

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2024–25 Financial and Performance Outcomes

Melbourne – Wednesday 26 November 2025

MEMBERS

Sarah Connolly – Chair

Roma Britnell – Deputy Chair

Jade Benham

Michael Galea

Mathew Hilakari

Lauren Kathage

Aiv Puglielli

Meng Heang Tak

Richard Welch

WITNESSES

Jeroen Weimar, Secretary,

Colleen Peterson, Acting Deputy Secretary, Planning and Land Services,

Fiona Adamson, Deputy Secretary, Transport Services,

Dean Tighe, Acting Deputy Secretary, Network Design and Integration,

Stuart Moseley, Deputy Secretary, Housing Building and Land Delivery,

Jacinda de Witts, Deputy Secretary, People, Legal and Governance, and

Shaun Condron, Acting Deputy Secretary, Investment and Technology, Department of Transport and Planning;

Frankie Carroll, Chief Executive Officer, Suburban Rail Loop Authority;

Kevin Devlin, Director-General,

Duncan Elliott, Chief Executive Officer, Roads, and

Matthew Gault, Chief Executive Officer, Rail, Victorian Infrastructure Delivery Authority;

Anne Jolic, Chief Executive Officer, Development Victoria;

Anna Cronin, Commissioner and Chief Executive Officer, Building and Plumbing Commission;

Tammy O'Connor, Chief Executive Officer, Safe Transport Victoria;

Will Tieppo, Chief Executive Officer, V/Line; and

Tracey Slatter, Chief Executive Officer, Transport Accident Commission.

The CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. I ask that mobile telephones please be turned to silent.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to them, their culture, their elders past, present and future and elders from other communities who may be joining us here today.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2024–25 Financial and Performance Outcomes. Its aim is to gauge what the government, the courts and Parliament achieved in 2024–25 compared to what they planned to achieve.

All evidence taken by the committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, comments repeated outside of this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

All evidence given today is recorded by Hansard, and it is being broadcast live on the Parliament's website. Now, the broadcast includes automated captioning. Members and witnesses should be aware that all microphones are live during the hearings and anything you say may be picked up and captioned, even if you say it very quietly.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check. Verified transcripts, presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website.

As Chair I expect that committee members will be respectful towards witnesses, the Victorian community joining the hearing via the live stream today and other committee members.

I welcome the Secretary of the Department of Transport and Planning Mr Jeroen Weimar as well as other officials that have joined us here today. Secretary, I am going to invite you to make an opening statement or

presentation of no more than 10 minutes, and this will be followed by questions from the committee. Your time starts now.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Thank you, Chair. Good morning, colleagues on the committee. I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the lands on which we are gathering, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin nation, and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging and also extend that respect to all traditional owners across the great state of Victoria.

Visual presentation.

Jeroen WEIMAR: First slide, please. Thank you. We represent in the Department of Transport and Planning a very wide and diverse range of agencies and entities, all working for 7 million Victorians every single day. We have agencies ranging from the Gippsland Ports authority to the Building and Plumbing Commission, the architects registration board, the Suburban Rail Loop Authority, VicTrack and V/Line, to name but a few, collectively representing tens of thousands of people who work hard every day to improve and ensure the transport connectivity of this state and to improve the planning and responsiveness of our system. I would like, on behalf of us, to really thank them for the work that they do every single day.

The scale of what we do: it is 23,000 kilometres of network roads that we have under our management going the entire length and breadth of our state. Half a billion tonnes of freight are moved on our roads and rail network, including servicing the Port of Melbourne, Australia's largest bulk shipping port, alone accounting for around \$36 billion worth of value to the state's productivity, and the broader freight sector supports 240,000 jobs. They are critical of course, those industries, to our food and fibre exports. We support and enable 501 million public transport trips every single year across thousands of bus services, rail services and tram services both within metro and within regional Victoria. Collectively, the job of the Department of Transport and Planning is to bring all this together and to ensure that we continue to support the needs of our growing state.

Next slide, please. Growth is very much Victoria's story. We have seen a 50 per cent growth in our population over the last 25 years, and *Plan for Victoria*, which was released earlier this year following consultation and engagement with over 110,000 Victorians, sets out a longer term generational plan around where we expect Victoria to be in 2051, when we will be a state of, we estimate, 10.3 million people. Through this plan, by engaging 79 local governments all across our state, we have not just predicted what we think growth looks like but where in particular we see those 2.2 million additional dwellings being built across our state. It is critical, that piece of guidance, around not only ensuring that we support and improve the livability of our state but also ensuring that we have got clear guidance to all public authorities and developers that the infrastructure and broader supporting services are there for those growing communities. This is clearly enabling a diversity of housing choices to be available for future Victorians, whether it is the continued growth of our greenfields to the west and north and south-east of Melbourne or whether it is the continued and stronger growth that we expect to see within the inner and middle rings. There is also the growth of our regional centres – the doubling in size we expect for Geelong, the 67 per cent growth we see for Bendigo – but also our smaller regional cities, such as Wangaratta, Warrnambool and Mildura and even out to our rural communities in East Gippsland, all where we have worked with local communities to understand what kind of growth we expect to see and how we then ensure we support that with appropriate infrastructure and planning support.

Next slide, please. That growing population of course needs ongoing investment in transport infrastructure and in particular ensuring that our road and freight networks continue to support that growth across our state. We have got a significant and ongoing program of maintaining and improving our road network, a \$6.6 billion program committed to road maintenance over the next decade, and this year topped up with additional capital investment. Around \$964 million was spent in the 2024–25 year on our road maintenance program, with \$972 million set aside this year. We continue to improve our approach to road maintenance, and in particular what we have seen in the last few years is a shift both in terms of working with our road maintenance contractors, the eight regions across our state, the 473,000 road inspections that we undertake annually, the technology that drives the appropriate investment in our systems, but also a greater focus on rehabilitation and reseal and fundamental investment in our road network and ensuring that ties into the needs of our local communities. In doing so of course we have had to address the ongoing legacy of the floods from over three years ago, but also the ongoing, more challenging climatic conditions we see, as well as providing the network that all people need. Similarly, that \$470 million of additional investment into the regional rail freight network,

ensuring that freight also has options to go on the rails, with record volumes of grain in particular being covered by rail to the ports, again on the back of that really good investment in the Murray Basin network.

Next slide, please. Of course transport infrastructure is a big part of our story and we will update you shortly on the Metro Tunnel and the West Gate Tunnel, but also looking at the 87 level crossings removed to date as part of our program of 110 level crossing removals; the ongoing upgrade of the Melton line, which should complete early next year; and the ongoing work on the north East Link program, one of the largest state road projects that is ongoing. There is a long list there to work through.

Next slide, please. We are excited of course about opening the Metro Tunnel. After a decade that Metro Tunnel will open on Sunday, with five brand new stations coming onto the network. This is an integration of our new high-capacity metro trains, 70 of those now operating on our network; high-capacity signalling; phenomenal investment in our network; and a fundamental transformation of capacity into our rail network. We are obviously very pleased to see that project coming together, being delivered on time and opening on Sunday, and then the expansion of our timetabled services early next year, ensuring an additional 1000 train services on that Sunbury to Dandenong corridor.

Next slide, please. Similarly, later next month we expect to be opening the West Gate Tunnel, again a significant step forward, particularly for the movement of freight in and out of the port, in and out of the west of Melbourne. It is a generational shift in our road network and in particular in supporting the ongoing growth of the west of Melbourne and a shift to transition, particularly of freight and removing over 9000 trucks a day from local roads in the inner west, a significant number of freight route realignments and ensuring we maintain the ongoing investment for access to the west of Melbourne. It is a great project to be bringing to the table.

Next slide, please. Of course all of that growth in transport infrastructure that we have seen over a number of years also now enables us to really start to think about how we apply our planning levers into that work. The work we are now introducing on activity centres is really about leveraging the additional train services and tram services that have been implemented over the last few years. We implemented 10 activity centres earlier this year through those gazettals, through lots of work with local communities, and we are now middle of the consultation for a further 50 activity centres, all based around those rail stations and tram stations where we have seen that uplift in capacity. This is all about really ensuring that we see the integration of our planning system with our transport system to deliver better outcomes for Victorians and to start to deliver more homes for Victorians. In particular what we are also now seeing with the Suburban Rail Loop program is the integration of planning and transport infrastructure delivery. We see the Suburban Rail Loop, now in its fifth or sixth year of operation, as being a step onto delivering 70,000 homes across those six precincts. Six of those precinct structure plans were released for public consultation earlier this year. They are now going through the standing advisory committee process, and we expect to gazette those next year. Again, it is a really important way of us linking our infrastructure agenda to delivering more capacity for homes all across Melbourne and broader Victoria.

Next slide, please. That has really been part of our conversation over the last two years, particularly with the housing statement released just over two years ago. We are now seeing a real bringing together of many of our planning and land-use levers to enable the growth and increase in housing all across our state. To do that, we have seen the introduction of a whole series of townhouse and low-rise codes to make it easier for home owners and for landowners, to improve the speed by which we can get homes built and to give them greater confidence as to how the planning system will operate. At the moment we are going through legislation around the streamlined planning and environment Act. Again, that enables more homes to be built more swiftly and more effectively and gives more confidence to the development market.

The development facilitation program, by itself, has sped up the approval of significant housing developments – over 53 housing developments now approved, over 7000 homes that can now get built, as well as 5700 homes that have been brought forward through planning scheme amendments through the DFP. To give more confidence to the Victorian building sector, seeing some of the challenges we saw three or four years ago with a number of insolvencies in the home sector, we have established a far stronger and more effective Building and Plumbing Commission to ensure that there are clear protections in place and that the strong reputation of Victorian builders can be enhanced. We have started the work around the environment effects statement, and of course we have for the first time a plan for the next 10 years as to how we develop and build out our greenfields.

Next slide, please. Collectively, what all that means is that we are seeing more homes built in Victoria than before. We have seen a 7 per cent increase in development and housing approvals over the last 12 months. We have consistently built more homes than any other state in Australia, and we continue to see the building industry being attracted here because of the growth in population that we see, the faster planning system and the stronger measures in place to enable more homes to be built.

Chair and committee, it is a pleasure to be with you here today. I look forward to answering your questions over the next few hours. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Secretary. The first 21 minutes is going to go to Ms Benham.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you, Chair. Good morning, Secretary. Good morning all. No surprises – I want to concentrate on roads this morning. What a way to start us off. Secretary, the departmental questionnaire at page 10 shows, for the third year running, the government has filled 200,000 potholes. What proportion of reported potholes is that?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Ms Benham, good morning and thank you for the question. I am pleased to be here to talk that through. We have a system in place with our regional maintenance contractors – eight regions, as I said, across the state. They undertake daily inspections on our road network. We classify those 23,000 kilometres by the level of inspection, based on the demand and the condition of that road. Those 473,000 inspections that we undertake every single day include them ensuring that at every single point in time any significant potholes or any other significant incidents are made safe and addressed at that point in time.

Jade BENHAM: So what proportion is the 200,000?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I do not have an absolute number because clearly the number of potholes that we have in the state will be a continually moving feast at this point in time. But you will appreciate that what our contractors do is they assess the standards by which the road is currently performing, they make a judgement around the extent of the potholes and they fill the potholes that need to be filled at that point in time, but they also identify works that need more significant work. As I said in my introductory statement, we are pivoting very aggressively towards greater rehabilitation, to greater reseals, so that we can improve the underlying condition of the road network.

Jade BENHAM: In your introduction you said that the department continues to improve the approach to road maintenance, but across a 23,000-kilometre state-owned road network, those 200,000 potholes that were repaired, that is a pothole nearly every 100 metres – or 8.5 or nine every 100 metres. That is a failure, not a success, wouldn't you say?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, I would not, and I think if you look at the range and diversity of our road network – and I will rely on your maths as to whether that is the right rate –

Jade BENHAM: It is; I checked it twice.

Jeroen WEIMAR: The balance we are seeking to strike is ensuring that we undertake the fundamental rebuild, rehabilitation and reseals of our critical road network, recognising that two-thirds of our road maintenance activities are taking place in regional Victoria and about one-third in metro Victoria. Of course, fixing potholes as they come up is a part of that job. It is a part of that requirement. We would expect to see that you need both the agility in our routine maintenance operations to deal with problems there and then to ensure we can maintain a safe and effective operation of our road network, but we recognise that sometimes you have got to go back –

Jade BENHAM: Sorry, Secretary, can I just pull you up for a second there? You are saying a third is being done in metro compared to regional, but in the department's performance statement the targets in metro and outer suburban are being met; in regional Victoria they are not being met at all.

Jeroen WEIMAR: No, but if I look at our total program for rehabilitation and resurfacing, in 2024–25, 35 per cent of our rehabilitation and resurfacing was undertaken within the metro area. Sixty-five per cent –

Jade BENHAM: So when will the number of potholes actually reduce?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Ms Benham, I think it is important that the benefit of having hundreds of people out there every single day, including today, maintaining and improving our road network is –

Jade BENHAM: Is not reducing potholes.

Jeroen WEIMAR: It is critical that they address potholes where they find them, but it is also critical that we do the long-term improvements and rehabilitations to improve the underlying condition of the network, and that is the work we have been doing. It extends of course to the blacktop, and rightly we focus on the blacktop – it is something we all see every single day wherever we are – but we have also got 6000 bridges and major culverts that we maintain, we have got 12,500 traffic lights that we maintain and we have got 80,000 hectares of roadside land that we maintain, so the maintenance operation covers a vast range of activities.

Jade BENHAM: In the same section on page 10, you have also listed indicators of activity for grass mowed, signs replaced, fixed barriers repaired. So can the committee please have the data for the previous five years? As you stated in your introduction, you continue to improve. Can we see the comparative data for the last five years?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I am sure, Ms Benham, you will appreciate I do not have all that with me today, but I am very happy to see what we can provide, going back a few years. What I would also note is that, again, we look at the history of where the road network is at; we look at the incidents that have happened. For example, we all remember the floods in 2022. We had a significant shift and a surge of operation in 2022–23 around tackling short-term fixes. Why – because we needed to get the roads back into operation. We needed access to the roads at that point in time, and that is what we did. We are now in a position over the last two years – 2023–24, 2024–25 and this year – with \$964 million spent last year, \$972 million planned for this year, to do more and deeper improvements on the network, to do bigger rehabilitations, and that is the kind of work we have seen happening all across the state.

Jade BENHAM: So when the road maintenance budget is reducing, how do you plan on continuing to improve?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, it is not reducing, Ms Benham. As I said, we have a committed program of \$6.6 billion over the next 10 years for underlying road maintenance, and that is the work we are on with now. In the last year we spent \$964 million. That included some capital road project upgrades; some of those bigger rehabilitation projects are included in capital funding. This year we are spending \$972 million. That is the largest number that we have spent in a single year for a number of years now. If I look back to 2015–16, 2016–17, 2017–18, those numbers were lower.

Roma BRITNELL: Excuse me, Secretary. May I ask a question?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Ms Britnell.

Roma BRITNELL: Thank you. Given what you just said about increasing the maintenance and increasing the spend, why are you only doing 1 per cent to 1.5 per cent of the annual maintenance that is required to get through the change around, to make sure it is maintained, when it used to be 8 to 10 per cent? How can the department justify only 1.1 per cent to 1.5 per cent maintenance?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Thank you, Ms Britnell. The approach the department takes – we made a significant shift three years ago around how we measure, how we incentivise and how we report the data on the work of our road maintenance contractors. Certainly five or six years ago we used to have a broader metric –

Jade BENHAM: So you have moved the goalposts.

Jeroen WEIMAR: No. We are spending more money than five or six years ago. We are doing more work than five or six years ago. We had metrics five or six years ago that talked about the broader treatment of the road network. That was a larger number because pothole filling and temporary patch jobs were included in that metric. The rehabilitation and reseal program and the major patching works are a tighter definition, and therefore we have a more accurate track of the work that we are doing.

Jade BENHAM: But the reality that we are seeing is that it is not working. Potholes in the roads are getting worse, particularly in the regions. So when will we see them improve? When will we see the number of potholes reduce?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, look, I cannot give you a rolling pothole metric. What I can say is we have addressed 200,000 or so – 220,000, I think – in the last year. We continue to have a long –

Jade BENHAM: Maybe that is the problem.

Jeroen WEIMAR: With a 10-year road maintenance program, we have an ongoing investment program focusing on those areas of the road network where we have to undertake fundamental rehabilitations and reseals. That is a programmatic program. I think we have 59 projects on the program for this year in particular. What communities will see, what road users will see, is a fundamental improvement in upgrades on those sections of the road network.

Jade BENHAM: No. Well, they are not. Do you have a KPI metric at all for filling potholes? Because the ones that are listed in the performance statement in particular are clearly not being met, and these are your numbers.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, Ms Benham, I would not agree with that interpretation. If I look at our performance metrics, the total number of rehabilitation and reseals, we are well ahead of those targets. If I look at our KPI measures, you have asked for KPI measures on cracking standards, roughness measures and rutting standards. Those are all on target or above target, so –

Richard WELCH: Everything is fine.

Jade BENHAM: The actuals in 2023–24 were 422,000 square metres. The target in 2024–25 was 3,163,000. The outcome was below that, and the target has reduced again to 2,707,000. So are you saying that there is less work to do in the coming year?

Jeroen WEIMAR: No, I am not saying that. I think, just to make sure I have understood your point correctly, if I look at the road area of rehabilitated roads in regional Victoria metric, we are ahead of target on that. In 2024–25 actual 3,290,000 square metres against a target of 3,163,000, so I think we have exceeded that target.

Roma BRITNELL: Secretary, are you saying the roads are in good condition and you are proud of the achievements you have made to date?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I would say, Ms Britnell, that we continue to work to improve the condition of the road network. I am proud of the work that our teams are doing out there.

Roma BRITNELL: Are you saying our roads are in good condition and you are satisfied that it is safe and you are proud of the achievements to date?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Absolutely, Ms Britnell. I am absolutely satisfied that our roads are safe. And if I look at the AusRAP –

Jade BENHAM: Thank you. I want to move on to a different subject now, if that is okay, Secretary. The same section on the departmental questionnaire –

Michael GALEA: He is answering the Deputy Chair's question.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you – this is my time, Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: It is also Ms Britnell's.

