

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2026–27 Budget Estimates

Melbourne – Monday 18 May 2026

MEMBERS

Sarah Connolly – Chair

John Pesutto – Deputy Chair

Jade Benham

Michael Galea

Mathew Hilakari

Lauren Kathage

Aiv Puglielli

Richard Riordan

Meng Heang Tak

WITNESSES

Gabrielle Williams MP, Minister for Transport Infrastructure;

Jeroen Weimar, Secretary, and

Adam Maguire, Deputy Secretary, Network Design and Integration, Department of Transport and Planning;
and

Duncan Elliott, Interim Director General, and

Matt Gault, Chief Executive Officer, Rail, Victorian Infrastructure Delivery Authority.

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

I begin by acknowledging the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land on which we are meeting, the lands of the Wurundjeri people. We pay our respects to them, their elders past, present and emerging, as well as elders from other communities who may be here with us today.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2026–27 Budget Estimates. The committee's aim is to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for the Victorian community.

I advise that all evidence taken by the committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, comments repeated outside this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard, and it is broadcast live on the Parliament's website. This broadcast includes automated captioning, so members and witnesses should be aware that all microphones are live during hearings and anything you say may be picked up, 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 and other committee members.

I welcome the Minister for Transport Infrastructure the Honourable Gabrielle Williams as well as officers from the Department of Transport and Planning. Minister, I will invite you to make an opening statement or presentation of no more than 10 minutes, after which time the committee will ask you questions. Your time starts now.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Thank you, Chair. I wish to start today by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we are currently gathered, the Wurundjeri people, and pay my respects to their elders, past and present.

Visual presentation.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Chair, our transport infrastructure program has always sought to support a growing Victoria and help Victorians get where they need to go faster and more reliably. Since coming to government, we have invested in a carefully sequenced pipeline of projects to ensure our communities stay connected and livable as our state continues to grow. I am pleased to appear before the committee today to provide an update on our infrastructure program and on our ongoing investments in preparing for and responding to future growth.

Next slide, please. This past year we delivered two major infrastructure projects: the Metro Tunnel and the West Gate Tunnel. These projects were both designed to remove choke points on our transport network and give Victorians more options to move easily across the state, and this is what we have seen since they both opened late last year. We have also reached significant milestones in a number of other projects: 89 dangerous level crossings have now been removed, and these projects have improved road and rail travel in local

communities but also transformed local amenity through the delivery of more modern infrastructure and green space and also through delivering better active transport connections.

We have also completed our regional rail revival programs, with the delivery of the Gippsland and Shepparton line upgrades, which have enabled more frequent and reliable services for Victorians across our state. Finalisation works to upgrade Warrnambool stabling to house VLocity trains were also completed earlier this month. The regional rail revival program has delivered 20 new and upgraded stations, hundreds of kilometres of track and signalling improvements, new and extended stabling facilities, and safety upgrades at more than 150 level crossings.

The more accessible Ballarat station recently opened as well, with passengers now able to use the overpass rather than leaving the station to change platforms. We have completed the Epping Road upgrade, with 4 kilometres of extra lanes in each direction, upgraded intersections and better walking and cycling connections, making it easier to access jobs and services, including in the Epping activity centre, and supporting housing and business growth in the Wollert area.

Next slide, please. We continue to have a significant number of infrastructure projects in various stages of development and delivery. On the rail side, we continue to remove level crossings to achieve our target of 110; a further nine level crossings are currently being removed and another 17 are in the planning phase. The Melton line upgrade, which will enable us to run nine-car VLocity trains to Melton, is in full flight, with platform extensions at Caroline Springs and Deer Park stations already completed and Rockbank and Cobblebank stations underway.

The Hopkins Road, Truganina, level crossing has been removed as well, and a further three at Coburns, Exford and Ferris roads in Melton will be gone in the coming months. Construction is underway on the new stable yard at Cobblebank. The new Melton station, along with the Mordialloc, Boronia and West Tarneit stations, is set to open over the course of this year. Melbourne Airport Rail, otherwise known as MAR for those familiar, stage 1 of those works has commenced between West Footscray and Albion, with designs for two new, modern and accessible train stations at Tottenham and Albion released just yesterday. I know that this has been a source of great excitement for the Chair. The project will untangle one of Victoria's busiest rail junctions and transform the Sunshine station precinct into a transport superhub, allowing up to a thousand trains per day through the corridor, including metropolitan trains to Melbourne Airport Rail and of course paving the way to a future electrified Melbourne line on the roadside.

