on in the conversation you made it clear that all the work was being done as it was supposed to be done. It just wasn't necessarily being recorded in the way that the Auditor General wanted to see it recorded. I'm pleased that we're taking steps to rectify that.

Switching gears, Mr. Hackett, I'm going to go to being responsible taxpayers and making sure that we look after our money in the best way possible. There was conversation in the report about making sure that taxpayers are not overpaying for infrastructure. What steps are we taking as a department to make sure that we're getting the best bang for our buck as taxpayers?

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Hackett.

PETER HACKETT: I'm going to talk first, and I'll hand it over to Mr. Maillet to make sure I cover everything.

In our highway work, on our highway department side, and on our building side as well, we have a good team of engineers and architects, people in the field right across the province. We put a lot of effort into making sure that our designs and our estimates are accurate, and to make sure that when we put things out to tender, we try to have everything in place and get everything covered, so we're not looking at change orders and stuff like that going forward.

We also look at average prices and costs, and we also look at where we're going to get best bang for our buck with the types of tenders we put out. Whether they're designed builds or designed bid builds or P3s, we do all of that kind of analysis to make sure that what we get out of our toolbox, we make sure we get the right delivery for Nova Scotians so that we get the right prices and they're very competitive.

I'm not on it day to day, so I just want to pass it over to Mr. Maillet for any more comments with regard to the highway work.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Maillet.

DON MAILLET: Best bang for buck is to treat the infrastructure early in its life cycle. That could be a road. That could be a bridge. That could be as simple as washing the bearings where you would prevent corrosion from happening - painting a bridge, for example.

With regard to the asset and the infrastructure itself, it's best to catch it at a certain spot in the life cycle where you don't have to spend a lot of money to either rehabilitate it or to preserve the life of the asset. Through our asset management software, we will be able to identify that in the future. We do that now, but probably not to the extent that we would like to. That is important for us because we know that any time you replace, it costs a lot.

With regard to a replacement of a bridge, we go through the analysis of what is best suited for that particular area. Of course our design team gets together, and we have lots of opportunity to assess the sites, look at utilities, look at all this. All of that goes into the package as to what is our environmental impact and all of that.

Once the tender package goes out, we do use a three-year rolling average with our engineers, who look at trends through the previous years, and then we see what the bid comes in at. Of course, we compare it to our estimates 9 times out of 10. Currently right now, we can certainly understand that with the labour shortages and the material issues that are associated with some of the market conditions, that probably has an impact on price. What we need to be is a little more creative in our bidding process, trying to have options out there. When a bridge does come in over budget, we'll also look at some value-added stuff to it or work with the proponent that got the job, and/or we'll cancel, and we'll regroup and repackage it in a different way to try to minimize some of the cost. So that's somewhat what we do.

KENT SMITH: I appreciate that answer. I'm going to switch gears once again and bring the conversation close to my home constituency for a moment, if I may - the beautiful Eastern Shore. I'm sure you all take time to visit throughout the Summer, as we have some of the best natural resources in the province - sorry to MLA Taggart.

I would be remiss if I didn't bring up the Musquodoboit Harbour Bridge as a critical piece of infrastructure on the Eastern Shore. As you look at a highway map of the province, you see the 100-Series highways that leave out of the core of Halifax span the province, with the exception of Highway No. 107 that gets to Musquodoboit Harbour, and then you're left with Trunk No. 7 for the rest of the way. We certainly found on the Eastern Shore during COVID-19 that what was previously untapped became a very popular destination.

Unfortunately, when you get to the end of Highway No. 107, you turn right and you drive a minute down the road, you come to Musquodoboit Harbour Bridge, which is not necessarily our prettiest asset that we have on the Eastern Shore. I've had many conversations with Mr. Balsom, Mr. Rafuse, and Mr. Peachey about the status of that bridge. I'm curious to know if we can share today what the status is of the replacement of that bridge, and when we can hope to see a brand-new piece of infrastructure to help grow the tourism and the economic life cycle on the Eastern Shore.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Maillet.

DON MAILLET: I will concur that the bridge is not pretty. It needs a good paint job, but we're going to do better than that. If I could back up the bus just a little bit. Two years ago, the bridge was destined to be rehabilitated. In the process of determining what the cost was going to be through the design work, it was quickly determined that the rehabilitation on that bridge was going to be quite extensive, realizing that we basically had to put a detour bridge, and it was quite complex. Through the life cycle analysis of the structure and through what we perceived a new structure would cost, and/or sustained through the life cycle of the asset, we determined that it was a replacement.