Jade BENHAM: The same section on page 10 also indicates the department cleared 20,000 square metres of graffiti. What was the cost of this work, and how does it compare to the previous five financial years?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Ms Benham, I do not have a separate number to hand on the cost of removing that graffiti, but of course we have reported the amount of graffiti we have removed. I would be very happy to give

you advice on that. This is the reality of the diversity of work we do across our road maintenance program. Graffiti is a problem to fix.

Jade BENHAM: It is nothing new.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, the trends we see around that, the level of activity we see around that, are a problem. We are under pressure from local communities to remove graffiti. It is a great thing to go and do, but it does cost, as does people tossing out vapes –

Jade BENHAM: So you are going to provide that data to us?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I can certainly see what information we have and come back to you on that, Ms Benham.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you very much. So for the 2024–25 year, how many claims were made to the department for damage to vehicles or other property caused by the roads, and how many further do you expect year to date? At previous outcomes hearings you have had an as-of-today figure.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Yes. Let me just check out my numbers on this. Year to date we have received 196 claims from road users.

Jade BENHAM: And have they all been settled?

Jeroen WEIMAR: One of those has been assessed as payable.

Jade BENHAM: One?

Roma BRITNELL: One?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Yes.

Roma BRITNELL: Out of how many?

Jade BENHAM: Out of 196?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Correct.

Jade BENHAM: So how many do you expect in the forecast reporting?

Jeroen WEIMAR: If I look at the trends of previous years, we would typically see a handful – 10 or so – being paid out.

Jade BENHAM: No, how many do you expect to be reported? Surely there is a pattern now that you can see trends emerging.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Are we talking about the number of claims that are being made –

Jade BENHAM: Yes.

Jeroen WEIMAR: or the numbers that are being paid? Well, it is 196 to date, as at the end of September. I do not have a more recent number, but we are talking about this year, so –

Jade BENHAM: Is there a metric that you measure? Do you expect that there will be less claims with the so-called improvement in regional roads?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I think what that one data point tells us, Ms Benham, is that we see actually quite a cyclical nature in the nature of claims coming through. Some years you get high numbers of claims and sometimes you get low. The number of claims assessed as payable tends to remain fairly constant and tends to remain fairly low. We have a lot more claims than those that are assessed as being payable.

Jade BENHAM: Okay. I am going to move on from that in the interests of time, because that will take up a lot of time. As of today, how many roads or sections of roads are subject to ‘pavement in poor condition’ management plans?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Look, as I said earlier, we have got all of our road maintenance contractors out there doing their daily inspection program. I have mentioned the 473,000 inspections that they undertake. We have a number of sections of road that they will flag up for further works to be done.

Jade BENHAM: Are they the ones with the signs on them – with reduced speed limits and hazard signs on them?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Yes, typically there will be instances where essentially it is the job of the contractors to work through to assess the condition, as you said earlier, to make sure that the roads are always maintained in a safe and effective condition. Sometimes, if necessary, where we need to put some short-term measures in place or where we need to arrange for works to be done, they will put some short-term speed restrictions in place, and that is the work we do on a regular basis.

Jade BENHAM: What does the department classify as short-term signage in place? Because there are some roads that have had reduced speed limits and hazard signs on them in place for – they are celebrating birthdays.

Jeroen WEIMAR: I mean, that depends on the work that we assess as being needed to be done. So if we were going to have a situation where –

Jade BENHAM: But what does the department classify as ‘short term’?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I do not have a single definition for that to give you right now. If our inspectors are going out on the road network and are requiring some short-term patching jobs to be done, that will be done in a matter of days, or it will be done swiftly.

Richard WELCH: If I could ask, Secretary: you are using the phrase ‘short term’, but you do not have a definition of it.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, I am trying to explain, Mr Welch.

Richard WELCH: No, you just said you did not have a definition of it. What is the point of using that phrase? Because that could mean anything. Could you be more precise, please?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I am very happy to be more precise, Mr Welch. As I said, with the hundreds of inspectors we have on our road network doing their daily inspections on the network, they will make their professional judgement about the work that needs to be done on a stretch of road if they find something is amiss. That can sometimes mean some short-term patching works need to be done. That can be raised in a matter of days. I would suggest that is consistent with a ‘short-term’ definition.

Jade BENHAM: Okay. Back to the original question. Secretary. As of today, how many roads or sections of road are subject to ‘pavement in poor condition’ management plans?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I can come back to you on notice with that. Again, that number will change and shift every single day, because we have people out on the road network –

Jade BENHAM: As of today?

Jeroen WEIMAR: every single day undertaking works and undertaking repair work. This is not a static number that does not move around. The judgement work we do – I think you have to see this in the context of a significant \$964 million investment program and a long-term program. As a condition service we have a good understanding of the condition of our road network. We target maintenance activity based on the work that needs to be done.

Richard WELCH: Are you saying this is too complicated for you? Is that what your answer is?

Jeroen WEIMAR: No, that is not what I am – I think I am explaining it quite clearly.

Jade BENHAM: Secretary, in previous outcomes hearings the department has been able to give us that figure, even if you have had to take it on notice. Can I have that?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I am very happy to take that question on notice. Ms Benham.

Jade BENHAM: Great. Thank you. Pages 16 and 17 of the questionnaire show the road pavement program was one of the department's failures, with major targets missed. What is the department now doing to reverse these failures, and how many square metres of pavement will be treated this summer?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Again, with respect, my understanding, Chair, is this is the 2024–25 performance work.

The CHAIR: Yes. Secretary, I am just going to interrupt you there.

Jade BENHAM: Given the failures –

Roma BRITNELL: Missing targets of 2024–25 –

The CHAIR: Ms Benham and Deputy Chair, I am going to remind both of you that with the terms of reference we are in the year 2024–25, not today.

Roma BRITNELL: And those targets were referred to.

The CHAIR: Referring to numbers for today – the inquiry is examining the previous year.

Jade BENHAM: On the point of order, Chair, these are performance outcomes. We are looking at previous years and previous department's failures with targets that have been missed. Is that not what these hearings are for?

The CHAIR: Ms Benham, I did not raise a point of order. Did you want to use your time to raise a point of order with me, which I will then rule on?

Roma BRITNELL: Would you like to keep wasting the time that we have?

The CHAIR: Deputy Chair, that is not an introduction for you to make commentary. Ms Benham, did you want to continue with questions of the Secretary?

Jade BENHAM: Secretary, I will repeat the question. On pages 16 and 17 of the questionnaire the road pavement program was one of the department's failures, with major targets missed. So what is the department now going to do to reverse these failures?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Let me circle back. Again, there are a whole series of performance standards in our annual report, in the department's performance standards. Again, I have referred to the road condition standards around cracking standards, roughness standards and rutting standards, all of which we met or exceeded for the 2024–25 performance year. I have talked about the overall rehabilitation resealing program. Again, we exceeded the targets of all of those. The area where we did not achieve was around the major patching number, because we made a proactive decision to put more investment into resurfacing and rehabilitation, because we think that was a more important way to manage the network at that particular point in time. So I would accept that there were one or two KPIs that we missed because we made a proactive decision to put more focus on rehabilitation and reseals. That program continues this year. So to your point, we have 59 major rehabilitation programs in this summer's work program, and we continue to work on that and continue to work to improve the road network, and I am confident that will be reflected in our performance conversation in a year's time.

Jade BENHAM: In the 2021–22 budget the target for road area treated was almost 12 million square metres in regional Victoria alone against a budget of \$807.4 million. The government says it spent close to \$1 billion last year and this year on road maintenance. So why then are we getting less road treated for more money?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Again, I think I alluded to this. Maybe I was not clear, and Mr Welch rightly picked me up on it. We made some significant changes in 2022–23 around the classification of works we do and how we present that work within the departmental performance statement. What we used to report in 2020–21 and 2021–22 was a broader metric around road area treated – roads in metro Melbourne, roads in regional Victoria.

What we now do in order to give the public and to give this committee greater understanding of the work we do is we have now broken it up into I think six different metrics around patching, resurfacing, rehabilitation, by inner and outer suburban and regional Victoria. So I think we have given you greater granularity. That also means that we are not picking up in some of those metrics the broader routine maintenance work that we do around the minor patching and the maintenance, which used to be incorporated into those metrics.

Jade BENHAM: So you are not picking up the amount of potholes that need to be filled.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Yes. We still report them. In fairness, Ms Benham, we still report the number of potholes to you, given the conversation we have had around that, but I think what our metrics are trying to do and what we are trying to give clarity to Victorians on is this is the actual deep rehabilitation, resealing and major patching work that people can see we are doing.

Jade BENHAM: But what we are trying to get clarity on, Secretary – and I apologise for the very straightforward question – is why we are getting less road treated for more money. Regardless of how it is classified, the practical reality is less road being treated for a larger budget.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, again, it would be very simple for the department, should it wish to do so, to say ‘We’ll just do a whole bunch of straightforward, limited patching work and cover as much as possible’ and not actually repair the fundamental roads and not put them through their rehabilitation and resealing process, which lasts many more years. So I think in fairness, again, what the data shows is that we are putting more energy into the fundamental deep maintenance and deep rebuilding of our road network as opposed to just continually patching and throwing it into – your point – lots of potholes. So I am very willing to go and report on how many potholes we do. But ultimately it is a balance between that routine maintenance work and the deep rebuilding work that we need to do on our road network.

Jade BENHAM: Regardless of what it is, it is still a lot less than in the past. But I will move on. There are multiple projects in the questionnaire experiencing delays. Just one example is the regional road upgrades package from 2017–18, which was scheduled to be completed in 2019–20, is now not scheduled for completion until 2026–27. That is on page 80 of the questionnaire. So why is it taking so long to complete road and rail projects in this state?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, if I can just find my reference here, Ms Benham, thank you.

Jade BENHAM: Page 80 of the questionnaire.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Yes, we are just looking it up now. So in terms of our project build, we completed in 2024–25 118 road safety and active transport projects – I think that is the core of what you are heading to – representing around \$208 million worth of investment. Eighty-nine per cent of those projects were delivered to cost, 79 per cent delivered to the original timescales. If I look back over the last three years: 370 projects, \$789 million of investment, 85 per cent of those on budget, 82 per cent of those to time. I think the data shows, the evidence shows, that we are delivering the vast majority of our road projects on time and on budget, and they are all delivering major benefits across our wider state. There will always be occasions where we find, you know, we get into those conditions – and there are a number of examples I am sure you have got – where we get into doing some of the repair works that are more complex jobs, more work needs to be done and the timescales start to prolapse. So does the cost go up –

The CHAIR: Thank you, Secretary. I am going to interrupt you there. We are going to swing back this way if Ms Benham wants to get the full, comprehensive response to that. Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Good morning, Secretary and officials. Thank you for joining us. I would actually like to expand on this topic. Page 10 of the questionnaire talks about the investment in –

Jade BENHAM: Please do.

Michael GALEA: I thought you would be pleased with that, Ms Benham. Page 10 of the questionnaire expands on some of the work that has been undertaken in the 2024–25 financial year when it comes to road maintenance. Not putting to one side the record investment again in this year, which we will talk about in the next FPOs I am sure, there was a significant increase in investment in 2024–25 compared to previous years, I

understand, for road maintenance. Can you please talk to me about how that has been applied but also any particular new technologies that you have been looking at and implemented in order to more efficiently undertake these works?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Sure. Thank you, Mr Galea. And I may just ask Mr Tighe just to talk through some of the work we undertake around our asset condition surveys. So at the heart of driving this road maintenance program – and again, as I have talked about, you know, a 10-year program with an overall \$6.6 billion figure around it, topped up with significant capital investments – it is about ensuring that we have a really good understanding of the condition of the road network and are able to prioritise those works. Mr Tighe might just want to talk about some of the approaches we take to that.

Dean TIGHE: The prioritisation process, absolutely. I think Jeroen sort of touched on before that we have that road management plan, which really dictates how we approach and how we tackle the road maintenance task. Our responsibilities around inspection, maintenance and repair come from that plan, and it is subject to the *Road Management Act 2004*. We really do take a systems approach to how we manage the network, so we have clear road maintenance standards and guidelines, we develop the program and then we implement that program.

In terms of how we go to those rehabs that we spoke about before with Ms Benham, there are really two key data sources that help shape the annual program, and they are complemented by what we see and feel on the ground with our contractors, the 500- or 600-odd workforce who are out there every day. We engage the National Transport Research Organisation, who undertake those network-wide surveys via automated survey vehicles, which are called iPAVE. You may have seen them; they are these quite substantive trucks. They actually drive the whole network every two years. It provides really rich data – those really rich insights – not only on what is happening on the surface but what lies below in the pavement. The data collected includes those measurements that Jeroen mentioned before, which are in the budget papers, around cracking, rutting and roughness and really looks to the strength of the pavement condition. It is then fed into the department's predictive modelling tool, dTIMS, to predict the rate of decay of the asset, and it provides recommended treatments and interventions across the network, whether it be routine maintenance, planned maintenance or that more substantive work, which we have touched on. That is the direction we are heading to with our road maintenance strategy. That is really the first part about how we go about performing the program with data-led, evidence-based prioritisation. It really does look to then balance the need between strategic and operational requirements. We overlay local factors, forecast wear and tear, weather in different regions et cetera.

Then we have part 2 of the narrative, as I see it. We have our road maintenance contractors who visually monitor the network every single day, and depending on the road classification, they will do that with various frequencies. I think we mentioned in the introduction that the contractors have carried out over 470,000 inspections of the roads. You talked about the potholes. They are the ones out there identifying the potholes. If they are a safety hazard, they will address those potholes on the spot. If they cannot do it on the spot – for various reasons, because of weather or whatever – they will put in those measures that you have mentioned there. That data – those inputs and insights – then get fed in and get married into the program. I think we touched on before how we have a flexible program. We need to really balance the needs of the network and what we are seeing on the road every day with that more strategic long-term investment that is going to extend the life cycle of the road asset. As we may have discussed before in this committee, the simplest analogy is a house. You get the structure of your house right, but you have got to do that recurrent maintenance – the painting and the fixing of the tiles or whatever. You need that balance to ensure that the house –

Michael GALEA: So the work is going on –

Dean TIGHE: That is it.

Michael GALEA: to cover the workload that has been caused by the recent weather patterns and the damage sustained –

Dean TIGHE: Absolutely.

Michael GALEA: but you are also not taking the focus off the longer term focus of how we can more efficiently maintain them and get better value in the long run. Is that it?

Dean TIGHE: That is exactly right.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Mr Tighe. Secretary, I would like to also ask you about the Metro Tunnel, which opens in just a few days time, which is very exciting, especially for those of us in the south-east. The questionnaire details a number of measures that were undertaken in the past financial year in terms of equipping and getting ready for the Metro Tunnel. Can you please talk to me about this, particularly in regard to the engagement of staffing on the network and the timetabling to ensure that services will be running?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Sure. Thank you, Mr Galea. Yes, it is very exciting to be a few days away from opening Metro Tunnel. We have all watched this project developing under our feet, and it is exciting for the people of the south-east but also exciting for the people of the north-west as they will see thousands of additional trains on the Sunbury line opening up that part of our network. I might ask Mr Devlin a moment to talk through some of the preparation work around Metro Tunnel and how that project has come into being and come into readiness, but what I will say before handing to Mr Devlin is that it has been not only a hugely complicated civil construction program but actually a railway integration program that has involved many entities and agencies across Victoria.

Of course the commissioning of the tunnels involves the new rolling stock that was procured, back in 2016 from memory, 70 high-capacity metro trains using high-capacity signalling, and this is one of the first – I think maybe the first that came in – introductions of high-capacity signalling into a brownfield railway environment. That is already operating as we as we sit here today. Operating that and making sure that is interoperable across the traditional signalling system we have on that corridor has been a really complicated feat, recognising we have got freight trains and regional trains running on parts of that corridor as well. We have integrated the train system into that tunnel infrastructure, and of course we are working through our franchisee, Metro Trains Melbourne, to ensure that all the systems work, recognising it is quite a different operating environment. As all Victorians will see from Sunday onwards, it is a very different kind of railway environment, both from a customer point of view but also from a railway point of view. But with that introduction, I might go to Mr Devlin for any other comments around the readiness work around MTP.

Kevin DEVLIN: Thanks, Secretary. The team is very excited to have only a couple of sleeps to go to opening the tunnel. It has been literally a lot of huge amount of effort by a lot of people over years to bring this to fruition, and it will be a massive change for Victorians and Melburnians. The tunnel itself, while it is only 9 kilometres in length, has really been a project of over 100 kilometres between East Pakenham and Sunbury, upgrading power and signalling across that line, with new rolling stock, as the Secretary mentioned, as well as the five new underground stations that are going to be amazing new facilities for Victorians to experience and get around the network in a whole different way, particularly for regional passengers. It will mean very significant changes, and it is probably part of the education process that we are now in the midst of through this summer start explaining to all parts of Victoria how they can use the Metro Tunnel – for example, the access it provides now to Parkville. I live in Geelong, and being able to take the Geelong train – previously you would have to get to the Parkville medical precinct via Southern Cross then catch a tram up Swanston Street or get off at North Melbourne and catch a bus. Now you will be able to switch at Sunshine station and literally get to Parkville in minutes, providing huge travel time savings for lots of regional passengers. So learning where to change and being able to utilise the Metro Tunnel is what we are going to be focused on in the next couple of months.

But we have spent now over 300,000 kilometres of testing of the trains. We have been operating those trains for over 12 months, really pressure-testing all that work. We have been taking the learnings from global experience across turning on other metro tunnels around the world – Crossrail, Sydney Metro, Hong Kong, Singapore and Madrid – really focused on how best to switch on these significant new investments. The team is really focused on a great summer start from Sunday and then the big switch, with a thousand new services and up to 18 trains per hour running through the tunnel on 1 Feb. So certainly yes, we are preparing the way. Metro Trains Melbourne have trained over 500 new drivers, with a huge number of station staff now in operation.

We will have extra staff at the beginning of the openings in that hypercare period to really make sure that any issues are identified, commuters are able to navigate their way through stations and new journeys and destinations and there are lots of people there to help them. We will also have plenty of learnings and plenty of technicians on standby when it goes into operation, and we will be ironing out any other final bugs with the system. We are asking commuters to really help us during the summer start, get familiar with the stations, help

our staff get familiar with what their role is in operating an outstanding new service for Victoria and Melbourne.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. You spoke about the increased staff, obviously, that have been put on over this budget period but also indeed the international experience and comparisons. I know one of the other new features, aside from the high-capacity signalling, which is going to allow the trains to run at a very high frequency, is also the platform screen doors at the stations. You spoke about some of the international learnings as well and mentioned, for example, the Elizabeth line in the UK. Is that the sort of thing that you are talking about when it comes to learning and adapting from their experiences?