Next slide, please. On the roads side, we have works underway on projects right across our state. Tunnelling is nearing completion on our North East Link project, which will fix the missing link in our city's freeway network and take about 15,000 trucks off local roads. Major construction is underway in Wyndham Vale, Armstrong Creek, Point Cook, Clyde North and Wallan as we deliver our road blitz to get families home sooner and safer across some of Victoria's fastest growing communities. And as part of our \$1.2 billion road blitz program, pre-construction works will shortly commence on the Donnybrook Road, Calder Park Drive and stage 2 of the Mickleham Road upgrades, a critical phase that sets the groundwork for major construction to progress. In this budget we have committed additional funding for stage 2 of the Donnybrook Road upgrade and to deliver the vital duplication of the Western Highway between Buangor and Ararat, which is set to commence later this year. Works are nearing completion ahead of schedule on our Ison Road and Pakenham Road packages, with communities no doubt looking forward to the faster, safer and more reliable journeys that these unlock. And we are continuing to plan and develop a further 15 road projects, ensuring we are keeping pace with growth and building the network Victorians need well into the future.

Next slide, please. We are also investing to continue preparation for future upgrades to our network, with investments in the final steps ahead of contract award for the delivery of works to electrify the Melton line, including securing power supply and engagement with delivery partners on finalising detailed designs, delivery schedules and costings; finalising a program business case for upgrades to the Upfield, Craigieburn and Seymour lines to ensure that investments in this corridor are appropriately sequenced and can deliver benefits as soon as possible; and finally, planning for the upgrade of our ageing signalling assets to ensure our network can remain safe and support increased services as we continue to grow. That concludes my presentation.

The CHAIR: Very good, Minister. Still 4 minutes to go; ahead of time already. The first round of questions is going to the Deputy Chair.

John PESUTTO: Good morning, Minister. Good morning, officials. Minister, when did you first become aware of allegations Schindler Group had falsely claimed around \$6 million for allegedly damaged Metro Tunnel equipment that was never replaced?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: What budget paper reference, Deputy Chair?

John PESUTTO: Budget paper 4, but do we really need a budget paper reference? This is the Metro Tunnel.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: I am just following protocol, Deputy Chair; I am happy to answer your question. The issue that you relate to – and I may get Duncan Elliott here to supplement my remarks in regard to action taken by VIDA at the time – my understanding is the allegations came to light in November, I believe, last year, 2025, and VIDA then made a referral to Victoria Police. I now understand that Victoria Police are investigating that matter, which is appropriate. I also understand that the workers concerned in that incident have been stood down and that the moneys were repaid, but I will pass to Duncan to add any comments to that, given that it was VIDA that made the original referral.

John PESUTTO: I might come to Mr Elliott in a moment, if that is okay, Minister. I just want to go back to just a bit of the timeline here. Can we confirm for the Victorian people you became the Minister for Transport Infrastructure on 19 December 2024. Is it your evidence to this committee that you were never told, never given written advice or in any other way informed that there had been a \$6 million fraud perpetrated on the Victorian people at any time prior to the *Age* newspaper revealing this scandal in its masthead?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: As I just outlined, Deputy Chair, the referral was made by VIDA, which was around the time I would have also become aware in November last year. And VIDA, Duncan just tells me, became aware in October of the issue. A referral was made at that time – that would have been the time that I became aware of issues, and I have now become aware that Victoria Police have progressed the investigation into that matter, which I think is appropriate.

John PESUTTO: Minister, do you think it is reasonable for the Victorian people to ask just what is going on when you, as the minister, were not made aware of such a scandal, with such a large amount of money being defrauded from the Victorian people? Is it plausible that you could not have known? And what does it say about the systems you were overseeing as the minister responsible for tens of billions of dollars worth of public infrastructure that Victorians rely on and are paying for?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: To be clear, Deputy Chair, I believe I was notified by VIDA in very close temporal proximity to the time that they were made aware of the incident. I also want to make it absolutely clear we have zero tolerance for criminal or corrupt conduct on Victorian government sites, which is why we have worked to progress a very comprehensive reform package that goes from everything from supporting the federal administrator in its important work as well as establishing our own inquiry through the Wilson review, implementing all of its recommendations and going beyond that to also bring in the expertise of John Merritt to look at what else we could do to strengthen our response. We have not stopped since these allegations came to light in mid-2024, and we will not stop.