That was two years ago. Of course, as we can appreciate, the regulatory processes, the design processes, the utilities and whatnot, we certainly can appreciate that it takes time when we switch gears. We're hopeful that the bridge will be in a position possibly to be procured next year, put on the plan.

THE CHAIR: Order. That concludes questioning for the PC caucus. We'll have 12 minutes for the next round, and we'll start it with MLA Clark.

MLA Clark.

BRAEDON CLARK: I just want to start with a quick comment and some questions around transparency of information and so on when it comes to bridges. I'd like to urge the department to do that as much as you can. I think just in general in government, a lack of information leads inevitably to a lack of confidence and trust, which is certainly not the direction we want to go in.

I know it's a ton of work. We're talking about thousands of bridges. But if we can get to a point quickly where people can find out that these are all the bridges the department manages, these are the conditions of them, this is when they were inspected, I think that would give people a great deal of peace of mind, even if they never go there. Just knowing that it exists I think has a lot of value. I just want to double down on that point from earlier.

I wanted to ask a few questions around contaminated sites as well, which I think is an underappreciated issue in the province, to be honest. Just curious, I'm not sure who this question is best directed to, maybe Deputy Minister Hackett can direct. How many sites are we talking about here, in general, across the board? Is that updated on a fairly regular basis?

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Hackett.

PETER HACKETT: I'm going to start, and I'll pass it off. We have compiled a list of contaminated sites across the province. Some are managed, some are active, some are dormant, and some are looked at for the future. We do have a list. It is looked at by our interdepartmental team. That's regularly reviewed and updated, and brought to the deputy ministers' committee, as well as part of the contaminated sites group.

I'm going to let Jason Rae speak a bit more to how many sites are out there and what we're actually doing about them.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Rae.

JASON RAE: I'll stick to the numbers that I know for sure, because the deputy minister mentioned that the Department of Finance and Treasury Board does hold a list for the province's contaminated sites numbers. I can give numbers specifically to our department, so DPW. In total, we have 30 liabilities that have been booked with Treasury

Board - 26 of those are bases. What I mentioned earlier is that since those are noted as being a contaminated site under the regulations, we manage those under the regulations, and those are in compliance with the regulations.

BRAEDON CLARK: You mentioned, Mr. Rae, that there are 30 liabilities booked with the Department of Finance and Treasury Board. What is the dollar value of those liabilities in total?

JASON RAE: I remember the number as a total for our province, not particularly with our department, so it's just a matter of the numbers. But I know that the last published numbers from the Department of Finance and Treasury Board were around \$450 million. That's a province-wide liability list that's maintained by the Department of Finance and Treasury Board.

BRAEDON CLARK: To clarify, that \$450 million liability, I think it's fair to say, would be a best estimate, perhaps. Obviously, there's a whole ton of detailed work that is not done in the vast majority of those cases yet that could reveal - unfortunately, the cost of these things usually goes up, not down.

Mr. Rae, would it be safe to say that's probably an incomplete and probably low accounting of the overall real cost?

JASON RAE: I can't specifically comment on how the Department of Finance and Treasury Board manages the amounts. Just to loop back, I had mentioned earlier about committee work. Part of the Auditor General's recommendations was to create a committee where some of these items are discussed. In that, we're working with a consultant right now on a liability framework guideline. That helps our department. To step back here a bit, some of the items that are worked on in the committee, our department pilots that first, and then once that is a well-oiled machine, we can roll it out to other departments.

What I'm hoping is that with this framework, it's a guideline to help develop accurate liabilities for some of these sites. We did find, through the Auditor General's process, that was an area for improvement. Along with that, there is an accounting standard that Finance and Treasury Board follows, which is the PS 3260, I think is the name of it. What we've done is we're working with a consultant to create a guideline that helps us have a more precise and accurate liability.

BRAEDON CLARK: If you could perhaps give a quick overview of what I assume would be one of the bigger liabilities or ongoing remediations, of course, related to Boat Harbour - I know that's been going on for years. I'm just curious if you could give us a quick status update on where that project lies at the moment.

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Hackett.

PETER HACKETT: I'm going to defer from Mr. Rae to Mr. Benoit. He'll speak about Boat Harbour.

[10:15 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: Mr. Benoit.

DAVID BENOIT: Thank you, deputy minister, and thank you for the question. As it relates to Boat Harbour, obviously a very important and significant site, an earlier question was, "why does it take so long to do the cleanups?" I think Mr. Rae answered it perfectly.