Kevin DEVLIN: Absolutely. One of the brand new features of this Metro Tunnel will be the high-capacity signalling allowing us to run more trains more frequently with reduced headway between those trains. So it is a major implementation for the system in Melbourne, the rail network. We have looked at all those European and other jurisdictions on implementing that highly complex and advanced technology. We have been testing that for a long time now, operating across the network.

The other key feature is the platform screen doors, increasing safety for those five stations. We have seen it in Crossrail, the Elizabeth line and Sydney Metro and are taking those lessons learned around the platform screen doors, which do require millimetre tolerances to work with the train doors and trains stopping. The signalling systems allow and support the drivers to get that millimetre accuracy, so we have been practising a lot there. But again, there is that enhanced safety and those enhanced conditions within the stations. Obviously the platform screen doors then stop the old piston effect within the old underground stations. If you have travelled to London or on the old city loop, you will have experienced that hot environment, that windy environment at times. These are very different. These five underground stations will have climate-controlled systems. The platform screen doors separating the tunnel from the stations provide that enhanced comfort and user experience.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. You spoke about the hundreds of new drivers that have been employed in the last financial year as well. Obviously a large proportion of that would be to support the actual new Metro Tunnel line from East Pakenham and Cranbourne all the way through to Sunbury. Would I be right to assume, though, that that also includes provision for new staff for the uplift in frequencies that we are going to see on other lines, such as the Craigieburn, Werribee and Sandringham lines, as well as the actual Metro Tunnel line itself?

Kevin DEVLIN: I might let the Secretary take that one, but certainly the Metro Tunnel unlocks the city loop. From 1 Feb we will put the Frankston line back in the city loop, for example – another great outcome for Frankston commuters. Yes, it is all about unlocking that capacity. While the Metro Tunnel itself provides huge uplift in capacity and connection from Melbourne Central station and Flinders Street to the city loop through access ways between the State Library and Town Hall stations, that next evolution of the network, unlocking that capacity, enables governments to invest in the future of the metro rail system and uplift further capacity as Melbourne continues to grow.

Michael GALEA: Thank you.

Jeroen WEIMAR: I will maybe just follow on from that, Mr Galea. Thank you, Mr Devlin. Metro Tunnel is part of a network story of a whole series of changes that have been made to the metropolitan rail network over a number of years now and will continue to be made. If I look at the work that has preceded this with the 87 level crossing removals, what that has made possible is that five of our lines are now completely level crossing-free. That allows us to run more trains more frequently, because you have obviously no negative impact on the road network and of course it is a safer structure for doing so. The duplication we did to Hurstbridge, the extension to Mernda, the removal of the Frankston from the loop and putting it back into the loop – they are all network abilities that allow us now with Metro Tunnel to start to uplift capacity onto the network. What we will see on 1 February with the timetable changes are thousands of additional services a week, in particular on the Sunbury line and on the Dandenong line, but also benefits to a number of the other lines on the network to get that additional capacity. And then we continue on with that program. The Sunshine superhub not only opens up the future of Melbourne airport rail, but it also opens up opportunities to increase capacity of services, particularly out towards Melton and out towards Geelong. It just gives us greater network capacity in those critical pinch points where we need it.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. I am very much looking forward to this Sunday; I know the Chair is too. Secretary, I would like to ask about buses as well, another very exciting topic when it comes to public transport, and in particular the expansion of growth area bus services that are part-funded through the growth areas infrastructure contribution and the specific fund for public transport. I know in particular there was some funding through the 2024–25 year through the GAIC program for a number of initiatives, including in the outer south-east, including the 831 and 928 extensions, which I have been very glad to see in my local patch. Can you talk to me about the importance of this fund and what you are doing to ensure that growing suburbs are getting bus services at a faster rate when they are being developed?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Thank you, Mr Galea. I might ask Mr Tighe to add to my comments. But again, I think if you look at the 4500 or so buses that run in Victoria's bus fleet, the changes we are making to those are all set out in *Victoria's Bus Plan*, which was released four years ago in June 2021, which has a series of principles about how we make the network simpler, faster and more reliable and how we really improve the directness and frequency of services, particularly for growth communities but also for existing bus networks. And over the last few years we have changed 126 of our local bus networks, which has involved either putting in additional services or rearranging existing services, but all to ensure that they meet the needs of those growing communities. I am particularly pleased to see in 2024–25 there were 36 packages of bus service changes, particularly into those growth areas, so around Cardinia and Clyde in the south-east, Craigieburn, Gisborne, Wallan, Melton, Point Cook and Armstrong Creek, examples of where we have taken local networks and really sought to ensure that we provide good access, particularly to those growing communities. Now there is more work to be done and that program continues on, so in 2025–26 we have got another \$162 million worth of investment, again to improve access to particularly train stations and other networks and schools and hospitals, particularly in those growth suburbs that rely significantly, and rightly so, on those bus networks. So we will continue to work that through. Mr Tighe, do you want to add anything to my comments?

Dean TIGHE: Just that the bus plan does, again, provide that framework – simpler, faster, more reliable bus services. I think you have touched on, Jeroen, the new services and the strengthened services into those growth corridors. You mentioned Melton, Whittlesea, Casey and Cardinia. I think in particular in Casey route 798 went live early in May of this year, which extended the current route to operate every 20 minutes to Clyde North via Hardys Road, so that is a great outcome, but it also improves that network coverage for residents on that corridor.

I believe we also extended route 831 just a month or so ago to operate every 30 minutes seven days a week, again to provide those connections for residents in the Clyde, Clyde North area to the Berwick station. So that is about improving connectivity so people can get to jobs, see family, do those daily trips et cetera. Jeroen mentioned some of those routes in those new and extended bus packages, so I do not need to go there. But basically what we are trying to do is upgrade bus services. We are trying to make it simpler, as I mentioned, cleaner, with a smarter fleet. We know we have got the ZEB buses – all new buses will be ZEB buses from 2025 – better performing buses, a better customer experience. We want people to use this as a viable network. Patronage is growing, so it is a great outcome. Then internally what we are trying to do is have better contract management working with our bus providers, whether they be metropolitan or out in the regions. We have great relationships with our providers, who are trying to ensure great value for money. So it is a good story, it is a positive story.

Michael GALEA: You mentioned those two routes in particular – 798 and the 831. Not just the expanded service and coverage for these new estates in Clyde North and providing that grid formation too, but the frequency is really key to actually driving that mode shift and getting people onto buses as well, which has been great to see. On that note, I am curious if you have any update on how, whether it is these specific services or any of the broader new GAIC services, they are performing.

Dean TIGHE: Actual performance – that is a good question.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Mr Galea, I am very happy to take that question, and Ms Adamson might help me with some of the performance figures on this. What we have seen is the performance of the bus network continues to hold up really well. I think some of these data are also included within our DPS measures. We are starting to see growth again of people coming on our bus network, and we are maintaining good reliability and good punctuality. Ms Adamson, is there anything else you want to add to that?

Fiona ADAMSON: We are certainly seeing an uplift in bus usage – patronage – and the key to that is actually having services where people want them. So this whole bus reform package is about identifying where people need to have services and making sure we are making those changes as well as introducing new services. We can come back with the exact numbers on that, Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Galea. We are going to go to Mr Welch.

Richard WELCH: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Secretary and officers. In regard to the development facilitation pathway, how many extra new homes have been created under this program?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Thank you, Mr Welch. Under the development facilitation pathway I think about two years ago we expanded it. It has been there for –

Richard WELCH: But how many?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I think as I said in my introductory comment –

Roma BRITNELL: No – extra.

Richard WELCH: Extra, not net. Extra. Or net rather than gross. Extra.

Jeroen WEIMAR: The numbers I can give you that are available to me is that there are 7000 homes across 53 major developments that have been approved by the DFP that would not otherwise have been approved.

Richard WELCH: I will just help you with the question. How many extra houses have been created?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Approvals have been given. I mean, bear in mind –

Richard WELCH: No, no, not approvals. Created. Built.

Jeroen WEIMAR: We would need to go and talk to each of those 53 developers and come back and say when those houses have been built.

Richard WELCH: You do not know? So how many have been built?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Let me explain to you what the DFP does.

Richard WELCH: No, no, no. There must be a number. All I am after is the number –

Jeroen WEIMAR: I do not have that number to hand, Mr Welch.

Richard WELCH: You do not know how many extra houses have been built?

Jeroen WEIMAR: No, it is not that I do not know. It is for the simple reason that the role of the department is to support the planning minister in making planning approval decisions. There are 53 major schemes that have been fast-tracked –

Richard WELCH: Are you not monitoring this?

Jeroen WEIMAR: There are 53 schemes that have been fast-tracked by the DFP.

Richard WELCH: Are you monitoring this?

Jeroen WEIMAR: We are there to give approval to those schemes. We will provide additional support if those developers need it. But ultimately what they are looking to us for is development approval. There is a condition –

Richard WELCH: I understand that. I am asking you, though, are you monitoring how many are built?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, yes, but –

Richard WELCH: You are. So then how many have been built?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I can go and give you an answer on that on notice if you wish, but –

Richard WELCH: Yes, that would be great. Thank you. In terms of affordable housing, how many dwellings have been forfeited offset under the scheme via the financial contribution option to Homes Victoria?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Sorry, could you explain that?

Richard WELCH: If you make a cash contribution, you can offset the affordable housing component, correct?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Yes.

Richard WELCH: How many under the scheme?

Jeroen WEIMAR: That would be something we would have to check with our colleagues in the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. The purpose –

Richard WELCH: So you do not know?

Jeroen WEIMAR: The purpose of the DFP scheme – again, I do think it is important that we explain this.

Richard WELCH: No, no, I just want to know whether you know the number or not.

The CHAIR: Mr Welch, can you just let the Secretary try and respond to you.

Richard WELCH: He did. I got the answer to my question, so I will move on.

The CHAIR: Mr Welch, just allow the Secretary to finish his sentence for at least one of the questions you have asked. Secretary.

Richard WELCH: Well, as long as the answer is confined to the question, please.

The CHAIR: Mr Welch. Secretary.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Thank you, Chair. The DFP provides for 10 per cent of the housing that is approved to be provided as affordable housing or for there to be a financial offset to the same equivalent value. As we have approved 7000 homes to be delivered through the DFP, at least 700 affordable homes would have been enabled and created through that program. The funding of that goes into the Social Housing Growth Fund that is accessed by our colleagues in Homes Victoria.

Richard WELCH: What is the value of that?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I might ask Ms Peterson to see if she can advise on that question.

Colleen PETERSON: There have been 1200 affordable homes delivered through the DFP since its inception in September –

Richard WELCH: No, just regarding the offset number, please.

Colleen PETERSON: We have collected \$5.8 million. It is not possible to translate that to numbers of dwellings.

Richard WELCH: Not possible? No? But that is why it has been offset, so it must relate to a specific number of houses.

Colleen PETERSON: We know that the money that we collected is equivalent to around 3 per cent of the development cost, or it is 10 per cent of the housing provided as part of the development.

Richard WELCH: So the developer, in acquiring the offset, is an offset of a specific number of dwellings, correct?

Colleen PETERSON: Well, it is an offset of a financial contribution.

Richard WELCH: Not a specific number of dwellings. So you cannot relate the offset? So they are offsetting against an undefined figure?

Colleen PETERSON: No. It is the development cost.

Richard WELCH: The development costs.

Colleen PETERSON: We do know that contribution to the Social Housing Growth Fund does actually provide sufficient funds. That actually provides a greater contribution overall in terms of the number of dwellings. It allows the providers in that program to bring projects to market that they would not otherwise be able to provide.

Richard WELCH: Secretary, which organisations have benefited? Sorry – the figure was \$5 million, is that right?

Colleen PETERSON: \$5.8 million.

Richard WELCH: Which organisations have benefited from that \$5.8 million?

Jeroen WEIMAR: That \$5.8 million would have gone into the Social Housing Growth Fund. That fund is accessed by Homes Victoria and their overseeing department, and they would then ensure that affordable homes are provided through that fund.

Richard WELCH: Are those funds going to new projects or are they backfilling funding on projects that were already scheduled?

Jeroen WEIMAR: The Social Housing Growth Fund is about enabling affordable housing to be built through the auspices of Homes Victoria in particular.

Richard WELCH: So it is not generating new projects, new funds.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Yes, it is. It is generating –

Richard WELCH: It is being used for the existing projects.

Jeroen WEIMAR: No, it is generating new resources, additional resources for affordable housing to be procured through Homes Victoria.

Richard WELCH: How many new projects?

Jeroen WEIMAR: What we have generated, as Mr Peterson has explained, is \$5.8 million worth through the DFP in addition to the 1200 affordable homes which she has referred to.

Richard WELCH: And how many new projects?

Jeroen WEIMAR: That money is going to the Social Housing Growth Fund. That is administered by Homes Victoria and DFFH and the Department of Treasury and Finance.

Richard WELCH: Okay. We have got \$5.8 million offset put in there. It is not backfilling existing projects. It is creating new projects, as you have explained. How many of these new projects?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, that Social Housing Growth Fund is administered by DFFH, Homes Victoria and DTF.

Richard WELCH: Yes, but how many? I do not care who administers it. I want to know how many.

Jeroen WEIMAR: It is not within the realms of my department, Mr Welch, to answer that question.

Richard WELCH: You do not know? You are not monitoring it?

The CHAIR: Mr Welch, you will have an opportunity to go there.

Richard WELCH: According to the MAV, over 100,000 dwellings have been approved and remain unbuilt. So why is it necessary to fast-track development – bypassing councils, Heritage Victoria, community consultation – via this development facilitation pathway?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Again, I might ask Ms Peterson to provide some additional comments on this, but in all the engagement that certainly I have been doing with the building industry over the last two years and the development industry, planning obstructions and the slowness of our planning system have been one of the risks and challenges about getting more homes built. What the industry has been asking us for and what we have needed to do in order to enable more homes to be built is to simplify and to make the planning system more predictable.

Richard WELCH: But apparently it does not need simplification. There is already 100,000. So the question was: we have already got 100,000 unbuilt, so what are we simplifying for? Why aren't we just getting on with the building? Why aren't we facilitating the building?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, we are doing both.

Richard WELCH: Well, you are not, because there are 100,000 that are not built.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Forgive me, as the Department of Transport and Planning we cannot control the economic feasibility of every single development that is happening. What we are trying to do is to make it simpler and easier and cheaper for developers and homeowners and builders to get more homes built through a number of planning levers.

Richard WELCH: But not more affordable. So can you tell me then, since the announcement of the Big Housing Build in 2020, how many extra – net – social housing homes have been completed on surplus government sites?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, as I said, one of the elements of the housing statement program was to release blocks of government-owned land.

Richard WELCH: Yes. So how many? I know what the purpose is. How many?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I am just explaining the process by which it works.

Richard WELCH: No, I am not interested in that. I am interested in the number.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, we have put a number of those government sites out to market for partnerships with developers to be to be developed. Ms Peterson might help me.

Richard WELCH: Please, Secretary, stop the obfuscation. I am asking a very specific, clear, simple question: how many?

The CHAIR: Then, Mr Welch, you will afford the Secretary the opportunity to answer your question.

Richard WELCH: I have, and he is refusing to.

The CHAIR: He is not refusing to answer your question. Secretary.

Richard WELCH: He is doing everything but.

The CHAIR: Mr Welch, if you would stop bombarding the Secretary and others question after question after questions –

Richard WELCH: Well, if I got clear questions – answers.

The CHAIR: I am sorry, Mr Welch, you have asked a question. The Secretary would like to answer it.

Jeroen WEIMAR: I will ask my colleague Mr Moseley two questions on your behalf, Mr Welch: one is the number of public parcels of land we have put back into development; and do we have an update on the homes being built on them? Thank you.

Stuart MOSELEY: The information I have is that as at the end of 25 October there are 82 surplus government sites in the pipeline. They are all at various different stages, from scoping through to completion. So there are 82 – and I will not run through the full numbers.

Richard WELCH: No, that is okay. Thank you. And how many extra houses, social homes, have been completed on these surplus properties?

Stuart MOSELEY: There are 345 dwellings completed. I will need to take on notice how many of them –

Richard WELCH: Since 2020?

Stuart MOSELEY: No. Since the release of the housing statement in 2023.

Richard WELCH: 320.

Stuart MOSELEY: That is right, yes; 345 dwellings have been completed. I can take on notice the number of those dwellings that are affordable, but the standard requirement is 10 per cent.

Richard WELCH: Great. Thank you. How many of these public sites will be sold to private developers?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Mr Moseley, you might wish to walk that through, but also the work we are doing with Development Victoria.

Stuart MOSELEY: The intent is that private developers will construct almost all of these. So this is not Homes Victoria's pipeline. This is the pipeline of land surplus and underutilised government land that is taken through to market, mainly through Development Victoria, sometimes through entities like Homes Victoria, who will partner with the private sector, VicTrack or the Level Crossing Removal Authority. It excludes the very big government land development sites such as East Werribee and Arden Central or the Fishermans Bend innovation precinct. But the intent is that the vast majority will be built by the private sector with the government.

Richard WELCH: And how many homes will they produce?

Stuart MOSELEY: The commitment is from 45 sites to deliver 9000 dwellings. There are an additional 37 that we have already also identified.

Richard WELCH: Just 9000, compared to the 100,000 approvals that are waiting to be built? So we are going to upheave all of this planning and these local consultations for the benefit of 9000?

Stuart MOSELEY: No. I am responding to the number of government surplus sites in the pipeline, which I have said is 82. That target is a projected 16,500 dwellings. Your other question was about existing approvals, which the MAV claims is 100,000. That is quite a different matter. That would be approvals issued by councils across the state, and they would be at various stages of the development pipeline. Some will be acted upon, some will not. They are two different things.

Richard WELCH: Thank you.

Jeroen WEIMAR: I think, Mr Welch, if I could just add to that –

Richard WELCH: No, I am happy with that. Thank you.