John PESUTTO: I can agree, Minister, that you will not stop, because you have not started. That is what I would put to you. Can I clarify for the Victorian people: you first became aware of what Schindler had done through its dishonest employees and obviously poor practices in October 2025?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: VIDA have informed me that they became aware in October 2025. The referral was made in November, and my recollection is that I would have been made aware at around that time.

John PESUTTO: The referral to?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: To Victoria Police. Victoria Police were notified of the situation, and I now understand Victoria Police are investigating. I think that is appropriate given, as you have outlined, the severity of the allegations and the significant amount of money involved. I am also aware that the workers concerned in that matter have been stood down and the money was repaid.

John PESUTTO: Minister, can I just clarify: were you advised in writing or in person or both of the fraud?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: I cannot recall exactly how I was notified, Deputy Chair. We can come back to you on that. But I was notified that an incident had taken place, the nature of that and that a referral had been made. It was very important to me that a referral was made because, as we continue to remind any person with allegations, it is critically important that referrals to the appropriate authority be made, because that is how we are going to ultimately stamp out this sort of conduct. Also –

John PESUTTO: So, Minister –

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Sorry, can I also just go to this, because this is a very important point to make: subcontractors on all government sites are a matter and a decision and a choice of the head contractor.

John PESUTTO: No, I put it to you, Minister, that is wrong.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Government funds –

John PESUTTO: I think it is a matter for you as the minister and the government. That is what I put to you.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Government funds major projects –

The CHAIR: Excuse me. I am going to stop you there, Minister. I am looking at the time. It is 8:43. You are starting to get slightly disrespectful, Deputy Chair.

John PESUTTO: No, I am not. This is a scandal.

The CHAIR: Deputy Chair, the minister is genuinely answering your question and has evidence the committee needs to hear, so please, for the grace of the community, stop talking over the top of her. Minister, if you would like to continue.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Thank you, Chair. It is an important point, Deputy Chair. It really is. Government funds the delivery of major projects that we deem important for our community not just today but for generations to come. We contract with head contractors, who then have the responsibility for determining how that work is carried out and for bringing on their subcontractors to deliver that work. Now, they must do that, and our expectation is – and we reiterate this frequently – that they do that in accordance with the law and to the highest standards of integrity.

John PESUTTO: Minister, can I then put it to you: if that is the case – and I would disagree with you; for the record, I would state that it is your responsibility and the responsibility of government. But I put that to one side.

The CHAIR: Deputy Chair, that is irrelevant to the report and inquiry at hand.

John PESUTTO: Can I ask my question?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: We do not employ workers on jobsites.

John PESUTTO: Minister, when you first learned, whether it was verbally or by way of a written brief, did you pick up the phone and refer the matter to Victoria Police? Prior to you being advised, your own Premier, the Premier of this state, had told the Parliament many times that matters should be referred to the Victorian police as soon as they come to hand. Minister, why did you fail to refer the matter to Victoria Police as soon as you heard it? Did it not arouse in you, as a minister and as a Victorian, absolute disgust and dismay that this had happened? Why didn't you refer it to Victoria Police?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: With all due respect, Deputy Chair, it was referred to Victoria Police.

John PESUTTO: Not by you.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: As I have outlined, VIDA – and I am happy for Mr Elliott here to explain what VIDA's role is – have a critical role in contract management of our contractors and a responsibility to refer matters that come to them. They have the direct relationship with our contractors, as our delivery agency, and that is appropriate. When I was briefed on the issues the referral, to my knowledge, had already been made. The information had already been passed on.

John PESUTTO: But why didn't you make it, Minister?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Because it had already been passed on. I ensured, as I always do, and I want to make a –

John PESUTTO: You and the Premier and other ministers have made a virtue of saying 'people should refer the matter'. If a minister of the Crown is not prepared to do it, who else will?

Members interjecting.

The CHAIR: Excuse me. Members will come to order. Deputy Chair, did you have a new question that you wished to ask? The minister has repeatedly answered your question.

John PESUTTO: I will refer to Mr Elliott now. Mr Elliott, when did you and your agency first become aware – the very first time – that a fraud had been perpetrated?