The one key element that maybe wasn't as pronounced is the fact that it takes many, many stakeholders to look at a site. We need to make sure that we've got the right solution for the area and for the contaminants that are contained therein. Making sure that - then there's geography, access, and other factors that factor into this.

The update on Boat Harbour is that it continues to progress. We continue to work with the Pictou Landing First Nations and the federal government in order to get to that solution. There is agreement across the board on what they want to see at the end. If you could paint a picture of what this place would look like on completion, there's agreement there. It's the matter then of how we get to the details to be able to deliver on that vision.

It remains in the environmental assessment phase. It has been there for a little bit, as we go through. Every time there's a question or there's a concern that's raised by any of the stakeholders, we all take a chance to explore that concern, get replies back, and then make sure that we can move it forward together.

BRAEDON CLARK: One more question, and then I'll turn it over to MLA Maguire for the last couple of minutes.

Deputy Minister Hackett, as I'm sure you're aware, on June 1st Minister Lohr issued an order to close the gates at the aboiteau at the Windsor causeway. That order is due to expire tomorrow, June 15th. I'm just curious: Were you or the department aware of that order prior to it being issued on the 1st?

PETER HACKETT: I have to say that we weren't, but the Department of Public Works isn't really involved in that portion of the work. That would have come obviously from Minister Lohr of the Office of Emergency Management, and the current aboiteau is operated by the Department of Agriculture. The federal order on that is with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada so the Department of Public Works doesn't really have much involvement with the current state of that structure.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Just a quick question. I'm looking back over the last couple of years, and one of the things I would like for the department to table to this committee, because it's something I've been unable to get information on: Shortly after the new government came in, we as a community were in negotiation with HRM on the development of the J.L. Ilsley High School. Part of that was the regulation-size football field, and it was agreed upon by the municipality to give money to the province to help build and maintain this field.

Shortly after that, I received a letter from Paul LaFleche, the former Deputy Minister, saying that the province was pulling out of the agreement. When I asked the Minister of Department of Education and Early Childhood Development why, she said, those kids could walk to Graves-Oakley Memorial Park. She clearly doesn't know the area. I would like the department to table the conversations and how that decision was made for this committee so we can be open and transparent about how and when resources and money are spent in our community.

THE CHAIR: MLA Maguire, just a reminder that the topic of this is Follow-up of 2018, 2019 and 2020 Performance Audit Recommendations on Bridge Projects in Central and Western Districts.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: It's not what the Auditor General and the Chair said in that discussion. They said - Mr. Smith can shake his head all he wants. It's nice for you to acknowledge me now that you've blocked me. I would just like for you to . . .

THE CHAIR: Order.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I would just like that to be tabled to the committee so that we can see where the money is being spent and where the resources are being put, and just for clarification for the people in my community and for HRM. They're confused as to why that decision was pulled out of.

PETER HACKETT: I'll have to see what I can find. I wasn't part of the discussion. Much of that has to do with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development as well, on the decision to go from a size of field to another size of field, soccer field to maybe a different size of field. I don't know a whole lot about that. I'd have to look that up and where the decisions came from.

THE CHAIR: MLA Maguire, you've got a minute.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: The reason why I think it's important we know these things is because obviously any sizeable project is going through the Department of Public Works. We know that there is potential for political interference in this department when it comes to projects from partisan politicians, and it was troubling to me, because I feel like we're going down the same road with - we just heard where MLA Smith talked about a

bridge. We're sitting over here going: He's going to get a timetable and it's going to get approved. When we're asking questions on this side, we're not getting specific timetables - we're not finding out when these projects are going to get done.

Again, this is not on the department. I think there is bigger political interference at play here. That's why I think that when these decisions are being made, we need to know why they're being made, why our projects are being left off. It's not just in HRM. I know that the member for Clare had some projects that were approved that were pushed down the pipeline . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. That concludes the time for the Liberal caucus. MLA Coombes.

KENDRA COOMBES: I'll just go back to my last question. It's my understanding that a new bridge inspection procedure has been finalized. Can you table that to the committee, please?

WILL CROCKER: You're correct, that has been finalized, and we can provide that.

KENDRA COOMBES: The AG's report also found that the department was not completing regular bridge inspections as required by the department's policy. I'm wondering if this can be explained. Are inspections currently overdue for any bridges, and if so, which ones? If that's a list, that can be tabled as well.