Roma BRITNELL: I would like to ask a question now if that is okay, Secretary. Thank you. I would like to go to the Metro Tunnel. Firstly, what is the final cost of the build? Will it be \$13.5 billion or more?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I may ask Mr Devlin just to give a bit more detail on that, but of course the Metro Tunnel is opening on Sunday and is being delivered and opening on time, which for a 10-year project is a phenomenal achievement. Mr Devlin will give us an update on the cost that we have for that.

Kevin DEVLIN: As the budget for 2024–25 outlines, the TEI is \$13.48 billion, and Metro Tunnel will be delivered within that budget.

Roma BRITNELL: Okay. So it is 18 months late and \$137 million extra was required. Why was the original cost so wrong in the 2024 budget, and what is the additional scope for?

Jeroen WEIMAR: If I could just be clear, Ms Britnell, it is being delivered on time. I think the original business case predicted a 2026 delivery. It is being delivered in 2025. Metro Tunnel is being delivered and opened up on time. In terms of additional scope, I am not quite sure what numbers you have in front of you that indicate those kinds of variances.

Roma BRITNELL: I will move on then. Can I ask a question to VIDA or the CEO of Metro Tunnel?

Jeroen WEIMAR: You can ask the question to Mr Devlin, who is here on behalf of the –

Roma BRITNELL: Touching on your Myki at the State Library station and touching off at Melbourne Central station will be counted as a trip and your Myki will be charged; is that correct?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I might take that one on behalf of the network, Kevin. I think the question is: if you enter Town Hall station and go to State Library station, will that be counted as a trip? Yes, it would, because it will be one stop on the Metro Tunnel.

Roma BRITNELL: Okay. So that will be charged to your Myki?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Yes, it will be charged to your Myki, like any other public transport journey between two stops. Yes.

Roma BRITNELL: Will the Myki system be able to handle the multiple discount structures and categories – payments, that is – which were signed in the contract, or is it just going to be for fixed fares only?

Jeroen WEIMAR: No. The Myki system will operate exactly the same way on Metro Tunnel as it does on every other bit of our network. The government has announced free travel weekends, starting this weekend, over the next five or six weekends. That will be a free travel period. We have enabled that through the Myki system so that people do not need to touch on for those free travel weekends. If they choose to do so, there will be no fare charged on their Myki. That will be a statewide benefit. The free travel period for those weekends is across the entire state, from Wangaratta to Warrnambool.

Roma BRITNELL: The TEI of the ticketing project increased by \$136 million due to the program reset, with the estimated completion date now to be in quarter 2 of 2028–29. Can the department guarantee that it will be able to be delivered on that date and at that cost?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Yes. I am very confident. We have worked very hard with our supplier Conduent ticketing systems to deliver the open loop system. Ninety-five per cent of all the new devices, the new readers, are already out and about on the rail network, and we are rapidly deploying those readers onto the tram and bus networks across the state as well, so we will all be using them. That phase has gone exceptionally well –

Roma BRITNELL: Right across the state – so we will not be having paper tickets in Warrnambool? We will be able to tap on with our Mykis?

Jeroen WEIMAR: We will be enabling credit card payments on the new ticketing system all across the state as we roll it out over the coming years. Certainly by early next year we expect to be introducing credit card payments on the existing metropolitan, V/Line, tram and bus networks all across the state.

Roma BRITNELL: Thank you. I might just move on to public transport safety issues. Can the Secretary tell me: has crime gone up or down on the network and by how much?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Thank you, Ms Britnell. I am afraid that is a matter for Victoria Police, who manage all crime recording and reporting data. Of course we have a very strong and deep partnership with Victoria Police, including the deployment of public safety officers at all of our stations after 6 pm. We work very closely with

Vic Police. We have good sharing of information and intelligence, but any questions around the level of crime reporting are a matter for them.

Roma BRITNELL: Sorry, I will go back to the question I asked before. When you touch on with your Myki, when you go from the State Library to a loop station, will that be charged to the Myki?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Yes, that is right. It will be charged to your Myki.

Roma BRITNELL: Thank you. So you do not utilise incident reports and information when the Department of Transport and Planning is prioritising spending on safety and security measures across the network? That is not linked to what is happening –

Jeroen WEIMAR: No. As I said, we have a close working relationship with Victoria Police. I saw the chief police commissioner only a few weeks ago as part of my regular dialogue with him, and my teams have similar conversations with their counterparts, including the dedicated transport command within Victoria Police. But they are responsible for gathering crime data and making crime decisions –

Roma BRITNELL: But you do not know whether the incidents are going up on the transport network; you are not aware of that because that is up to the police.

Jeroen WEIMAR: That is a matter for Victoria Police to manage.

Roma BRITNELL: So how do you plan to keep the community safe if you are not understanding whether the data is increasing in the –

Jeroen WEIMAR: Of course Victoria Police will share their views and their advice, and they will give us some sense of what is happening out and about on the network.

Roma BRITNELL: You do not use that, though, to prioritise spending on safety and security measures across the network?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, yes, we do. I mean, we invest significantly on an ongoing basis in the safety and security of the network. We include of course extensive CCTV networks across our network. We have of course significant staffing levels on both the V/Line network and the Metro network, and indeed the tram and bus networks. We have significant investment in authorised officers rotating around the network from both a revenue protection but also from a customer service point of view. So I think all the feedback we have through our own customer data and customer information is that people are travelling safely on our network, but we –

Roma BRITNELL: People are feeling safe on the network and you are addressing their issues and there is no need to increase anything?

Jeroen WEIMAR: No, there is always a need in any public transport system to continue to work on ensuring (a) the safety of the network, which I believe is very strong, but also ensuring that we deal with antisocial behaviour, trespass and other issues, and that is more within the realms of what we do.

Roma BRITNELL: Okay. All right. Thank you. I will just move on to the cost blowouts on St Kilda Pier. What is the precise increase in the TEI for the St Kilda Pier rebuild compared to the original budget, and on what date was the project reclassified from a minor to a major project?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Thank you, Ms Britnell. I was pleased that we completed the work on St Kilda Pier in partnership with Parks Victoria, and it is good to see the increasing usage numbers on the pier since it has reopened. I might ask Mr Tighe to just advise on the details of your question.

Dean TIGHE: I will have to check, Ms Britnell, but any cost increase would be reported in the ‘State Capital Program’, budget paper 4. I am happy to follow that up for you, but I have not got those figures to hand at the moment.

Roma BRITNELL: Yes.

Jade BENHAM: Can I just jump in with one question? I just want to go back to the State Library loop stations. The Twitter account said yesterday about touching your Myki on at State Library station and off at Melbourne Central. You can walk that, right? So you are going to be charged for walking.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, no –

Michael GALEA: Why do you need to walk into the station to walk across the street, though?

Jade BENHAM: But why do you need to be charged twice for it?

Michael GALEA: You will not be charged twice.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Ms Benham –

Jade BENHAM: That is what we have asked twice, so can you please clarify what that tweet was all about?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Sure. I did not see the tweet – did not generate the tweet – but now I know about it, so thank you, and thank you for the clarification of the question. Let me be very clear. If you enter onto any station on the network and exit at another station on the network, you would normally be charged. If you choose to enter the State Library station and then walk all the way through the station and exit at a Melbourne Central point, then yes, you would be charged because the assumption would be that you have moved from one place to another. But ultimately, I would not expect people to be using the ticketed zones of those stations as –

Jade BENHAM: But it is a new toy in Melbourne that the government has completely spent we do not know how much on advertising for and keeps talking up. People might just want to go and check it out, and they do not feel safe to jump on a train.

The CHAIR: Ms Benham, what is your question?

Jade BENHAM: I am just seeking clarification that people are going to be charged for walking – if they just want to go in and have a look, their Myki is going to be charged.

Michael GALEA: No, they are not on weekends. That is why it is free on weekends, Ms Benham.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you, Mr Galea. I am asking the Secretary.

Michael GALEA: Ask a better question.

The CHAIR: Mr Galea, please.

Jade BENHAM: Wow, that is rich coming from the government side.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Ms Benham, thank you. There are a number of places on the Metro network at the moment and at the five new stations where there are unticketed zones that you will be able to walk through. If you are at Anzac station or Parkville station, there are areas where you can walk through those stations without having to touch on with your Myki because that is before you get onto the platforms. It is similar at State Library station – there are parts of the station you can access, I think, without having to pass into the ticketed zone, but as soon as you enter into the ticketed zone, then yes, you will be charged when you exit. Of course one of the benefits of the free travel period across the whole state over the next few weekends is that people can, as you say, play with their new exciting toy and get a sense of how to use it. But I do not think we have a systemic problem with people being charged to wander in and out of stations.

Jade BENHAM: Okay. There was a Reddit post from Minister Williams that promoted the State Library to Melbourne Central thoroughfare, saying you can use it as an alternative entrance. So why then did the minister fail to say that Victorians would be charged to do so?

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Benham. We are going to move on to Ms Kathage.

Jade BENHAM: Wow, great defence.

The CHAIR: We are coming back to you, Ms Benham.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Chair. Secretary and officials, great to have you here. I wanted to ask about regional rail. I can see in BP3 2024–25 on page 83 it has got information on the regional revival program, which is upgrading every regional line in Victoria. Can you provide an update on the total number of lines that have had their upgrades completed as part of that program and how many extra services per line?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Thank you, Ms Kathage. I can. I think the first thing to say, again, is it probably goes into the theme of a long-term strategic upgrade on the regional rail network that started a number of years ago. What regional rail revival has done is essentially provide significant upgrades on each of our key regional lines. Of course we completed recently the Warrnambool line upgrade, we are working on the Melton line upgrade at the moment and completed the Gippsland line upgrade quite recently. What those upgrades do is not only improve the condition of the track and the signals and the assets on those corridors, but they also include things such as passing loops, reintroducing duplication where we can, giving us capacity to run more services. If I take maybe the Warrnambool line as an example, we used to run 30 trains a week on that particular line, we now run 70 trains a week on that particular line, because we have improved the condition of the track and we have improved the passing loops that allow us to run a more intense service.

Roma BRITNELL: There are less people able to be transported –

Lauren KATHAGE: Excuse me. Thank you.

Jeroen WEIMAR: What the regional revival program has also done is it enables us to run the modern VLocity fleet across our regional rail network. We have progressively been buying more and more of the VLocity trains and ensuring that we can extend that all the way across our network and removing as much as possible of the classic fleet, which was getting a little bit long in the tooth. The upgrade in rolling stock and the operating conditions has just allowed us to run far more services out and about on our regional rail network. I have got some numbers here somewhere, but I might ask Ms Adamson just to talk briefly to the timetabling of regional rail services. Can you talk to the frequency of train services?

Fiona ADAMSON: I think that was Mr Tieppo.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Fine to deal with that? Okay. All right. In that case, Ms Kathage, if you will permit me, I will bring the CEO of V/Line to join the table just to talk about the additional services on the network. Thank you, Will.

Will TIEPPO: G'day. How are you going? A part of the regional revival program over the last four years – I think it was over a \$4 billion program that has been funded and been constructed and delivered by the VIDA group over the last five years. Over that period of time we have seen a significant amount of increase in services being delivered onto the regional rail network. We have seen just recently the Gippsland line upgrade adding another 87 extra services a week. We have seen also on the Warrnambool line the five extra services, with additional weekend services as well. So that has added another 40 over the week. Probably over the last 10 years, including all those investments plus extra services, we have added in total about 1000 services in the last 10 years on the regional rail network – so a pretty significant increase.

Roma BRITNELL: Point of order.

The CHAIR: Excuse me, the Deputy Chair has a point of order.

Roma BRITNELL: Sorry, is there an obligation to be factual and not misleading? There might be more services, but on the Warrnambool line there are 8000 less people able to be transported.

The CHAIR: Excuse me, Deputy Chair, this is not a time for grandstanding. You are not sitting in question time. There is no point of order.

Roma BRITNELL: I am putting some accuracy into the discussion.

The CHAIR: There is no point of order.

Michael GALEA: What is inaccurate about more services, and why do you oppose more services on your line? You are literally opposing more services on your line. It is crazy.

The CHAIR: Members can cease interjecting. Try to control yourself, Ms Britnell. Please proceed.

Will TIEPPO: Over the last 10 years as part of the regional rail revival program we have seen 467 extra services added to the Geelong corridor and 30 extra services on the Warrnambool corridor over that period. Ballarat, as part of the Ballarat line upgrade, which was a significant upgrade and was the first one that was completed, added another 291 services in total. We have also seen increases on Ararat, Maryborough, Bendigo and Echuca – significant increases on those services. Some of those regional communities are really benefiting from that, particularly around the Bendigo area, where we have seen the Echuca and Raywood areas actually using it as a metro service to get into Bendigo to work. We have also seen the same on the Geelong line, where people from Lara are moving into Geelong by train. So we have seen a 20 per cent increase in how people are using the regional rail network, not only just to do the travel to Melbourne and back or beyond; they are also using the network as an intracity. As part of the Gippsland line upgrade, we are also seeing people travelling from Bairnsdale, Traralgon, using it as a way to connect into Dandenong and places of employment and also going to university. So we have seen a really diverse mix.

I think as the Secretary has talked about, with the additional services on the regional rail network, we will see a different pattern with Metro Tunnel opening up. We will see people from Bendigo. Just as an example, which I think Jeroen mentioned before, if you are at Bendigo and you want to go to Town Hall station and you decide to get off at Sunbury or Footscray, that is a 25-minute saving for someone coming from Bendigo going to Town Hall instead of going to Southern Cross and catching the tram up Collins Street. As the new CEO of V/Line, I have been travelling around the network meeting with councils and they are very excited about how their travel will change and giving them more options.

I think, Ms Britnell, you talked about Warrnambool before. We have added those five extra weekday services. We are seeing a different span of patronage on the Warrnambool corridor. They are –

Roma BRITNELL: They are standing up instead of sitting down.

Will TIEPPO: Well, we are seeing the weekends a lot busier, and I think that is as a result of the fares policy. We have seen a lot of people on the Albury line, the Bendigo line as well as the Warrnambool line – quite popular on Friday nights and Sunday afternoons. I travel the Warrnambool line a couple of days a week. It is not always busy on a weekday, but it is busy on a weekend. I am not saying that is incorrect.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you. In terms of the Shepparton line, which is closer to the heart, the works there would seem to have been going for quite a while. I imagine there were various stages of the rail revival program. Where are we up to on Shepparton, and what improvements has that allowed on the Shepparton line so far?

Will TIEPPO: I might divert that to Matt. Matt, do you want to talk about the Shepparton line upgrade?

Matthew GAULT: Thank you. The Shepparton line is now into the third stage of upgrade. The first and second stages were really primarily focused on enabling the VLocity services to run to Shepparton. Now that, like most of the passenger lines in regional Victoria, has been converted to a full VLocity service. We are now into the final stage. That work is in a commissioning occupation at the moment, scheduled to be completed by 14 December. On the completion of that, all of the signalling upgrades will be finalised, allowing a full nine services a day out of Shepparton.

Lauren KATHAGE: So the additional peak service that we are getting on the Shepparton–Seymour line starting next year is a result of the work that has been undertaken to upgrade the line?

Matthew GAULT: Yes, correct. The three stages, as I said, have deployed the VLocity trains on that corridor at increased speeds, particularly between Seymour and Shepparton, where trains can travel now up to 115 kilometres an hour. And yes, this final commissioning enables nine return services a day.

Lauren KATHAGE: Okay, great. We think about these things as being, I guess, regional investments, which they are, but they also benefit folk in the outer suburbs like Wallan and Donnybrook, who get an extra peak hour service, or in Ballarat, with 291 extra services, as we just heard, as part of regional rail, which is massive.

Matthew GAULT: Correct, and that includes those new services with upgraded stations and other facilities and new stations throughout the regional network. It has made an enormous difference – what is now 10 years of investment into upgrading every single regional line in Victoria.

Lauren KATHAGE: Yes, great. I did have comments recently from visitors who used the Wallan station. They loved sitting in the heated room and the bathroom, and it was very nice for them, so thank you for the work there as well. Over the other side of the state, on the Gippsland line, I do not have the most up-to-date information, so I am not sure about the benefits of the Gippsland line upgrade. Is that your –

Matthew GAULT: Well, one of the main things from the Gippsland line upgrade was the enabling of the 40-minute services inter peak. Those works were completed in June, after what had been a long period and lots of work on that entire Gippsland and Pakenham to Metro Tunnel corridor. So on the Gippsland line passengers down there are able to enjoy the benefits of all the work that we have invested into the Metro network between the Metro Tunnel and out to Pakenham, which is now level crossing free Sunbury to Pakenham, and then the work on the regional line at Gippsland enables V/Line services to use that corridor. So the entire investment is doing a lot towards more frequent services and more reliable services, as we remove all of the level crossings and upgrade the network.

Jeroen WEIMAR: And Ms Kathage, if I may, I was in Traralgon last week with V/Line, and it has been a very challenging period for a long time for people in Gippsland with regard to all the heavy works we have been doing both in Traralgon on the Gippsland line upgrade but also, as Mr Gault says, on that whole Dandenong corridor, as we get ready for the level crossing removal program and Metro Tunnel. Having completed all that work, we are now seeing 300 train services a week up and down to Traralgon. That delivery of those 20-minute and 40-minute services is making a real shift for the month of November. We are still in it now. We have been running a month of free travel to really bring people back onto the railway and to say thank you to those in the Gippsland region who have had to put up with a lot of disruption as we rebuild that train network. But the condition of the assets is in a much greater state, and I think we are very confident we can use this to build more growth in the Gippsland region.

Lauren KATHAGE: And we know that, especially with the drought, there was an increase in animal strikes on the lines, requiring carriages to be sent through maintenance. But there was investment in previous years in the Dynon facility to improve that. Where is that up to?

Jeroen WEIMAR: That is right, Ms Kathage. Again, this is probably another subject for Mr Tieppo to come back and talk to. Thanks, Mr Gault. I think the investment in stabling and maintenance facilities for V/Line has been a slightly invisible but important part of rebuilding the rail network over the last few years and ensuring we have now got two biowash facilities to ensure we can keep the trains clean, safe and presentable following seasonal animal strikes. We have seen a bit of a challenge around that over recent summers with those drought conditions. They do mean we have a lot more roos running around looking for water. Will, I am not sure if there is anything else you want to add to those comments?