Duncan ELLIOTT: I was not in the role at the time, but I am advised that the agency was advised in October 2025 by the Cross Yarra Partnership, which is the consortium in charge of the Metro Tunnel. They had conducted an investigation at that time, and they had referred the outcomes of their investigation to us. We then took that information and referred that to VicPol in November 2025.

John PESUTTO: Mr Elliott, to the extent that you can answer it, as a matter of policy, do you accept that there must have been a major failure, admittedly before the time when you took on the role, of the agency to have in place proper procedures so that the existence of an investigation was brought to the attention of the agency itself and the minister and the government?

Duncan ELLIOTT: What I would say to that is that the main thing, from our point of view, is that as soon as CYP became aware of it, they took steps to understand what had occurred and then took steps to rectify the situation, terminate the staff members involved and recover the funds. They then provided that information to us, as the agency responsible for the project, and that information was then passed on to VicPol.

John PESUTTO: And to your knowledge, Sir, is Schindler still involved in any contract work in any capacity for the Victorian government either directly or through consortia?

Duncan ELLIOTT: I would have to take that on notice.

John PESUTTO: But it is possible they still are?

Duncan ELLIOTT: It is possible, absolutely. As the investigation –

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

Michael GALEA: Ms Kathage.

The CHAIR: Ms Kathage. Apologies.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Chair, Minister and officials. I am referring to budget paper 4, page 13, and specifically the North East Link, which it states there is in 'peak construction'. I am just wondering if you can give us a bit of an overview and an update on the North East Link.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: I sure can. Thank you, Ms Kathage, for your interest in this incredibly important project. It is Victoria's largest ever road investment and, as I said, the missing link in our freeway network. It connects the M80 ring-road at Greensborough to the Eastern Freeway at Bulleen, closing that longstanding missing link, removing significant numbers of trucks off local roads and improving congestion through that area for the benefit of generations to come – and improving travel times too, and I will hopefully get a chance to talk about that. We are over 80 per cent done with the tunnelling. TBM1, which is otherwise known as Zelda – you may be familiar with the practice of naming our TBMs after significant women typically, and Zelda is named after Zelda D'Aprano, for anyone who is interested – that tunnel-boring machine is powering to the finish line, which is fabulous news. On the Eastern Freeway we are also powering ahead. In the last 12 months we have seen new pedestrian bridges in place at Heyington Avenue and Estelle Street that have been lifted into

place and opened. We have also seen the first of three mega lifts, dropping a massive beam that will form part of the new interchange with the tunnels at Bulleen, and that progress is very visible for those who traverse the Eastern Freeway frequently. It is really setting a cracking pace.

There has also been huge progress at Doncaster Road interchange, with a new bridge over the freeway at Doncaster Road, moving traffic onto the new bridge and enabling the demolition of the previous, old structure. There has also been construction progressed on the new multilevel Doncaster park-and-ride. Noise wall installation is well underway along the freeway, particularly in Balwyn North, Mont Albert North and Box Hill North, and the project is well and truly on track for completion by the end of 2028.

Lauren KATHAGE: For my constituents in Doreen it is going to make a big difference getting home, and I know everyone is looking forward to the lights being removed at the end of the ring-road. Those benefits for road commuters – I mean, there must be hundreds of thousands of people who will use it daily.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: That is right. Commuters are indeed the big winners of the project, but they are also not the only ones who will benefit from the projects. I am happy to give you a run-down of those key benefits for drivers, though. North East Link is estimated to cut travel times by up to 35 minutes for motorists travelling between Melbourne's northern and south-eastern suburbs. If you are going from the M80 interchange through to, say, the Eastern around Bulleen Road, you can expect a 35-minute travel time saving compared to the project not existing. That of course also means a lot of cars using the tunnel, which means Rosanna Road will see something like a reduction of approximately 12,000 vehicles per day and Greensborough Road a reduction of approximately 19,000 vehicles per day. Motorists could see a total travel time saving of up to 11 minutes on the Eastern Freeway between Springvale Road and Hoddle Street, and that will be due to additional lanes, including new express lanes and better on and off ramps getting rid of some of those existing bottlenecks that cause commuters so much pain.