WILL CROCKER: You're correct, that's one of the deficiencies that was identified. Our current inspection system has what we call Level 1, which is scheduled to be done on every bridge every year. It's a general cursory overview of each structure for any safety or maintenance concerns.

Then we have a regularly scheduled Level 2 inspection, which is dependent upon highway classification, the previous inspection condition, and the type of structure that it is. All of this is contained in the inspection procedure and policy.

Regarding the question about whether we have a list of overdue inspections - as a result of the AG recommendations, until our new system is in place, we've been doing regular data extracts from our current system and doing analysis in spreadsheets. This has allowed us to provide tracking of what has or hasn't been done, and that's regularly provided to our district staff to be followed up with and addressed.

KENDRA COOMBES: I'm sorry, Chair, I didn't hear any numbers. I'm wondering, do they currently know how many bridges are overdue for inspection? How many?

WILL CROCKER: I don't have a number of what is overdue for the current year. We would have started our new inspection cycle in January of this year. Level 1s are required for this year on every bridge. I don't have numbers on me about how many have been done to date. Similarly, our Level 2s - I don't have the numbers that were scheduled or what may or may not have been done to date.

We do have those numbers. I just don't have them on me.

KENDRA COOMBES: Chair, I ask that we follow up with the department - that they provide us those numbers. It's unfortunate that they don't have them today, considering that this is what the topic was.

To your riding, Mr. Chair, we saw that a roadway bridge was destroyed in the Shelburne fires. My question is: How are we constructing our bridges to be more resilient to increasing climate change threats? How vulnerable are our aging bridges to the threats of fire and flooding?

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Hackett.

PETER HACKETT: I'm just going to start a little bit, and then I'm going to hand this off to Mr. Maillet.

It's a good point about climate change. Over the last number of years - not so much on the fire issues that we've just currently had, but certainly on rising water, intense rainfalls, issues with coastal erosion - we have changed our designs and our structures to make sure that we accommodate for that when we put new structures in. Sometimes we rehab some structures. We've gone to making some things bigger, looking at the way water flows differently.

That is ongoing with our department as we continue to replace and rehabilitate. It is a hard thing to do sometimes because climate change does come unexpectedly. We had an issue in Cape Breton in Fall 2021 - we lost about five bridges in Cape Breton due to some flooding down in that area. That was very isolated. The rainfall hit the top of the mountains around the Ingonish area, and then on the other side in Margaree and took out a number of bridges. Those bridges were all replaced at a better standard than they are today.

It's just hard to predict, but as we go to replace them, we do upgrade them to a different standard.

Don, do you want to add some to that?

THE CHAIR: Mr. Maillet.

KENDRA COOMBES: I just want to take my time back, Mr. Chair, because I have limited time.

THE CHAIR: With respect, if you ask a question, I think the witnesses should be able to answer.

Mr. Maillet.

KENDRA COOMBES: I'm reclaiming my time, please, Mr. Chair.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Maillet.

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Chair, I have a follow-up, and I'd like to reclaim my time, please.

THE CHAIR: MLA Coombes, with respect, if you ask the witnesses a question, they should be entitled to answer the question.

KENDRA COOMBES: It was answered, Mr. Chair, and I'd please like to ask a follow-up.

THE CHAIR: MLA Coombes.

KENDRA COOMBES: Thank you. Mr. Hackett, you said climate change comes unexpectedly. I just want to say first, it does not come unexpectedly. We know it's coming. It's good to know that these new bridges are resilient. With that, I'm going to ask another question. With regard to the repairs that need to be made to bridges when things happen, what is the Department of Public Works doing to ensure warranty repairs are covered by the responsible parties, and not Nova Scotia taxpayers?

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Hackett.

PETER HACKETT: I'll leave that to Mr. Crocker or Mr. Maillet.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Maillet.

DON MAILLET: We implement a system to track when the work's completed and when the proper warranty period has ended. At that point we do a fairly detailed inspection with both the engineer, the consultant, and the contractor, at which point we identify the deficiencies. It's staggered. We have a fairly rigorous warranty period for that one year after substantial completion. Then after that for bridges, we have another two years of extended warranty for other things that we feel might fail within that two-year period.

In the process of doing all this, we have the correspondence that goes between the department and the contractor, and we hold them accountable. What we do as well is we have surety in place through the contractual obligations of the contractor that will enable us to call upon if the contractor decides not to fulfill their requirement under the contract through the warranty period. We certainly have that in place for the taxpayer to identify if there's a delinquent contractor.