Will TIEPPO: I think the investment that has been made at the South Dynon facility has been a huge help to manage those unprecedented sorts of animal strikes that we see. On the regional network it could be a kangaroo – we see a lot of loose fences on the side of farmers' lands where cattle might come across or all those sorts of things. So we work as closely as we can with those areas. We know where the hotspots are. But in terms of the new facility at South Dynon, the old facility used to only take two one-carriage trains to do the full inspection and the wash. The new facility now accounts for a whole three-car VLocity train going into the facility. I was out there only three weeks ago to look at how they actually do that. It is a high-tech facility where it enables us to clean the trains. Our process is that we clean the trains first, and then they have to go in for a mechanical inspection. We do find that when we do hit animals like kangaroos, they do do damage underneath the train, on hoses and all those sorts of things. So it is really important that we try and get the trains, as many as we can, through the wash so that we can get them into inspection so that they are inspected safely.

We have also got another wash facility at Bendigo, a second wash that has been upgraded at Bendigo. So that is giving us some more capacity, particularly leading into the summer and that sort of period where kangaroos are looking for water close to rail reserves. We have got fantastic facilities now. We are turning over five trains a day through the biowash at South Dynon, compared to the two a day that we had previously, and then adding on to Bendigo will give us additional capacity as well to get trains into service as quickly as possible.

Lauren KATHAGE: I guess the outcome of that, or what patrons see of that, is that they are more likely to have more carriages on their service when it turns up in the morning.

Will TIEPPO: Yes, that is right. When we did have that unprecedented event last financial year, because the facilities were not up and running and those works were not finished, we did have a period where we had to run a shorter consist of train, from a six-car to a three-car. We still ran the service, but we tried to get them back into service as quickly as possible to make sure that we were running the timetable as we should be.

Lauren KATHAGE: I know there were improvements definitely on the Shepparton line that were undertaken last year in terms of shoring up those carriages in the morning. Combined with the improvement in turnaround for carriages with animal strike, does it play out in the data that you see there are more seats available?

Will TIEPPO: Yes, definitely. With the investments and some of the work going on now, we are in a better position to deal with these unprecedented events, and we are finding that our reliability and the availability of those trains – they are getting back on the network a lot quicker.

Lauren KATHAGE: That is great. Thank you. I want to ask about the Murray Basin rail project. I am not sure that where that sits. I want to ask, in terms of rail for freight, what improvements for the freight industry have been unlocked through the Murray Basin rail project.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Thank you, Ms Kathage. I will make some general comments, and I might ask Will just to stay there, because I am sure there will be some rail freight aspects that he can give us a light on as well. Since 2020 we have invested \$471 million in the regional freight network. That is on top of, of course, the investment we have already made in the Murray Basin network. What we are seeing as a result of that is a significant uplift particularly in rail freight, particularly for the food and fibre sector in the north and west, and more of that work coming into the port. But it also extends to putting better facilities into providing good access particularly around the Port of Melbourne, in terms of how we use rail freight in and around the Port of Melbourne, and the long-term work that we are doing around building intermodal freight terminals and enabling the private sector to build intermodal freight terminals. Altona is already built, Somerton is currently underway, there is all the work happening around Beveridge with inland rail – so providing that capacity as it comes on line, and some work that we will do within Dandenong. And – I might go back to Mr Tieppo at this point – \$103 million worth of maintenance and renewal funding has been allocated for the regional rail network to V/Line to ensure we can sustain the performance of the regional freight piece. Mr Tieppo, is there anything else you want to add in terms of volumes you are seeing on your network?

Will TIEPPO: Yes. This financial year and last financial year it was in the order of \$100 million of rail freight maintenance that was dedicated to replacing sleepers and maintaining the tonnage on those corridors, particularly in the Murray Basin area and some of those dedicated freight lines that V/Line gives the freight industry access to. We saw in 2024–25 about 4 million gross tonnes moved on the V/Line network, more than any other year. That was obviously a good grain season last year, and we have seen some of the benefits there. We have had some really good feedback from the industry around where those investments were made.

Going back to the original Murray Basin, which the Secretary talked about, and the scope that was determined, we did have the input from the industry about where those investments were going to benefit the industry, and we have seen with the completion of those works the benefits really are paying off as well. Over the last financial year the freight moved on the V/Line network has been about 1.9 million tonnes of grain and 1.4 million tonnes of containerised products, and we have also seen about 0.7 gross tonnes of quarry material being moved on the network. We are getting some really good feedback from the industry. We are also working really closely with ARTC around how we are sharing intelligence with the freight industry about where they want to run and how they want to run. Obviously we are working really closely with them along the way, and we are all for supporting the new freight plan that has been released by the Victorian government.

Lauren KATHAGE: It is really quite astonishing, the investment in regional rail that we have had over the last 10 years, with, like we said, Ballarat having an extra 291 services and Gippsland I think 57 or 87 extra services, when it was not that long ago that we had the Kennett government shutting the Mildura line, shutting the train to Ararat and Bairnsdale in all different directions. So in terms of regional rail investment, with every

single line upgraded under the regional rail revival program, it seems that there is a really stark difference from decades gone by to now. So thank you to the department for their hard work on regional rail.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Kathage. The committee is going to take a short break before coming back at 11:15 am.

The committee will now resume its consideration of DTP. We are going to go straight to Mr Welch.

Richard WELCH: Thank you, Chair. Mr Weimar, the cost of the SRL, \$34 billion – that costing actually goes back as far as 2018, doesn't it?

Jeroen WEIMAR: That is right.

Richard WELCH: Is there any other single project in your remit that has not had its costs revalidated since 2018?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Thank you, Mr Welch. A lot of our projects, as I said earlier – I think 82 per cent of the projects – have been delivered within budget just in the last three years.

Richard WELCH: No, I am asking: is there a single active other project you have that has a 2018 costing that has not been revalidated?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I would need to go back and check amongst the literally hundreds of projects that have been delivered or overseen by this department.

Richard WELCH: Do you think there are others? There may be others?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Absolutely. I think if I look at the program spending that we do across a number of different areas – we have talked about roads extensively, public transport – across our infrastructure program –

Richard WELCH: Why isn't your department working to its 2018 budget then? Why has your department budget been updated?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Because the department has continued to evolve and change over the last seven or eight years, as you would expect it to.

Richard WELCH: So things have changed.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Mr Welch, if the point of your question is that things change, absolutely. I think the SRL business case completed in, what, 2019, as a multigenerational project, has built into its costings risk of change.

Richard WELCH: We are only one generation right now. There are no other generations right now. Are you saying that not one single input cost to the SRL has gone up?

Jeroen WEIMAR: No, that is not what I am saying at all.

Richard WELCH: Have any input costs to the SRL gone up?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Mr Welch, the business case looked at this project being delivered by 2035.

Richard WELCH: I am not interested in the business case; I am interested in the cost. Have any input costs to the SRL gone up in the last six years, if we all agree on that date?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I am happy to bring Mr Carroll as the CEO of the SRLA to the table to maybe answer that question in more detail. I think what you would expect from me as Secretary, recognising that the SRLA as an established legislative authority has control over issues of cost.

Richard WELCH: I will ask Mr Carroll: have any input costs to the SRL increased since 2019?

Frankie CARROLL: I think there have been various movements in the SRL cost.

Richard WELCH: Have any increased?

The CHAIR: Excuse me, Mr Welch. You have asked a question. Mr Carroll has just sat down. Afford him 5 seconds to answer your question. Mr Carroll.

Frankie CARROLL: Thank you, Chair. I thank the honourable member for the question. In relation to the budget that was actually put together in the business case, which was between \$30 billion and \$34.5 billion, we break up those costs, and the costs that we have incurred, which are the initial and early works, were actually on budget –

Richard WELCH: Mr Carroll, have any input costs to the project increased in the last six years – any?

Frankie CARROLL: I think if you let me get to the end of my explanation –

Richard WELCH: Actually I would just like a yes or a no.

The CHAIR: Mr Welch! Mr Carroll, you are genuinely trying to answer this question. Please proceed.

Frankie CARROLL: Thank you, Chair. The initially early works, which were budgeted at \$2.2 billion, are on track and on budget to actually be delivered for that. The next packages of work, which are the two tunnelling packages that we have let – \$3.6 billion and \$1.7 billion – have actually come in at below the estimate that we had.

Richard WELCH: So across that \$34 billion budget, no input costs have increased – not a single one?

Frankie CARROLL: What I am telling you is the initial early works are on budget. And the two packages –

Richard WELCH: I would like an answer to my question. Have any input costs to the project gone up in the last six years – any?

Frankie CARROLL: The two packages that we have let have been let at less than the budgeted cost.

Richard WELCH: Have any gone up?

Frankie CARROLL: I am telling you that the two packages we let have been let at less than the budgeted cost, so it is below –

Richard WELCH: Have any single input costs to the SRL in the last six years gone up?

The CHAIR: Mr Welch, Mr Carroll is answering your question, and he has answered it about four times the same way. Is there another question that you would like to ask?

Richard WELCH: No. I want this question answered and the Victorian people want this question answered: how can you have maintained the same costs as 2019 in 2025 – \$34 billion – and are you telling this committee and the Parliament of Victoria that not one single input to this project has gone up?

The CHAIR: Before you answer that, Mr Carroll, I am going to counsel you, Mr Welch, about respect. I spoke about respect at the beginning of this session, and I would ask you to afford respect to the witnesses, including Mr Carroll, who is sitting right there, and the Victorian community who are watching on the live stream today.

Richard WELCH: The Victorian people deserve the same respect in return, and that means honest answers. We are not getting honest answers here. The project has six years costings over time, and you are telling me not one single input to this project has gone up.

The CHAIR: Mr Welch, I think the Secretary is even putting up his hand to answer your question. I am going to throw to the Secretary, but I am going to warn you again, Mr Welch, to please be respectful. Please be respectful of witnesses –

Richard WELCH: It has to be reciprocated.

The CHAIR: Please be respectful. Witnesses here are affording you absolute respect and courtesy. Please treat our –

Richard WELCH: Not if they are not answering the questions.

The CHAIR: Mr Welch, just because you do not like the answer a witness is giving does not mean you have the opportunity to disrespect and harass witnesses.

Richard WELCH: And witnesses do not have a right to be in contempt of Parliament.

The CHAIR: Mr Welch, throwing around those kinds of accusations is incredibly serious. You have asked a question. I suggest you think about what I have just said and afford the Secretary the opportunity to answer your question.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Mr Welch. We are here to provide information in the honest and transparent way in which I expect all of our departments and agencies to operate. As I said earlier, in 2019 the business case work was done. That gave an estimate of the TEI between \$30 billion and \$34.5 billion. That includes provisions for escalation of costs over a 15-year program because it was seen as a 15-year program at that point in time.

Richard WELCH: Has one input cost gone up?

Jeroen WEIMAR: If I could please finish.

Richard WELCH: Have any input costs gone up?

The CHAIR: Excuse me, Mr Welch. Do I need to remind you again about respect? The Secretary has asked to finish his sentence. You can afford him the courtesy.

Richard WELCH: He is obfuscating. He is clearly obfuscating –

The CHAIR: He is not obfuscating.

Richard WELCH: as the Department of Premier and Cabinet did yesterday, as the Treasury department did.

The CHAIR: Mr Welch!

Richard WELCH: It is a government-wide, whole-of-government lie.

The CHAIR: Mr Welch, I would suggest to you that grandstanding does nothing for your case here.

Richard WELCH: Well, let us see.

The CHAIR: Mr Welch, do you want to ask your question again to the Secretary?

Richard WELCH: Yes. Has any individual input cost to the SRL gone up in the last six years?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Within the contractor framework that we have, the three packages that we have released have come in within budget or below budget.

Richard WELCH: Within the packages – has any cost within the packages gone up?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Not to my knowledge.

Richard WELCH: Not one?

Jeroen WEIMAR: The authority has released three packages of work. All three have come in under the initial cost estimate within the business case.

Richard WELCH: You do not believe that. I do not believe that. The Victorian public do not believe that.

The CHAIR: Mr Welch!

Richard WELCH: Are you being honest with this committee?

The CHAIR: Mr Welch, you are being disrespectful. I actually think you know that you are being disrespectful.

Richard WELCH: No, this is called accountability. This is what accountability looks like.

The CHAIR: You asked the question.

Richard WELCH: You cannot lie to the whole of the Victorian public for six years and not expect that at some point there is accountability.

Lauren KATHAGE: Point of order.

The CHAIR: Excuse me, Mr Welch, there is a point of order.

Richard WELCH: Is it \$34 billion or not?

The CHAIR: Mr Welch, please control yourself. Control yourself.

Richard WELCH: No, no, no. We have been patient enough.

The CHAIR: Mr Welch –

Richard WELCH: The Victorian people have been patient enough.

The CHAIR: There has been a point of order raised. Ms Kathage.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to raise a point of order about behaviour at the table in terms of –

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Welch, I would ask you to afford me the respect, as Chair of this committee, that I deserve. I will again counsel you to control your temper and treat everyone here at this table, including me, with the respect that they deserve. You have asked a question of the Secretary. He is attempting to answer your question.

Richard WELCH: No, he is not attempting to answer it. He should be called to answer it.

The CHAIR: He is attempting to answer your question.

Richard WELCH: Let me ask you this, Mr Weimar: would you stake your job on the \$34 billion figure? Would you stake your job on it?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I am sitting here giving advice to the Victorian Parliament –

Roma BRITNELL: That you have been told to say.

The CHAIR: Excuse me. These kinds of comments are beneath you, Deputy Chair. Now, Secretary, you were attempting to answer the question.

Jeroen WEIMAR: I do take exception to the allegations, but I will move on. The cost estimates provided in good faith in 2019 as part of the original business case – all of the packages of work that have been put out to market so far have come in below that number. I have no other information to provide you, Mr Welch.

Richard WELCH: That is using accounting obfuscation. Anyone can move figures between columns to say that, with COVID, the Ukraine, tariffs, everything else, every other Labor input has gone up in the order of 20 per cent plus, and you are telling us that – let us use a little comparison. North East Link is what, a 9-kilometre tunnel, no stations: \$26 billion. The Suburban Rail Loop: 26 kilometres, six massive underground stations and numerous contamination points to go through, and you are telling us it costs about the same as the North East Link. Is that honestly what you are telling the Victorian community?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I am very happy to bring Mr Elliott up here to talk about the North East Link program and the reasons for the scope changes that have been made.

Richard WELCH: No, you would talk about anything but the cost.

Jeroen WEIMAR: No, that is not true.

Roma BRITNELL: You are the Secretary. You are the one accountable for this. Is the question able to be answered? Comparing the two, has really nothing gone up?

The CHAIR: Excuse me. Mr Welch, do you have a question that you wanted to ask, or are you just grandstanding, making statements? I suggest you ask a question. The Secretary and the witnesses here are attempting –

Richard WELCH: You call it grandstanding; I call it accountability.

The CHAIR: Well, I am calling it disrespect for what it is, Mr Welch. Do you have a question?

Richard WELCH: One does not respect the lie –

The CHAIR: Do you have a question for the Secretary?

Richard WELCH: Well, let us talk about value capture, shall we – that magical formula. Have you had any role in working out what the mathematics, the mechanism, for that value capture will be?

Jeroen WEIMAR: No, Mr Welch.

Richard WELCH: None at all?

Jeroen WEIMAR: That is a that is a matter for the Department of Treasury and Finance, and they are working that through.

Richard WELCH: But it is a key financing point of the project, is it not?

Jeroen WEIMAR: That is right.

Richard WELCH: So when do you expect to start receiving value capture?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, I think that is a matter for Department of Treasury and Finance. They are working through that advice, and when that work is complete, then we will implement it.

Richard WELCH: But you are not at all curious?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well I have clarity of understanding around – what the department has been asked to do is to ensure that SRLA is delivering the program of works. We have discussed that. The department has been asked to engage with our Commonwealth counterparts around the Commonwealth contribution that is being sought by the Victorian government. We are on with that; we are doing that work at this point in time.

Richard WELCH: So the debt borrowing that you have to fund this project before the value capture kicks in – what interest is payable on that debt funding?

Jeroen WEIMAR: That is a matter for the Department of Treasury and Finance.

Richard WELCH: No interest, no care?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I have lots of care, but there are –

Richard WELCH: This comes back to my point, where this is a whole-of-government lie.

Mathew HILAKARI: Point of order, Chair.

The CHAIR: Excuse me, Mr Welch. There is a point of order. Mr Hilakari, what is your point of order?

Mathew HILAKARI: Mr Welch may not understand the division of works across departments, but I would encourage him to –

Richard WELCH: No, that is exactly what I do understand. This is a whole-of-government lie.

The CHAIR: Excuse me, Mr Welch, I am trying to listen to the point of order. Mr Hilakari, what is your point of order?

Mathew HILAKARI: I would like to hear some department-relevant questions as opposed to irrelevant ones.

Richard WELCH: How can the funding of the SRL not be relevant?

The CHAIR: Excuse me, Mr Welch. Mr Hilakari, what is your point of order?

Richard WELCH: Yes, what is it?

Mathew HILAKARI: Relevance.

Roma Britnell interjected.

The CHAIR: I am not inviting you to make commentary, Deputy Chair. This is your first FPO hearing. Mr Welch, please bring back the relevance to the terms of reference that we are examining today. Do you want to ask your question within the remit of the terms of reference to the Secretary?

Richard WELCH: The business case that went to Infrastructure Australia, and the other things that you frequently refer to, clearly said there is a problem with the value capture mechanism. You agree?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Not sure I do agree, but carry on.

Richard WELCH: You do not agree? You think the value capture method is fine?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, the advice I have received from colleagues in Treasury and Finance indicates that they are working on that program. They have a mechanism for doing so. That is advice for them to provide.

Roma BRITNELL: And you are not concerned.

Jeroen WEIMAR: No. I work with colleagues across government to deliver this government commitment. I have no concerns on that front, no.

Roma BRITNELL: No concerns?

Richard WELCH: No concerns. At the moment there is over a \$20 billion black hole on this project. So that is not a concern to you?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I do not recognise those figures, Mr Welch, I am sorry.

Richard WELCH: Well, how much funding have you got? How much funding is guaranteed at this point in time?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, the state government has allocated its funding. We have released funding I believe in the order of \$14 billion so far, \$2.2 billion from the Commonwealth government.

Richard WELCH: So that would be a \$20 billion black hole, would it not?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, no. We are currently working with our Commonwealth counterparts with regard to additional funding that is being sought.

Roma BRITNELL: Ah, the feds are going to give \$20 billion.