[10:30 a.m.]

KENDRA COOMBES: Thank you so much, that helps. With limited time, I'm going to pass on the remainder to my colleague, MLA Leblanc.

THE CHAIR: MLA Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Just with the last bit of time we have left, the last time the Department of Public Works was at committee, there were a few questions that we didn't get answered, so I'm hoping some of that information might be available. I wanted to know what the current cost is right now of the Hogan Court hotel health project.

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Hackett.

PETER HACKETT: I'm going to hand that off to Mr. Benoit.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Benoit.

DAVID BENOIT: Hogan Court was just recently transferred into build in order to continue the renovations that are required. There's actually no change to any of the dollar figures already provided.

SUSAN LEBLANC: The estimates that we have right now are \$15 million. Is that correct? Okay, great. When will the province release the assessment that confirms the P3 approach for the current stage of health redevelopment projects?

DAVID BENOIT: Just for clarification, you mean the Value For Money report? We've received that report and we're analyzing it now.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Benoit.

DAVID BENOIT: We have received that report. Now we're going through it and having, as with everything, as there are always questions that we may have about the report, so we're just clarifying those questions. Once it's accepted, it should be made available, as we had previously said it would be.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Do you have a timeline on that?

DAVID BENOIT: I don't have a specific time for you right now. I hadn't checked with my team to see how that is progressing before we came here.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Maybe we can just get that information. Just an email back to the clerk about when we can expect to have that information would be great. How much time do I have left?

THE CHAIR: About 45 seconds.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I just wanted to ask quickly, there's a bridge in Eastern Passage that sounds like it's similar to the one that MLA Maguire was talking about, where it's not safe for pedestrians or anyone in an accessibility mode of transport to cross. It's also used for Spring fishing and that kind of thing. I'm just wondering if there is any plan to look at that bridge and add accessibility - like what you were talking about with the sidewalk on the side - the cantilevered sidewalk - if there's anything with that bridge in Eastern Passage.

THE CHAIR: Order. That concludes questioning for the NDP. I'll start with MLA Smith.

KENT SMITH: I'd like to begin by offering a quick apology to the witnesses for some of the unprofessional and disorderly conduct that's been taking place today in committee. We certainly value the time that you folks put into preparing for this, and we value the time that you bring and the knowledge that you bring to this committee. Accept our apologies, please.

I also want to get on the record, I don't want to put anyone on the spot, but I want to test the memory. There have been claims of partisanship in decision-making, which is certainly not true. The Musquodoboit Harbour bridge that we spoke about during the last round of questioning, I'm wondering if Mr. Hackett or Mr. Maillet can test their memory and think about when that bridge was first put on the list.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Maillet.

DON MAILLET: That's correct. Through the inspection process, you certainly identify some of the deficiencies associated with the infrastructure. I suspect before it actually gets on the program for rehabilitation, you would probably be a good three or four years prior to that to look at the bridge through the selection process. From today, it would be at least six, seven years ago.

KENT SMITH: Thank you, I appreciate that. I'll tell you, it was first put on in the 2016-17 capital plan, I believe. I'll be tabling that document to make sure that the accurate information is shared with the committee.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Maillet.

DON MAILLET: My reference to two years was when we were actually going to proceed with the capital expenditure on the rehabilitation project, which the pre-planning would have been several years before.

KENT SMITH: That concludes my questioning for now. I believe MLA Taggart is going to take over.

THE CHAIR: MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: With respect to all these accusations about political favouritism, I want to quickly point out two things. Last year, I believe - you guys can confirm or deny or whatever, it's easy to look up - there was a bridge in the minister's riding that was on tender to be constructed last year. I believe that because of the overall cost of bridges, it was removed. Secondly, in my own personal riding, a bridge that had been put on the list because of need, without question, by former Deputy Premier Casey, has been pushed back as well for at least a year. I just want to put that on there because of all these innuendos.

My real question - I have to ask this because we are talking about bridges. The Salmon River bridge on Highway No. 102 between Colchester North and Colchester South has significant traffic delays. I get asked a lot of questions. It's very frustrating, everybody can understand that the bridge is in a difficult spot and had a lot of work over the years. One of the questions that's come up often to me is why was that work - why was a Bailey, a temporary bridge, not put in there? Is anybody able to answer that for me?

PETER HACKETT: I'll pass it over to Mr. Maillet.

DON MAILLET: Yes, the Salmon River Bridge. I concur. There is a lot of impact to the traffic, especially at rush hour and/or on a Friday afternoon or any time when the public has to go north, I guess.

The bridge itself is a rehabilitation project where we're fixing some of the beams underneath and we're fixing some of the work around the parapet walls and we're fixing some of the decking. For that to happen, we need to have a lane closure, and when we do that, of course, all the underneath work, we need the proper safe scaffolding for the workers to get down there in a safe manner for them to conduct the work.

Having said that, when we evaluated the bridge to get rehabilitated, we looked at the possibilities of trying to put a structure in place that could prevent the queuing or the one-lane situation. In this case, it's a fairly large span there. There are multiple piers on the existing infrastructure that span up through the land side - there's a floodplain there - and also on the river side, where there's the water. Of course, if we had to put a Bailey bridge or a detour bridge or such in place, it would have been fairly costly, and I'm not quite sure

if it was manageable, given the span that we had to do there. What we had to do, because of the requirements through the Fisheries Act and the requirements through all the regulatory approvals, because our detour bridges have to go through the exact same screening as a normal bridge, because we have to be sensitive of the environment and everything around the designs.

So it was determined at the time that probably the best approach was to do a lane drop, only because of economics and the difficulties of putting a fairly large detour bridge in. I'm not sure if Mr. Crocker knows or not - that detail about if the bridge could actually be built to span that span that we would require.

WILL CROCKER: Anything is achievable with enough money, but you would have had to make probably multiple piers into the water to allow that to happen - and to Mr. Maillet's point, a significant cost for that.

TOM TAGGART: Well, thank you for the answer. I'll repeat it many times, trust me.

I want to ask about another bridge in my constituency that is certainly not a political bridge. Exit 13 at Highway No. 104 was struck by a vehicle some time ago. Engineering - correct me if I'm wrong - determined that one lane of that overpass bridge was not safe. So a set of traffic lights was put in at the entrance to the Debert Air Industrial Park. Folks have been grumbling but quite patient.

I'm just wondering - I know there was engineering going on, and I'm hoping it's going to tender soon. Is anybody able to give me any information on that?

PETER HACKETT: Let me find out some information. We'll have to get back to you on what the status of that one is. It's probably being handled at the field level and hasn't made its way into our hands yet. It's probably being done down there. Let me get that information and we'll get back to you.

TOM TAGGART: I'm trying to think of that word. Godspeed, please.

Just to go on here, what process - I don't think this has been answered, but it might have been - what process has been used to monitor the ongoing progress of completing inspections during the time that the new Bridge Management System software is being implemented? That's with reference to Recommendation 2.4 of the Auditor General. Has that been answered and I missed it? It has been answered? Okay. MLA Sheehy-Richard, do you have any questions?

THE CHAIR: MLA Sheehy-Richard.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Look alive at the moment here. In response to one of the follow-up responses, you had talked about hiring a maintenance planner in 2022. I don't think we touched on that, have we? Good. Can you describe the role of what this individual is going to provide in specific ways they address the issues of unrecorded work on the completed bridges in relation to Recommendation 2.1?

THE CHAIR: Mr. Crocker.

WILL CROCKER: The maintenance planner - part of their role has been involved in doing background spreadsheet work and helping us do some of the work that I mentioned previously about some of the data that's going to feed into our new system. One of the primary roles that they have been involved with is, to the previous question, helping us track our inspections. They've been taking the data extract from our current SIS, they've been identifying what inspections have been done, have not been done, and ones that might have been overdue for the current year but also ones that are already done for the current year. That gets sent out to the district bridge engineer for identification and making sure they get done as scheduled. That is the primary role that the maintenance planner is involved with.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Switching gears back - we talked about the IAG and addressing the matter of contaminated sites differently. Can you just explain what's different about the way it's being addressed now versus how it was being addressed before?

THE CHAIR: Mr. Rae.

JASON RAE: I think the most important takeaway from that - how the province is handling contaminated sites differently - is that our approach is more consistent now between different departments. Also, with the creation of the committees, there's more collaboration happening between the different departments. Just as an example, where I mentioned before the risk ranking matrix that was created, that has been discussed in those committees. We've got feedback from other departments. We've also been, as I mentioned earlier, working very closely with the Office of the Auditor General on that. We just had a meeting with them a couple of weeks ago where we received positive feedback on that.

THE CHAIR: Order. That concludes our questioning for the witnesses today. I'd like to thank the witnesses for appearing here, and I'll offer some closing remarks. Deputy Minister Hackett.