The CHAIR: Excuse me, Secretary. Deputy Chair, the evidence that the Secretary is giving is important. Cease the interjection and the commentary.

Jeroen WEIMAR: There are components in the value capture program, which is being led by the Department of Treasury and Finance. I have every confidence that they will acquit that responsibility.

Richard WELCH: When must that \$20 billion come in? When do you run out of the \$14 billion?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, we have sufficient funding to have concluded the contracts we have at this point in time. There are two more contract packages of work underway.

Richard WELCH: What date does the \$14 billion run out?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I do not have that date in front of me.

Richard WELCH: You must do. You are running a project; you must know.

Jeroen WEIMAR: No, we have a phasing program in place in terms of additional packages of work that have been contracted. We are currently in active procurement through SRLA on two further packages of work

Richard WELCH: You would have a burn rate. You have a run rate. Anyone running a project has a burn rate. When does the \$14 billion run out?

Jeroen WEIMAR: There is work being done by DTF. There are negotiations underway with the Commonwealth government –

Richard WELCH: Are you honestly telling me you do not know when the \$14 billion runs out?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I do not have a date in front of me. Also, if I could just add, we have been given every confidence by our colleagues in Treasury and Finance that the value capture component will be provided for.

Richard WELCH: You have been given every confidence?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Yes.

Richard WELCH: In what form has that confidence been received?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, that is the advice. We are working across government.

Richard WELCH: What advice? Because they have not actually worked out the value capture model. So how can they give you confidence?

Jeroen WEIMAR: The government set out in its business case in 2019 that this is how the project is to be funded. The component –

Richard WELCH: Do you realise how ridiculous you sound right now?

The CHAIR: Excuse me. Okay, Mr Welch, you know that is disrespectful.

Richard WELCH: I am not going to sit here and hear absurdities and treat it with respect.

The CHAIR: Mr Welch, the Secretary and witnesses here today are affording you generous respect based on the way you are behaving.

Richard WELCH: No, they are not.

The CHAIR: If you have a question, please ask it to the Secretary. Mr Welch, do you have a question?

Richard WELCH: If they were genuinely respectful, they would give honest answers. If you are so confident in the funding why can't you define the value capture mechanism?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Because that is a matter for my colleagues in DTF to work through.

Richard WELCH: But they have not worked through it. They do not know what it is. So how can they give you assurance?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, that is –

Mathew HILAKARI: If you had asked the question when DTF were here, you would know.

Richard WELCH: We did. They said they did not know.

The CHAIR: Excuse me, Mr Welch –

Mathew HILAKARI: Is that right?

Richard WELCH: Yes.

The CHAIR: Mr Welch, do you want to ask your question again to the Secretary.

Richard WELCH: If the value capture mechanism after five years still has not been worked out and no-one knows how it is going to work, how can they provide you credible reassurance that you will receive that funding?

Mathew HILAKARI: Point of order.

The CHAIR: Excuse me, Secretary. Mr Welch, there is a point of order. Mr Hilakari.

Mathew HILAKARI: Mr Welch is having difficulty understanding what this inquiry is about. It is written behind you. Rather than a prospective five-year advancement, we are looking at the 2024–25 financial and performance outcomes.

Richard WELCH: And we are not spending money this year on the SRL?

Mathew HILAKARI: It has been repeated ad nauseam.

The CHAIR: Excuse me, Mr Welch. Mr Hilakari, what is your point of order?

Mathew HILAKARI: Relevance. I would like to hear some questions about what this committee is inquiring into.

Richard WELCH: Let everyone see that the Labor members of this committee do not want these questions answered.

The CHAIR: Mr Welch, I am going to rule on the point of order. Thank you. Please direct your questions within the remit of the terms of reference.

Richard WELCH: Well, I am yet to be told how it is not relevant.

Mathew HILAKARI: You are casting forward five years.

Richard WELCH: No, I cannot even be told when the money runs out, so how do we know it is forward? How do we know it is not this year?

The CHAIR: Mr Welch, would you like to rephrase your question within the terms of reference?

Richard WELCH: The Secretary has helpfully said that he has had reassurances that the funding will be in place. So I would like to understand how you have received those reassurances, given the mechanism has not been finalised.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, the government set out its position in 2019 in terms of how the funding was to be obtained for the Suburban Rail Loop. The business case, which is published – it is on the public record – set out how those components would operate. DTF are working through the details of how they will acquire their responsibility for that. I cannot speak to that, I am afraid, Mr Welch. What we are accountable for is continuing our conversations with the Commonwealth government.

Richard WELCH: But you just did, because you said you have confidence in it. So how have you arrived at that confidence?

Jeroen WEIMAR: When the government sets out and says, ‘This is how we’re going to fund a particular program,’ and DTF are there to undertake the mechanisms to do so, that is a matter for them. I rely upon them to do so; they rely on me to do other things.

Richard WELCH: Given that a substantial component of that – \$20 billion, as we have agreed earlier – is not funded, how can you deliver the project?

Jeroen WEIMAR: The component I am working on is the ongoing negotiations we are having with our Commonwealth counterparts. They have given clear – I think the Prime Minister was on the –

Richard WELCH: Yes, but you have been doing that for years as well. Have you been given a written guarantee that the funding will come?

Jeroen WEIMAR: We have had productive conversations since my time at –

Richard WELCH: ‘Productive conversations’, ‘working on it’ –

Jeroen WEIMAR: With respect, Mr Welch –

The CHAIR: Excuse me, Secretary and Mr Welch.

Richard WELCH: These are not terms you use on a \$34 billion project.

The CHAIR: Mr Welch! Secretary, you can answer Mr Welch’s question. You did ask it, Mr Welch, and the Secretary can be afforded the opportunity to answer.

Richard WELCH: But he is not answering.

The CHAIR: Mr Welch! It is like dealing with children this afternoon.

Richard WELCH: It is. It is indeed.

The CHAIR: Mr Welch!

Richard WELCH: One hundred per cent.

The CHAIR: That was a pointed comment towards you. You are to cease interjecting. Allow the Secretary to answer your questions so you can ask another question.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Thank you, Chair. Since my time in this portfolio, since the beginning of this year, we have been in continual and productive dialogue with our Commonwealth counterparts. There has been an extensive exchange of information to work towards that goal. I believe the Prime Minister is on record as making some comments around working towards a federal budget. We are working in good faith on that basis.

Richard WELCH: And if I had a dollar for having conversations, I would be a billionaire as well. So that is fine. You can talk. You do not have the money. You do not have the money, and yet you say you have received assurances from Treasury. Could you provide that assurance to us? If you have received it, can we receive a copy of that?

Jeroen WEIMAR: You have taken evidence from my colleagues in the Department of Treasury and Finance.

Richard WELCH: No, I am asking you: if you have received reassurance, as you have said, can we please see a copy of that?

Jeroen WEIMAR: From whom?

Richard WELCH: Treasury.

Roma BRITNELL: The advice you received.

Jeroen WEIMAR: No. I am afraid, with respect to my role and my responsibilities within the department, which I take with great seriousness, as I do my role as a public servant, we have a clear role to play. This department has a clear role to play with regard to enabling and delivering the SRLA project. DTF are responsible –

Richard WELCH: You are part of a whole-of-government lie, is what you are saying, because you can divide up responsibility and accountability between the various departments, and no one of you is individually accountable and you can just handpass off. Is that how this system works? Is that how you are operating?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I think, Chair, I would suggest that is an unhelpful framing of the advice this team is giving.

Richard WELCH: It is unhelpful for you. It is indeed. It is unhelpful.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Secretary. Mr Welch, did you have another question that you wished to ask?

Richard WELCH: I am asking: is this how it works? Is this the way you avoid accountability, by dissecting and compartmentalising your responsibilities over what is the single largest project in this state?

Jeroen WEIMAR: This department has 182 governmental performance standards. I am here to acquit my accountability as Secretary of this department. I have expended that extensively over the last two hours and expect to do so for the next hour. We are here to give evidence on the work of this department, and that is what I am doing.

Roma BRITNELL: You could provide that information through interdepartmental minutes from 2024–25.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Tak.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Chair, Secretary and officials. I will move to the Arden precinct. It aims to be home to up to 34,000 jobs and around 20,000 people by 2051. The DTP questionnaire response referred to the Arden structure plan and Arden vision. Secretary, perhaps through you, how is the vision being realised?

Jeroen WEIMAR: In terms of the – sorry, which program, Mr Tak?

Meng Heang TAK: The Arden structure plan and Arden vision.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Thank you, Mr Tak. Sorry, I just missed that part. I might ask our colleague Anne Jolic from Development Victoria to join us at the table. Arden is, I think, a great example of where major transport infrastructure projects generate opportunities to do broader, particularly housing, developments and spatial developments and to really regenerate and change the way the city works. The Arden project – obviously the station opens up on Sunday. Arden probably represents one of the greatest opportunity areas that we now have as a precinct, and what the department has been doing for the last few years is applying precinct planning to that area to ensure that we have the right balance of homes and employment generation in that particular area. Development Victoria is the development arm of the development agency of the department. They have got over 25 housing projects on foot at this point in time. They are also working on the commercialisation of Arden and are choosing a joint venture partner to develop Arden. So I might ask Ms Jolic just to talk to that briefly. Thank you.

Anne JOLIC: Thank you, Secretary. Thank you for the question. We are in a live procurement process with active competitive bidders, so I cannot give the detail of any of the proponents' bids, but we will be in a position early next year where we will be able to contract on the site. I can give you assurances that the bids are very high quality. They will deliver housing in stage 1 in accordance with and in respect of the guidance that was previously given in terms of the dwelling numbers. The open space provision is very high quality and very good, and it will be a mix of largely build-to-rent apartments and student accommodation. We expect to have more to say on that in the new year.

Meng Heang TAK: Great.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Mr Tak, I might get Mr Moseley just to add some additional planning comments.

Stuart MOSELEY: Just to build around that theme of bringing the vision to life, the request for proposals document that tenderers are responding to seeks to achieve 3000 to 3500 dwellings, a population of around 7000 people, at least 1.1 hectares of open space designed to high quality and a site for a primary school of around 0.7 of a hectare, as well as infrastructure for flood-proofing the public realm. A minimum of 10 per cent of the houses are to be affordable, and we are seeking at least a thousand in stage 1.

Mathew HILAKARI: And are you on track in terms of the years 2024–25 for achieving your progress metrics for that period of time? Is there anything you want to speak to in terms of those metrics?

Stuart MOSELEY: Working closely with Development Victoria we are on track to bring the right decisions through to government so that we can get housing out of the ground within the targeted timeframe. It is a very complex site, and you do not want to rush things and risk a suboptimal outcome. But at the moment there is great teamwork, a very good response from the private sector and some really great innovative thinking, and we are on track.

Mathew HILAKARI: Great.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you. And coming back to the private sector, budget paper 3 for 2024–25 on page 81 says:

Funding is provided to progress development of the Arden Precinct in partnership with the private sector to achieve objectives as set out in Victoria's *Housing Statement*.

Can you please explain the role of government and also the role of the private sector in delivering these precincts?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I might go to Mr Moseley on that just to frame that answer.

Stuart MOSELEY: So in general terms government has the role of getting the land ready for development and feeding it out to the private sector. So that is around planning; it is around enabling studies and decisions around infrastructure support, relationships with the council and the community, what facilities need to be planned for – I have mentioned education and flood-proofing. So that thinking is what government brings, and then obviously the government's equity stake is the land. That is all then taken through to the private sector via Development Victoria, who are the state's development arm, and their job is to treat and work with private sector entities on behalf of government to get housing built. So that is the general scheme, but in the structure of the offer that is in the market, essentially government is saying, 'Here is this absolutely cracking site right on top of a metro station on the edge of the CBD with a whole lot of good thinking and vision around it. What can you do, development sector? Give us your best offer. Bring your innovation, bring all your technical smarts,' and that is the job of Development Victoria to support government through making those decisions.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you. Also the DTF annual report on page 59 says that the department is leading the whole-of-government delivery of the *Plan for Victoria*, which you just alluded to, the priority precincts, which include Arden, and bidders were shortlisted to proceed to the request for proposal stage of Arden Central. Stage 1 required the delivery of a minimum of 1000 residential dwellings. Secretary, what types of homes, community facilities and open space are being envisioned?

Stuart MOSELEY: To build on my comments earlier, of the thousand dwellings in stage 1 there is a requirement for 10 per cent of those to be affordable. There is also a requirement for contributions for key workers. On open space there is a minimum requirement for 1.1 hectares, which is interpreted to be what we call 'unencumbered'; that means it is recreational space that is an asset for the community. It is envisaged that the City of Melbourne would take responsibility for that. We also envisage there will be other areas of open space that play multiple purpose functions in terms of stormwater management, schools and that sort of thing.

So with the open space, there is a theme in Arden of what is called 'blue-green spaces' – spaces that play multiple contributions, so they might be available for recreation normally. If there is a flood event, they get a bit wet and then they hold the water and discharge it. So there are multiple purposes around the open space. 0.7 of a hectare for a primary school, as I mentioned – I think everybody acknowledges a new community brings with it needs for educational infrastructure, transport connections, flood-proofing, quality public realm and so on. I

do not know whether there is any more you can say about how that is being responded to other than positively and with innovation.

Anne JOLIC: The bidders have responded really well to that, so we are seeing really interesting and innovative concepts, particularly in open space delivery, assisting to deal with the flood and drainage constraints on the site, and a really good response to the station and the delivery of the station. There is high-quality apartment development, a good range of student accommodation and build-to-rent and affordable housing, so a good mix of different tenures and types of housing, which means it can all be activated and be delivered concurrently and as fast as possible. And we expect it all to be delivered within the timeframes previously advised, with the first residents in in 2028–29.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you. You also spoke about the flood risk in Arden. What work has been undertaken to better manage flood and climate hazard risk in Arden?

Stuart MOSELEY: There was a lot of work done at the time of the *Arden Structure Plan*, which was prepared by the Victorian Planning Authority with strong and very helpful input from Melbourne Water, and that piece of work is really a flood-proofing strategy for the greater Arden and Macaulay precincts, within which Arden Central sits. That work has been made available to the tenderers, but we are looking for them to innovate, because that work is now several years old. We know more and Melbourne Water knows more, and there is an opportunity to bring solutions that satisfy the essential flood-proofing and climate change requirements for that precinct and use techniques that perhaps the private sector can either do differently or more efficiently by looking at the site of Arden Central as a whole. The short answer to the question is: the flood analysis and assessment are very strongly overseen by Melbourne Water. That is then given into the tender process, and proponents are invited to meet those requirements, either using that design or something that achieves the equivalent intent in a better way.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you. Before moving on to the Growing Suburbs Fund and suburb outputs, I just have one question. With the economic growth within the Arden precinct, you have referred to the new underground train station at Arden. What does this mean for jobs and economic growth within and near the precinct now and into the future?

Stuart MOSELEY: It is a tremendous opportunity, I think is how I would express it. It puts it within a couple of stations. I mean, Parkville and the whole of the Parkville precinct are very closely located and accessible to Arden. That opens up opportunities not just for workers in that precinct to easily access it but for related businesses and services to consider locating in Arden. That might be consulting, it might be paramedical, it might be institutions that support academic research. Exactly what that looks like – we again have invited the private sector to tell us what might work. But that relationship with Parkville is critical. There is then the relationship with the CBD and of course with the western corridor of Melbourne and I guess casting that access of movement even further down to the south-east. Arden has an opportunity to have people, jobs and services really closely located, creating amenity and place that we think will make it an exciting new part of the CBD, right on top of a Metro station that is opening very soon. I do not know whether you would comment in terms of the private sector's response as regards –

Anne JOLIC: Again, there is a level of excitement about the proximity to the station and being able to activate the station, and we are just assessing those proposals at the moment. Again, next year we will be able to say more about what the response has been, but it has been an excited response from the private sector.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you. We will be looking forward to that exciting response coming up. Secretary, I refer to the 2024–25 financial and performance outcomes brief on page 41 of the DTP financial and performance questionnaire. How have the completed projects under the Growing Suburbs Fund supported infrastructure and service provision to enable communities to thrive across the growing communities in Melbourne?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Great. Thank you, Mr Tak. I think the Growing Suburbs Fund has been an important part of how we support housing of different types all across Victoria. We have spent a fair bit of time today talking about the opportunities around SRL precincts in terms of middle-ring development and the activity centre program and, again, about how we encourage development in established areas and around train stations. What the Growing Suburbs Fund also recognises is the continued pressures for infrastructure in our growth

suburbs, particularly around Cardinia shire, Casey, Hume, Melton, Mitchell shire, Whittlesea and Wyndham. They are the white edge of our growth agenda. The 10-year greenfield plan that we put out a few months ago sets out how we see more staged investment and development of housing in those greenfield areas and particularly how we better align infrastructure development and infrastructure provision both around roads and rail but also around housing and health and other critical services. I might ask Mr Moseley just to talk to the work around the Growing Suburbs Fund particularly. I think it is key to see this as part of our integrated approach to how we support those rapidly growing communities.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you.

Stuart MOSELEY: Yes. To build on those comments, the Growing Suburbs Fund as at 18 November had 107 projects underway and 262 completed, and there were 10 funded in the 2024–25 round of the fund. It is worth mentioning in a similar vein the Tiny Towns Fund, which is providing funding targeted at small towns across Victoria with a population of up to 5000. So Growing Suburbs, as the Secretary has said, focuses on Victoria's growth, Melbourne's growth corridors; Tiny Towns is targeted more at small communities. There were 21 projects funded in 2024–25 from that fund. They are in those same interface councils, but the fund itself ranges more widely. There is also the Pick My Park program – \$30 million allocated to a grant program to fund projects that create and upgrade green and open spaces in growing established suburbs and give the community the opportunity to have their say. Growing Suburbs for the greenfields corridors, Tiny Towns across Victoria and Pick My Park for established areas are all programs the government is administering to help communities receive the infrastructure they need as they grow.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you. You mentioned the 21 projects of Tiny Towns. Can you please advise on the status of the projects underway through the DTP component of the Tiny Towns programs, as per page 14 of the 2024–25 financial and performance outcomes questionnaire?

Stuart MOSELEY: The 21 projects funded have a combined project value of just over \$1.5 million. They are all across Victoria in areas from Flinders to Yarra Junction and Devon Meadows. They are now at various stages, so the proponents are now moving forward on those projects. Suffice to say the program has been very well received. It is recognition I think that whilst areas undergoing substantial growth rightly receive a level of government attention, there are a multitude of smaller communities as well. This is valuable recognition of the important places those are for people to live and work.