PETER HACKETT: I just want to say thank you to you and the committee for having us here today to speak on two very important topics related to the Department of Public Works. Obviously bridges affect everybody every day in the province. The contaminated sites - we progress to work on cleanup of a lot of sites that are out there and help get those properties and lands back to either managed sites or back to usage for sale.

I also want to thank our staff for being here as well as all the witnesses. I just want to say thanks to all of our staff across the province and in our head office for all the work they do every day. I think that it's important to take away from this meeting - important to take away from our department - we're out there every day. Our staff are out there every day working very hard to make sure the highway system - the road system - is safe for the motoring public. We are very appreciative of all the money that we get from government to look at the bridges that we've added to our program this year, and all the infrastructure we're able to get done this year. It's a big program.

We have very good staff who are out there looking at all the infrastructure to ensure it is safe. We have very good staff out there making sure that the infrastructure will get built and replaced. I just want to say thanks to them and all their hard work. Once again, thank you for having us here.

THE CHAIR: Maybe we'll take a quick two-minute recess just to allow the witnesses to move on. We're now in recess.

[10:45 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[10:47 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: Order. I call this meeting back to order.

On the agenda we have the June 23rd meeting regarding the Report of the Auditor General - Investigation of Island Employment Association. The Ombudsman is unable to make it for the 23rd. How does the committee want to proceed with that? Is there any discussion?

SUSAN LEBLANC: June 23rd?

THE CHAIR: Yes. Are we okay with continuing the meeting without the Ombudsman?

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Chair, could you remind us of who the other witnesses are?

THE CHAIR: The NSGEU and the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration. Is that okay? Seeing nods around. Everyone's okay? We'll continue with that meeting.

We have a motion on the floor from June 7th. MLA Maguire.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. If you could just remind people here what the motion is. Last committee, obviously, we didn't get a chance to vote on it, so there's not much more left for me to say, except that a lot of people have said that they're

doing everything they can to get our most vulnerable children back in school and support the workers who are out on the front line, who are standing out here right now.

This is a way to put actions to words. People can say whatever they want, but it's action time. I'd like to once again put the motion on the floor or remind people what the motion on the floor is.

I move that the Public Accounts Committee schedule an emergency meeting on the topic of inclusion in our education system, calling on witnesses from the IWK Health Centre and Inclusion NS to appear before this committee to address the ongoing and widespread long-term impact this strike is having on our children and loved ones.

I will remind people, because what was said last week is that this was about negotiations. It is not about negotiations. We are not here to talk about contract negotiations. We're here to talk about inclusion in our education system, which the Supreme Court ruled on a long time ago.

The motion is on the floor. I ask that we respect the motion and vote on it.

THE CHAIR: MLA Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I will speak in favour of this motion. I think it's an important subject for us to be talking about, especially at this time, where many of the students who would benefit from full inclusion cannot because of the fact that the government is not negotiating right now with CUPE.

I also just want to take this moment to welcome a number of members of CUPE 5047 to the committee room today. As we all know, these folks have been on strike for more than a month. They are living with poverty wages, and they are working with some of the most vulnerable people in our school system: kids with special needs; African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaw students who benefit from support workers; and of course, our four-year-olds who benefit from the pre-Primary program. None of these kids are able to connect with their people at this moment, with their workers.

I just want to thank the workers for their continued commitment. I can't remember if I told this story last week, but I don't think I did. Last week, I was standing on the picket line and just talking to a few workers, and there was traffic that stopped, and there was a car stopped in traffic, right by the picket line. I watched as the windows went down and this little kid stuck out their head and went, "Hi, Ms. Johnson!" Then Ms. Johnson came running out from the tent, reaching into the car, touching the kids, "Oh my God, I miss you." It was beautiful and heartbreaking, and Ms. Johnson is clearly loved and missed by the students that she works with. It was a great example of how important it is that this gets resolved - but resolved in a way that the workers can afford to pay their rent and put food on their table.

I support the motion. I think it's an important topic, and that's all I'll say.

THE CHAIR: MLA Clark.

BRAEDON CLARK: I just want to be brief, but of course say that I too support the motion that's on the floor. Unfortunately, I've gotten to see a lot of the people here and the people outside more often than I'm sure they would like, because they'd like to be in the classroom helping the kids - the close to 5,000 children, actually, in HRM who are impacted by this ongoing strike, which has gone on for far too long.

I've said this before to others, but my son was in the pre-Primary program last year. I know how much it did for him, socially and emotionally. He made tons of friends who hopefully will be friends of his for the rest of his life, and his teachers were incredible and never stopped working. It's just an amazing program. I think it's a real shame that we are getting very close to the end of the school year, and we've had close to 5,000 kids out for very close to a month now. I just want to say thank you to everybody for your work and thank MLA Maguire for bringing the motion forward.

THE CHAIR: MLA Coombes.

KENDRA COOMBES: Just briefly - first, my solidarity with the workers of CUPE 5047. Inclusion matters, and we have students who have been excluded from school for far too long, and this has major effects. It also has effects on the families - some of whom have not been able to go to work because their children cannot go to school because their support system is unfortunately on strike, fighting for a better wage and living conditions themselves.

I fully support this motion, and I hope to see an emergency meeting fairly soon.

THE CHAIR: MLA Sheehy-Richard.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: I just want to state for the record that I think we can all appreciate and agree that children should be back in school. We appreciate the concerns from the members opposite and understand that disruption of strike is obviously causing stress for students and families. We must continue to remind the members that the Public Accounts Committee is established for the purpose of reviewing the public accounts, the annual report, or other report of the Auditor General, and any other financial matters respecting the public funds of the province.

We do not feel that calling witnesses to discuss this topic reflects the purpose of this actual committee and its mandate. The Public Accounts Committee serves Nova Scotians by reviewing the effectiveness and efficiency in the spending of public funds. Mr. Chair, we're not an investigatory body for ongoing, current matters.

THE CHAIR: Is there any other discussion?

TOM TAGGART: MLA Maguire and I had this discussion earlier this morning. The bottom line is, I understand. Just for the record, I have family and good friends, as well as a lot of constituents who work as teacher's assistants, I think is the proper terminology, in Colchester North. I understand totally. I understand the urgency of this thing. I'm fortunate in that - I'm very happy that my residents got parity. I understand the angst that everybody is in - the workers, the students, the families, the children, and the whole thing.

I've got to tell you, I have real trouble - unless the Auditor General has done an audit and we have something to work with other than - for me, this kind of public discussion will only be turned into a political, gotcha thing and will not accomplish anything. If I had my way, I'll tell you right now, I'd talk this thing out. I'll just tell you right now, I'm not going to support it because the Auditor General has not - I actually believe it's very disrespectful for some people to continue to bring items, and if people did it before, I don't know how they handled it.

I'm just telling you that the Auditor General has done a great job in the work she does. Some of it we may agree with, some of it we may disagree with, but the bottom line is that she has a job to do, and I think we as a committee have a job to do as well, and that is to respect the work of the Auditor General and the Public Accounts Committee. If I'm missing something, please let me know. Emergency debate on things, that's fine, but this will turn into a whatever. It will just be who can get the best clip to put on their Facebook.

Those are my thoughts on it. I'm disappointed that any of these issues - I'm new to government and new to this table, but I don't think that this is the venue.

KENT SMITH: I've struggled on whether to chime in or not. This strike is hugely impactful to the workers and the kids and the families who are going without the ability to go to school. I've spent a ton of time on the picket lines. I've spoken to striking workers in the Porters Lake area and in the Sheet Harbour area, and I've tried to make myself as available as possible, and listened to their concerns and listened to what they feel is an unfair offer. I feel for them. Clearly, we're in this situation, and it's not what we want and it's not what the students want. It's not a great situation.

This particular motion, though, this is not the place to be debating this topic. This topic doesn't help get you back to work, which is what the people in my constituency are telling me they want. They want to get back to work. They want to be at the table, which I believe they are right now at the table, as I was told by some of the people whom I spoke with this morning. While this motion is a very important topic, and I respect the fact that this is a very important topic, debating it at Public Accounts Committee is not the right place for it. This committee has a mandate to look at the money of the province, and debating inclusion and the struggles with this strike is not the right place.

I'm going to leave enough time for us to vote. We're not going to support this motion. With those words, I'll turn it back to the Chair.

THE CHAIR: Is there any further discussion? A recorded vote has been called.

[The clerk calls the roll.]

[10:59 a.m.]

YEAS

Susan Leblanc
Kendra Coombes
Hon. Brendan Maguire
Braedon Clark

NAYS

Kent Smith
Tom Taggart
John A. MacDonald
Melissa Sheehy-Richard
Nolan Young

THE CLERK: For, 4. Against, 5.

THE CHAIR: The motion is defeated.

The meeting is adjourned.

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