Mathew HILAKARI: I love the Tiny Towns Fund. Werribee South is a community that I represent. I am just hoping that you take note of that suburb so that for the next round of Tiny Town Funds, which is currently open, maybe you just have that imprinted in your brain: Werribee South is one of those great communities that is deserving of such an expansion.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Secretary. Moving to the Fishermans Bend innovation precinct, it is projected to support up to 30,000 jobs in science, technology, engineering and related fields. The DTP PAEC questionnaire on page 57 says that the total actual expenditure from the announcement to 30 June 2025 was \$193.8 million. Can you please explain how this funding has been used to create an investment-ready precinct?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Yes, great. Thank you, Mr Tak. I think Fishermans Bend is a really exciting precinct, and we are seeing some significant developments in that space already. The framework for this goes back to 2018 forecasts around 37,000 homes, 80,000 residents, 80,000 workers and 20,000 students by 2050. What has actually been quite pleasing to see is that actually, in terms of the current developments, around 4700 dwellings have already been delivered or are under construction – actually, 2800 built, 1900 in flight – and development activity is actually tracking ahead of projections at this point in time, particularly in Montague, where we are seeing over 3000 dwellings delivered already, and Wirraway on over 700 dwellings delivered. So particularly the eastern side of Fishermans Bend is already benefiting from the investment in land and in particular transport infrastructure to make that work.

We have also delivered significant numbers of bus service changes and network changes there already. And recently my department released essentially a phased transport strategy for Fishermans Bend that set out three horizons for long-term transport investment, focusing on the bus upgrades that I have briefly mentioned already, moving on to the expansion of some of our tram networks into the Fishermans Bend area in the coming decades and then beyond that Metro Tunnel too. This is all part of that earlier conversation at the

presentation point around how we aim to have long-term plans of iterating transport infrastructure in support of housing development and economic development in those areas. So that work is all underway. We have got a good pipeline of social and affordable housing units, around 680 of those are already planned for the Fishermans Bend district, and right now we are just finalising the development contribution program for Fishermans Bend, and we expect government to announce that in probably the early part of next year. So a lot of work is happening. I do not know, Mr Moseley, if there is anything else you want to add, or Ms Jolic?

Anne JOLIC: Just on the innovation process, Development Victoria has been managing a major package of works to effectively get the site ready for future development. That is a contract we are currently managing, with main works of about \$84 million. That will effectively set up stage 1 for a future investment strategy for the private sector to come in and invest into the innovation precinct. So that work is tracking well and has been underway for some time.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you. Just a quick supplementary question. In the same questionnaire, on page 17, it says outcomes achieved include:

Strengthened partnerships across government, industry, and residents to deliver planning goals

Can you please expand on what are the planning goals and key partnerships specific to the Fishermans Bend innovation precinct?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Stuart, I might go to you on that as well.

Stuart MOSELEY: Sure. So the key partnerships within government are between DTP as the direction-setter and planning authority for the precinct; DJSIR as government's investment attraction arm – and they have the international relationships to bring into the innovation precinct the kind of expertise we need; and then Development Victoria as the government's master developer. We also work very closely with the City of Port Phillip and the City of Melbourne. Then we have been working very hard on building partnerships with the local communities of Fishermans Bend. Put those things together, and we think it is a very optimistic outlook for a shared interest in the future.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Puglielli.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon. To start off, can I ask: looking to North and West Melbourne, what is the expected increase in cars across the streets of North and West Melbourne as a result of opening the West Gate Tunnel?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Thank you, Mr Puglielli. As you know, we have been doing a fair bit – or you may not know. With the West Gate Tunnel a lot of our earlier conversations have been around the opening up of the tunnel and the road network really between Dynon Road and out to the Princes Freeway, the West Gate Freeway, out towards the west. What we have also been doing is a lot of localised work, particularly in that corner north-west of the City of Melbourne, around Hawke Street and that wider precinct, around some traffic, around what we are calling the transport immunity project. It is a joint program between ourselves and the City of Melbourne that we have funded to really improve those immunity benefits and to manage traffic flow through that area, recognising it is a pretty important community area. The West Gate Tunnel also includes the Wurundjeri Way extension, which opened up a few weeks ago, very successfully. What that has done has brought some relief, particularly to Spencer Street and to King Street as big north–south corridors, and we are already seeing some diversion of traffic away from those inner-Melbourne streets, particularly towards the north end and onto Wurundjeri Way.

What we expect to see I think when West Gate Tunnel opens is it will take a few months for traffic to settle down as people work out their new routes. A big focus for the West Gate Tunnel is about freight access to the Port of Melbourne, so that will be a big, heavy utilisation of it. If we had a map, we could see the dedicated routes that West Gate Tunnel provides into the port area. What it means for the inner-west community in particular is the closure of six key current roads to freight. So the expansion of the no-truck zones on a number of those key east–west laterals to encourage freight traffic to use the West Gate Bridge and the West Gate Tunnel is a big part of that project. It will take over 9000 trucks off those local roads.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Just to follow up, can I ask: once things have settled down, as you have referred to, would we still expect an increase in cars across those local streets?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I think what we will see is a settling down of traffic between the north and south of the CBD of Melbourne. We are expecting probably about a 25 per cent shift of traffic from the West Gate Bridge onto the West Gate Tunnel, so traffic that is currently coming in from the south of the CBD and then working its way into the north. That traffic we think will divert through West Gate Tunnel, and that will come in on the Dynon Road or Footscray Road access points. What I think we will see is some shift in traffic behaviours. There will be some benefits in the south of the CBD, in the centre of CBD and probably some parts of the north of CBD. There will be some growth of traffic in the north and west. What we are doing closely with the City of Melbourne – there was a community event around this effect last night that my team were at – is we will manage and monitor those traffic developments very closely and put in place the local improvements that we need to make to make that work.

I should also add that recently we have just – I think two weeks ago – finished the upgrade of Victoria Street, where we have introduced that level-access tram stop, long overdue and much needed, and also actually improved the flow of both cycling and foot traffic but also car traffic into that area. We will continue to look for those opportunities. Make no mistake, the West Gate Tunnel will have an impact. It will change traffic patterns. I think there will be some significant upsides, particularly in the inner west and parts of the CBD, and there will be some other areas we need to work with over the coming months.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay, thank you. Staying on the topic, my understanding is that the government told local residents they would get \$100 million of street upgrades to mitigate the impacts of the tunnel on the neighbourhoods, yet now the funding seems to be mostly intended to speed up traffic and make it easier for cars to move through West Melbourne. That is quite different to what the community was told. Has the objective of the street upgrade project changed?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I do not think so, Mr Puglielli. Yes, you are right, it is the transport amenity program I touched on – I forgot the number; thank you for providing it. It is a \$100 million joint program funded between us and the City of Melbourne. We each contributed \$50 million to it. \$44 million of that was allocated to the William Street tram works, the bike lanes and intersection design, so I think there have been some wider benefits around that. There are definitely some amenity improvements and also, frankly, trying to manage traffic through some of those smaller streets so they do not go into those heavily residential areas. The works we did back in September, October included a number of significant amenity projects. I do not think it would be fair to categorise this as a ‘speeding traffic through residential areas’ kind of program. It is about managing amenity and making sure that both the tram access improves and the cycling access improves and that we work with the City of Melbourne to get some of the traffic out of those residential areas. There is more money to be spent, so we have agreed with the City of Melbourne that we will review two or three months after the opening of the West Gate Tunnel to see how things are settling down. I am sure there will be pinch points that we need to deal with, and we will work with community around those.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. I might move on. Just looking at the Fitzroy tram corridor, in terms of accessibility upgrades to that corridor, looking at route 86 – I understand they previously received funding for community consultation – can I confirm: have the designs for those accessibility upgrades been confirmed?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I might just check in with my team on this in terms of the work we are doing on the tram corridor. Whilst they find the reference points, certainly in the 2024–25 year, 12 level access stops were delivered across the tram network, and we are starting to see I think some real traction now. The other key part I think of our tram program has been that we now have the next-generation tram in testing at Maidstone depot. Maidstone depot has been completed, and we have got an order book of a hundred of those trams to come through. That will significantly boost the number of level access trams we have operating on the network, so a hundred E-class trams, a hundred G-class trams on order, which will massively improve accessibility to the network, recognising that as a streetcar system it is quite a challenging thing to go and do.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: But that particular corridor, those designs for the upgrades – have they been confirmed?

Dean TIGHE: I have not got anything on the 86, which is my local tram network, but I will endeavour to get back to you on that one, if that is okay.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. That is much appreciated. If you can also provide it to the committee, it would be good to have the date for when the construction is due to start. That would be great.

Dean TIGHE: Yes.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. On another matter, is it correct that only one e-bike-related fire has occurred on public transport this year?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I think that is right. Certainly that is the one I think we are both thinking about, the one that sticks in our mind, which I think was three or four months ago. What we have seen, and we have been talking to colleagues in New South Wales and other states about this, is the nature of the e-bike fleet that is now starting to develop has a number of challenges with it. Whilst we have seen one fire on one metro train so far, we are becoming increasingly concerned with larger e-bikes coming onto the rail network, particularly those used, for example, by delivery drivers and e-bikes which have got adapted batteries on them. The conversations we have been having with colleagues in other states and also with colleagues in the federal government are that we do think there are greater national standards required around the whole e-bike sector. What we are seeing is bikes that are coming in without any quality standards – we are seeing vehicles coming in, bikes coming in that are essentially illegal under existing Australian jurisdiction – but we also do not have the legal mechanism in place at a national level to provide effective enforcement for either our public transport operators or even the police at this point in time. Whilst e-bikes create a significantly positive opportunity about the last mile home, particularly connecting in with the public transport network, they are also presenting a number of quite significant safety hazards in terms of the fire risk around cheap or poorly fitted or too large capacity batteries. Also what we are seeing is an increasing focus on the network impacts of bikes that go above the 25-kilometre-an-hour speed limit and that are unassisted. We have seen some horrific incidents in the last year, both here and in other states, of accidents on the roads either impacting the e-bike riders themselves or pedestrians.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. I will move on to another matter. Just looking to Kensington, can I ask: have the safer bicycle lanes on Macaulay Road in Kensington, the ones that have been approved and budgeted by City of Melbourne, been approved by the department?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I might go to Ms Adamson on this. Certainly the Macaulay Road approvals I think have all been in place. Ms Adamson.

Fiona ADAMSON: As you are aware, tragically a cyclist was killed there some months back, and our condolences to the family and friends of that young man. We are working with City of Melbourne, but they have not actually submitted designs to us for approval.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: They have not submitted them?

Fiona ADAMSON: They have not, no. We are absolutely working with them, and we are waiting for those final ones to be submitted. But we are not holding that up at all.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. I understand there are a number of other roads that have had separated bicycle lanes approved or designs consulted on by the City of Melbourne, but those, as far as I am aware, have not yet been approved by the department. One example is Queensberry Street. Can I ask: has that particular one been approved?

Fiona ADAMSON: I will have to actually confirm that with you. My understanding is we are not holding anything up, like any final approvals up. Let me check that, and we will come back on that.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. That is much appreciated. I would like to confirm another thing: has a direction been given by the department to the City of Melbourne that they not request approval for separated bike lanes until after the West Gate Tunnel has been opened?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Not to my knowledge.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. I will move on to another matter. Initial plans for the new Sunshine hub station – budget paper 4, page 187, if that helps – seem to remove a link for freight trains from the Ballarat line to Tottenham yard and other freight facilities beyond. Can I just confirm: will the existing freight link at Sunshine station be retained?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I might ask Matt Gault to come and join us, as the agency VIDA Rail is responsible for delivering the Sunshine program. Sunshine superhub, as you say, is a huge project on our network. As I

indicated in my opening remarks earlier today, it is about opening up the network to Melbourne Airport rail link, high-capacity signalling throughout Sunshine station and massive expansion for capacity into the west, particularly the routes towards Melton and towards Wyndham Vale. The challenge we have with the freight crossover is that the freight crossover through that area essentially would need to run over a number of high-capacity passenger lines, with 1000 services a day going through there, and the challenges doing that at grade would present, I think, a fundamental obstacle to delivering that piece. That means that installing a grade-separated freight crossover, a big bridge, is challenging and expensive and was not part of the original scope five years ago. I might ask Mr Gault just to add to my comments from an operations –

Matthew GAULT: Just to add to what the Secretary described there, retaining the crossovers at Sunshine would have a very significant impact on the capacity through Sunshine. We are setting up Sunshine to manage about 1000 trains a day, versus today's about 600 services a day. Alternative arrangements have been put in place for freight to access the port, so that is to take the freight down via the Gheringhap connection and up the Werribee corridor to get access to the port. Our immediate works are focused on what work we need to do to maintain the existing freight capacity through that route, and we are working in conjunction with a DTP-led freight working group to examine what the other opportunities are to increase that freight capacity in the future, knowing that the freight industry is very passionate about growing that capacity, and what work we need to do to identify what those opportunities are to grow that.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. I am just going to move on to another matter. I have got quite a few questions – I am sorry. Looking at the former Hoffman's Brickworks site in Brunswick, it is included in the Victorian Heritage Register, yet the brickworks developer has persistently failed to comply with Heritage Victoria-issued orders to repair a chimney on the site. The chimney has been covered in scaffolding since 2021. It has contributed to extraordinary insurance premiums for local residents. I understand since 2023, in June, Heritage Victoria has issued two repair orders, both of which have been ignored by the developer. Can you tell the committee why Heritage Victoria have not prosecuted the developer for its noncompliance?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Thank you, Mr Puglielli. It certainly is a site I am familiar with, but I might ask Ms Peterson just to comment on the process we are on with.

Colleen PETERSON: We are currently reviewing options and seeking legal advice about the most effective way to ultimately result in the restoration of the brickworks. We are very mindful of the tensions between a developer who has not complied with those orders and the impact that that has on the community, and we should have more information on that shortly.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: When you say shortly – this year?

Colleen PETERSON: I would think it would be into early next year, but we can get back to you on that.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you so much. Can I ask, for context: has Heritage Victoria ever prosecuted developers for failing to adhere to various orders such as make-safe or repair orders?

Colleen PETERSON: I will have to take that on notice, but I would be very surprised if the answer was no.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. I will move on to another matter. Can the panel tell the committee: when was the last time that the train station in Richmond was upgraded?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Gosh, I think that is not, in my memory, over the last 10 years, Mr Puglielli. That would be my first answer. We might have to take that question on notice.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. That is much appreciated. It would be good to know also when the last time was that Richmond station was assessed by the department for upgrades.

Jeroen WEIMAR: I might just use this to just talk briefly, if I may, about the work we are doing currently on rail franchising. Obviously we are about to go into the next iteration of the metro rail franchise. We are at the request for expressions of interest stage in that process at this point in time. The metro trains franchisee will take over all 227 stations, now we have added five onto them, and manage that through. Part of that is about the safe and effective management of all the stations, including Richmond station. As we keep adding more services to the network, Richmond is getting a lot more throughput at this point in time. It is very important to

the MCG and the wider surrounding area. We will gladly advise when it was last upgraded, but I would appreciate it is a key area of focus for us.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Moving on, we touched on Arden earlier. The estimates for population growth in that precinct seem to change. What is the current estimate for the number of people expected to live in Arden following the renewal?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I might ask Mr Moseley just to update on that.

Stuart MOSELEY: The Arden precinct – so this is bigger than Arden Central – targets an additional 9500 homes, 20,000 residents and 34,000 jobs. We actually are optimistic that Arden Central will do more heavy lifting, because there is more land now available for residential, so those numbers may go up. The good thing is that because Arden Central is such a large single-ownership site and there are other government landholdings also in Arden we know we can flex where we need to to make sure, if there are more people there, that they get the services and facilities they need in terms of open space and schools and so on.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I might have misheard you. Was there a number in there – the number of people expected to live there?

Stuart MOSELEY: Yes. I will just repeat that: 9500 homes, 20,000 residents, 34,000 jobs is what we are targeting.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. There are some concerns that due to the large costs of infrastructure in that precinct we might end up with just having one developer that builds the whole precinct. Is the department able to rule out that scenario?

Stuart MOSELEY: It depends what you mean by ‘precinct’. When I say ‘precinct’, I mean greater Arden Macaulay, which has numbers of landowners and different developers, Arden Central being one government landholding which is currently subject to the RFP. I am going to ask Anne Jolic to answer that question, because that is a market process and there may not be much that can be said at this point.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Let us maybe focus on that one. For that area, can we rule out a scenario where one developer builds the whole precinct?

Anne JOLIC: It is a competitive process, but our bidders are consortia of multiple developers. So I would say there is no scenario where it is one developer; it is actually consortia with multiple developers doing different types of housing for different types of users.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. That is much appreciated. I might move on. Funding was committed in this budget period to addressing risk of combustible cladding on apartment buildings in Melbourne. Can I get an assessment from the department: how many buildings with combustible cladding have been identified?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Yes. Thank you, because it is a good opportunity to talk about this. The setting up of Cladding Safety Victoria in the wake of some very high profile combustible cladding issues I think has been a real high point in terms of the work that this department has overseen, and that team has done a phenomenal job in acquitting its responsibilities. Stuart, you might have the numbers to hand, or I am happy to bring –

Stuart MOSELEY: I do. The program is an approximately \$740 million grants program overseen by Cladding Safety Victoria. To 30 June 2025 CSV have completed the rectification of 409 private residential and 130 government- or community-owned buildings, and in the financial year 2024–25, 79 private residential buildings were completed.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Is this department confident that all affected buildings have been identified?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Yes, we are. I think that work has been done comprehensively and has been done well. I think the other piece just to add to that is that where these are private developers our focus has been on enabling the occupiers to ensure their cladding is rectified quickly, and that is where the state’s funding has gone in. We are pursuing a number of litigation cases with original developers to try to recoup some of that cost, because ultimately this is a cost that the taxpayer has borne and we are looking to see how much of that we can claw back. But the important thing was to make sure those buildings are safe for the residents who are in them.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Yes. Thank you. Just moving on, in the 2024–25 budget there were various line items related to improving V/Line services. Was any of that funding put towards improving internet connectivity for passengers on V/Line services?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I would need to check with the CEO of V/Line as to how much of that work was committed. Will, could you give advice on that?

Will TIEPPO: Yes. At the moment we are working with VicTrack. VicTrack operates and maintains our telecommunications network. Being a regular traveller on the Geelong line, there are spots where the internet does cut out. All the trains are fitted with receivers. Every train only receives the data from nearby towers. We are working on what that would mean and what infrastructure is required to put some more receiving towers along the corridors. Some corridors perform better than others, but there are some corridors where it does drop out in terms of internet coverage.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. On another matter, can I get an update on the green spine project in central Geelong?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Could you give me a bit more of a clue?

Aiv PUGLIELLI: It is an area that state government assumed control over several years ago. It is to deal with what has been a heavily car-dependent and lacking cycling infrastructure place.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Having spent a bit of time in Geelong a few years ago, this is an area I can visualise quite well. But, Stuart, you might want to just give a bit of advice on that.

Stuart MOSELEY: I am going to have to take that one on notice.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: That is all right. Just looking at a piece of industrial land on the corner of Stubbs Street and Macaulay Road in Kensington, the community have wanted it to be turned into open space for years. It still has not been developed. What is the hold-up?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I would need to take that site on notice, I am afraid, Mr Puglielli. I do not know whether it is a state-owned site. Again, as Mr Moseley indicated earlier, we have a comprehensive approach to a whole number of state-owned sites at this point in time, but we will check our particulars.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Secretary. Mr Hilakari.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you so much. I am lucky last, and then you are free from this space. I am sure we are all looking forward to that. I am going to be following on from the previous questioner on both the West Gate Tunnel and then the Sunshine station superhub, partly because the Chair has got an extreme interest in Sunshine station. Starting with the West Gate Tunnel, we had 50-odd thousand people register to walk through the tunnel. I know some of us here walked through the tunnel on that wonderful day. But in budget paper 4, 2024–25, we committed to seeing that tunnel open in 2025. What do we expect? Are we meeting that objective of that budget?

Jeroen WEIMAR: We expect it to be open by the end of this year. I might ask Mr Elliott, as the CEO of VIDA, to come and join us. Duncan and I were both there on the community open day and walked through part of the tunnel, and it was good to see the welcome reception it had. As I said earlier – I will hand to Duncan in a moment – I think it is a significant transformation of road access from the outer west into Melbourne. Even for those in the inner west I think it relieves a lot of traffic pressure, particularly reorienting the freight industry. As the only integrated Department of Transport and Planning in Australia one of the opportunities we have been seeking is also to look at the implications for industrial land and things like empty container parks, so we are working actively with the freight industry and with developers and industrial sites around how we move some of that land out. Ms Peterson can talk about that if you are interested. But I might go to Mr Elliott first on just the progress of the project and whether it will open by the end of the year.

Duncan ELLIOTT: Thanks, Secretary. The project is essentially complete in terms of construction now. There are some minor ongoing works, particularly around landscaping and completing some architectural lighting fit-outs. But we are in the final stages of testing and commissioning, and we are expecting the tunnel to open before the end of the year. It is on track to do so.

Mathew HILAKARI: Great. I am glad we are hitting that 2024–25 budget milestone. Just further on that, in terms of the opening and day one and that preparation work over the 2024–25 financial year, what works have been done around wayfinding in particular and those preparation works? When we open the gates on day one, there are always some challenges for any large transport piece of infrastructure in people finding their way through, so what work have we been doing in that space?

Jeroen WEIMAR: We might answer this in two parts, Mr Hilakari, both in terms of what the project has been doing. I think those of us who use the roads in the west of Melbourne, coming in via the M80 or on Geelong road, will have seen the changes to traffic layouts. I should say we appreciate the patience of the community both in the local area and road users in the area, because it has been a complicated and challenging project to build, and the change of road layout has been one part of that. But I will also ask Ms Adamson just to talk through how we manage the opening of the tunnel and the road network and the dynamic management of road network. Mr Elliott, could you maybe just talk through the broader wayfinding approach we have taken?

Duncan ELLIOTT: One of the advantages we have with the West Gate Tunnel is that sections of the project have progressively opened. Having what we call collector–distributor aspects of the West Gate Freeway now in operation, having Wurundjeri Way open and having people experience the change to date means that when we get to actually opening the tunnel it is less complex but nonetheless still a big change. One of our key pieces of work has been to work with the digital map providers to ensure that on day one they are operational and they are set up. You will notice in Google Maps now it is shown as a closed red-dotted line corridor, but on the opening night that will progressively release.

Mathew HILAKARI: Not like the old *Melway* – you do not need to update your *Melway*. That is a reference for everyone at home who is above the age of 45.

Duncan ELLIOTT: That is right. I think it is really important that, whilst we have done an enormous amount of education and one-on-one sessions and we have had the simulator out at all the major events in Melbourne over the last 12 months, and Victoria for that matter, it will take time for people to get used to it and to understand how their travel patterns benefit or whether they stay on the existing network and take the benefit of the reduced traffic on the West Gate Bridge, for example. But we would say that it is going to take some time for that to bed down, for people to get used to it. We saw that with Wurundjeri Way – the first couple of days very low traffic volumes. Towards the end of the first week we had seen a fivefold increase in the amount of traffic using that corridor.

Jeroen WEIMAR: I might just ask Ms Adamson to talk through the traffic management operations around all that.

Fiona ADAMSON: Thank you. My team have been working closely with the project and also with Transurban. You might know we have got the transport operational centre, which is situated at Ringwood. This group is getting really ready to monitor the network, just like we do at the moment on our arterials, and be able to make real-time signalling changes when we need. They have actually done a whole piece of work in a program around the signalisation upgrades and changes required for this. We will have people monitoring from in there and people out on the ground as well having a look, really ready to respond to what is going on with traffic short term but also looking at if there are any long-term tweaks we need to make as well. I should say we used the Wurundjeri Way extension opening as a bit of a practice run for that, which went really well. That was a good practice run for us to make sure that we have got the right eyes on everything, again working with the project and working with Transurban, VicPol and the City of Melbourne to make sure we are ready.

Mathew HILAKARI: It is great to hear there was a fivefold traffic increase over that week. I expect the tunnel is going to get some good usage. You were saying, Secretary, earlier that 25 per cent of traffic coming across the West Gate Bridge at the moment will be diverted potentially. That is enormous. What other benefits are there of the West Gate Tunnel opening?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I think in particular, Mr Hilakari, it gives options to those of us coming from the wider west into Melbourne.

Mathew HILAKARI: We will not be stuck behind a truck which has broken down on the West Gate Bridge.

Jeroen WEIMAR: That is right. There will be a lot less of that. But also, again, as I discussed earlier in the conversation with Mr Puglielli, it is around the opportunities too to get swifter and easier routes, particularly for a lot of the traffic going north. I think what some of our traffic modelling is indicating is that there is a lot of traffic currently going over the West Gate Bridge and then it is heading north on the Bolte and north onto the Tulla. Again, this will provide a bypass around that most congested part of our network and really simplify the traffic movements in that part of the city. But also for that traffic that is coming into the south of the CBD, whether they are working their way up through a number of those roads and access points like Harris Street, it will enable them to go straight to the northern part of the city and onwards to their journey. It will spread the load, and I think that is a really important part of it for those road users.

But for freight in particular, it is about faster, swifter, more reliable travel times, particularly in the Port of Melbourne. The geography of the West Gate Tunnel – Mr Elliott might not agree – but to me, to a layman’s eye, is quite a complicated road network that we are creating, because what we are really doing is providing lots of dedicated freight routes in and out of the port and in and out of some of those key industrial sites in and around that part of Melbourne. It is a really important piece of supporting the onward growth of the Port of Melbourne, and it is the introduction of a number of truck bans on roads in the inner west where currently we have got a lot of freight movements coming out of the Sunshine area and working their way through the backstreets of the inner west and then trying to get onto the West Gate Bridge. We will introduce those no-truck zones to ensure that that traffic either goes through the West Gate Tunnel or over the West Gate Bridge, and that includes the curfew on Williamstown Road to minimise that disruption to residential communities in that part of Melbourne.

Mathew HILAKARI: Are we having a quality engagement with those truck operators and transport operators in the area? Are we having a high level of education campaign to make sure that they are aware of those truck bans and those limitations?

Jeroen WEIMAR: There has been extensive engagement with the freight industry over the whole length of the project right from its inception, but especially over the last six months or so there has been the need to both engage with the freight hauliers but also those key industrial sites, particularly in the inner west and the port, around understanding how the West Gate Tunnel is going to operate, how they rearrange their travel patterns, the benefits in terms of timesavings and the predictability that they will get from that, but also recognising there is a tolling system in place. There is a toll on the West Gate. There is a toll on the West Gate Tunnel for freight and there is a toll on West Gate Bridge for freight because we are trying to ensure they take the best and most efficient route, not just the cheapest route. So there is a lot of engagement that we have been undertaking through really the last six months. Some of those conversations have been quite challenging, but I think we have now got solutions for all of our key industrial sites in the inner west and, overall, a much better outcome for the industry.

Mathew HILAKARI: Those freight operators provide a great amount of jobs across Melbourne, but also the tunnel itself and the West Gate Tunnel project created a lot of jobs. Particularly referencing the 2024–25 year, what were the sorts of numbers of jobs that were generated during this project and ongoing as we go?

Jeroen WEIMAR: If I look at the freight industry in Victoria as a whole, because I mean all the work around the port and all the trucks we see currently moving in and out of the Port of Melbourne are all delivering produce and products for all across the state – it is not a Melbourne story, it is a Victoria story. The freight industry on its own supports around \$336 billion worth of economic activity for the whole state. It is about 6 per cent of our gross state product. It supports directly about 240,000 jobs just in the freight sector. I mean, it is a hugely important part of what Victoria is about. We have got the largest port in Australia by bulk tonnage. We support the entire Tasmanian economy, as all the freight from Tasmania goes through the Port of Melbourne. So it is a critical state asset, a I think the ability to do this is important.

But it goes more widely, because the work the department has been doing over the last few years around supporting high-productivity vehicles – i.e. bigger, heavier trucks – we see 10 times as many of those on our network now as we did six or seven years ago. We have been able to simplify their access to the road network, and by the upgrading work we have done on the arterial network, they can now access 40 per cent of our arterial network. And we are simplifying the permitting system; that means it will become an online automated system from the beginning of next year. So there is a lot of work in this to support the freight industry, and the West Gate Tunnel is probably the most symbolic, critical piece of all of that.

Mathew HILAKARI: I might move on to the Sunshine station superhub, because I know the Chair would not forgive me if I did not talk a little bit about that. I am hoping you can talk through some of the changes, particularly with reference to 2024 and 2025 and that real planning phase that was in at that point in time and that is ongoing, and what some of the project attempts to do, but particularly how it relates to the Melbourne airport rail as well.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Yes. Thank you, Mr Hilakari. Again, I might do this in two parts with Mr Gault, whose team are delivering the Sunshine superhub works within the rail corridor, but also Mr Mosley in terms of the wider work we are doing with the community around the broader Sunshine precinct. Sunshine superhub is a next key puzzle piece in the development of the Melbourne and broader Victorian rail network. What Sunshine will start to become, is becoming and will now become is a critical north-west hub for our entire rail network. So it enables services coming on the Geelong corridor, the Ballarat corridor, the Bendigo corridor; those passengers will be able to travel through Sunshine but also interchange at Sunshine to go straight onto the Metro Tunnel corridor, straight onto high-capacity Metro trains on the corridor. It enables us to continue that Melton line upgrade work that we have been doing. Currently we are working that through in delivering nine-car VLocity trains there for early next year. What this will allow us to do is to then continue that program at a future stage with electrification of Melton and to expand the high-capacity Metro train network all the way out to Melton, to those fast-growing suburbs. But as you said, it is a key pivot point onto Melbourne airport rail because it opens up the capacity for that whole interchange to bring Melbourne airport rail to the network. Mr Gault, with that introduction, I might give it to you to talk through any more details of the project. Thank you.

Matthew GAULT: I think the Secretary described the benefits very well. It is a complex area of the network connecting the Metro Tunnel through to Sunshine, and then Sunshine connects into 80 per cent of V/Line's network, as well as important corridors.

Mathew HILAKARI: And it is not just Sunshine itself, it is a large length of track which is getting separated out.

Matthew GAULT: Correct, yes.

Mathew HILAKARI: I am hoping you could maybe reference out some of that as well.

Matthew GAULT: The work that we are doing – we refer to it as untangling the network – extends from West Footscray all the way to Albion, and we will be also delivering the Albion station renewal as part –

Mathew HILAKARI: That is a massive usage of track for Melbourne's west. It is huge.

Matthew GAULT: It is about 6 kilometres. What happens through there at the moment is that there are a lot of the track crossings. Where trains move between the regional rail tracks and the Metro Tunnel tracks, the tracks cross at grade, so like a normal, conventional intersection. So a very significant amount of the work we are doing is what we call rail-to-rail flyovers to avoid and effectively take what are road network intersections now and move them to a freeway capacity. That is a significant part of what we need to do to get that increased throughput from 600 trains a day, up to a thousand trains a day, through Sunshine, so a lot of works to separate rail with bridges and retaining structures. But importantly, we are creating two new tracks. So we move the regional tracks across further to the western side of the Sunshine station itself and create a new path for those tracks. That frees up the space in the middle, where the existing regional tracks are on platforms 3 and 4, to become the new dedicated tracks that will service Melbourne Airport to the east and out to Melton to the west.

Mathew HILAKARI: Can you just talk about the electrification of the Melton line and how that fits in with this set of works?

Matthew GAULT: To set up for Melton electrification, there is a whole sequence of works we need to do. The electrified trains that will service Melton are the Metro Tunnel trains. Melton, when the electrification is completed, will connect through Sunshine and into the Metro Tunnel through to the eastern side of the state, so there will be really good connection there. We are extending the CBTC signalling, so the high-capacity signalling that runs through Metro Tunnel will be extended out through Sunshine and out to Melton. So setting up those dedicated two platforms and that connection is the start of building out to Melton.

There are other works we are doing at the moment. You are probably aware we are doing the Melton line upgrade, which is increasing the capacity on the trains there by 50 per cent, going from six-car trains to nine-car trains. That will be operational by 2027. But as part of that project, we are also setting up the stabling for those nine-car trains at Cobblebank, which is the correct location to convert. When the Melton electrification gets completed, we will convert that to electrified stabling, and that is where we will stable the HCMTs that will service the Melton corridor.

Mathew HILAKARI: Great. So we are building it for now and for the future usage on that line. I am just hoping you could talk about some of the disruptions for people who are travelling through that 6 kilometres of track throughout that Sunshine upgrade. What is that going to mean for passengers, both those who are out in Melton and those who are closer to town?

Mathew GAULT: Obviously that work is getting completed between now and 2030, so it is quite a long period of time. When we run our disruptions, we always have alternative services available. The actual disruptions around the Sunshine area will be broken into probably three or four major commissioning events over those four years, so there are not going to be extensive, long-term, wholesale disruptions to any of the rail services. They will be consistent with the sort of work we do now, where you see two, three –

Mathew HILAKARI: We have done so much work on our rail lines over time that we are getting pretty good at avoiding some disruptions.

Mathew GAULT: Yes. Certainly the replacement bussing is a very effective operation now. We are trying to come up with more innovative ways to do that to keep people on trains wherever we can and to make connections if we are able to. If we have got to close the regional rail lines, we can keep Sunbury open and we can bus people across the corridor to get them onto a train quicker and directly into the city.

Mathew HILAKARI: Great. I might move on to road safety investment now, Secretary. We had \$1.1 billion spent in 2024–25 on the *Road Safety Action Plan 2*. There is going to be a total of, I think, just over \$410 million into that over time. I am just hoping you can talk to what that sort of investment means for road trauma and the preventative work that goes on as part of that investment.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Thank you, Mr Hilakari. Look, I think that the road toll remains an area of real concern for the department and for all of us. So far this year 261 people have lost their lives on Victoria's roads, and that is a shocking figure that we deal with. We have seen a similar trend happening across the whole of Australia, with a high level of risk-taking behaviour in particular and changes in some societal patterns which have led to higher levels of trauma upon our road network.

We launched a 10-year road safety strategy in 2021. It is a partnership between us, Victoria Police, obviously the TAC – and our colleagues from the TAC are here with us today – our justice team and the Department of Health, recognising there are so many aspects to road trauma, with the impact and the burden that it puts on different parts of the state.

With the \$1.1 billion investment over that three-year program from 2024–25 to 2027–28, about \$350 million of that is around a critical road safety infrastructure program, including road safety cameras. We have got a joint investment around a whole series of road safety projects with the Commonwealth, with around \$260 million there, where we are sharing that load with the Commonwealth.

We are particularly also working with local governments. There is a \$210 million program around the safe local roads and streets program, recognising that this is happening in our local communities, and local governments are active participants in that. Again, we really value the work we do with local government to address some of those particular risks in their areas. The school crossing supervisor program, with over 3000 school crossing supervisors across the state, is again providing that really visible way to get our children safely into school.

As well there is the work around our medicinal cannabis closed-circuit track trial. We are really trying to understand, as a world first: what is the implication of medicinal cannabis, does it impact driver behaviour, and how do we manage and assess that safely? It is a really great bit of research, and I think it will be increasingly important not just to Victoria but to other bits of the country. There is a whole lot of work we are doing in that particular space. But this all holds around also trying to understand better some of these issues around behaviour, because we see a number of key factors that are driving into the road safety tolls. We see alcohol

and drugs. We are still in a world where 62 per cent of drivers who die on our roads have some level of alcohol or drugs within their system. Speed is a massive issue. That is why the enforcement partnership we have with Victoria Police and the department of justice is so important. Attention is so important – and seatbelt wearing. Many of us take it for granted that these are key elements, but we still have a ways to go to ensure that all members of the community are really focused on the act of driving, safety for themselves and for those in the vehicle with them and, crucially, the vulnerable road users out there on the network.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you for that. I am just going to take us to the parliamentary inquiry into vulnerable road users and just looking at how the road safety action – I will leave it for next time.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Apologies, Mr Hilakari. Secretary and officials, thank you very much for appearing before the committee today. The committee is going to follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses, Secretary, are required within five working days of the committee's request.

The committee is going to take a break before beginning its consideration of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action at 1:30 pm.

I declare this hearing adjourned.

Witnesses withdrew.