Melbourne's first dedicated busway, the eastern busway, will also deliver faster, more frequent and more reliable trips from Melbourne's eastern suburbs into the city, and recent upgrades along Hoddle Street, which introduced those 24/7 clearways for dedicated bus lanes between the Eastern Freeway and Victoria Parade, will also ensure efficient bus trips into the city once they come off the freeway. The busway, most importantly, will provide reliability, meaning that if you are on the bus in peak hour or at midday, you can know that the journey time will be similar to at other times. And as you pointed out, yes, hundreds of thousands will use the NELP link when finished, something in the range of up to 135,000 vehicles using that new freeway daily, a hugely important addition to our road network here in this state and one I think that, again, along with the rest of our transport infrastructure priorities, really demonstrates our focus on making sure that we are building for the future and, with that, contributing to the economic growth of our state as well.

Lauren KATHAGE: What about for locals living around the new alignment?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: For the locals on the alignment itself we will get some of the toughest noise wall standards that exist in our state – I think it is 63 decibels daytime and 58 at night – and there is going to be, as I said earlier, about 15,000 trucks taken off local roads. Many of the local streets – I highlighted Rosanna Road earlier – will see a huge reduction in vehicles using those roads. Building on those commuter benefits, residents and suburbs along the alignment, particularly in Rosanna, but also in Greensborough, Bulleen and Heidelberg, will also see significant reductions in heavy vehicles and through traffic volumes as trips shift onto that new link, and community parklands, which we approximate to be the size of about five MCGs' worth, along Banyule Creek, Borlase – I hope I am pronouncing that correctly – Reserve and Greensborough Road, are being turned into effectively a 2-kilometre tree-lined boulevard. There are also two new landscaped bridges at Watsonia Road and Elder Street connecting locals to the Watsonia station and shops, and a new multideck car park at Watsonia station. There are also new and upgraded paths for Koonung Creek Reserve and the Valda wetlands, and down the south end there is a green bridge over Bulleen Road. Upgrades to Koonung Creek Trail include a new connection under Doncaster Road for better access to Doncaster park-and-ride, and a wider, brighter connection under Doncaster Road between Koonung Creek Reserve and those wetlands that I referenced earlier.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you. A fun fact: one of the head engineers that I have met there, his grandfather designed Parliament House.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Is that right?

Lauren KATHAGE: Yes, but there are lots of benefits relating to jobs on the North East Link. Are you able to talk us through some of the other workers there and benefits for them?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Sure. Thank you for the question, and it is an important one, because our Big Build agenda, while setting us up for growth in the infrastructure it develops, has also been one that has supported tens of thousands of jobs but also a skills pipeline for Victoria that will ensure that we can continue to build the projects of the future. The North East Link is supporting on its own about 12,000 jobs, and about 8000 of those workers are currently active on the various sites across the project. Specifically, there are more than about 10 million work hours by trainees, by apprentices, by cadets since 2016 under the major projects skills guarantee and I think about 6.5 million hours worked by First Peoples on the projects as well, really highlighting our focus on ensuring that we maximise the benefit of these projects for as many Victorians as possible and making sure that we are also developing a really strong skills base that will serve us well into the future.

North East Link has provided job opportunities for more than 640 annualised employee equivalent of apprentices, trainees or cadets, as I outlined, who have worked millions of hours across our state to date. And across the North East Link Program there have also been roughly around 850,000 hours worked by First Nations people, about \$243 million spent on First Nations businesses as well and close to \$350 million invested in social procurement activities, again, which are about ensuring that we can spread the benefits of our investments as far and wide as possible to make sure that we are giving opportunities to people, we are allowing them to learn skills and trades and get experience that not only benefit them as individuals and businesses but also benefit our economy by ensuring that we have got the right skills pipeline to continue to contribute to the infrastructure that we are going to need both now and into the future. That includes of course, in addition to the groups I have mentioned, thousands of hours being worked by other categories of priority jobseekers, ensuring that they can be engaged in meaningful employment. It is something I think that is important to reflect on in government investment and infrastructure. It is so critically important for a growing state to make sure that we are improving people's movement, and that is what these projects are all about, but while we are there also providing opportunities. And if you are not committed to doing that, then you are effectively committed to sending our community backwards and sending our economy backwards. The opposition would seek to do that, but Labor is unashamedly committed to making sure that we prepare for the future, and that includes providing opportunities for people that contribute to their prosperity.

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

Jade BENHAM: Thank you, Chair. Morning, Minister.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Morning.

Jade BENHAM: I do want to ask some more questions for some clarity around the Metro Tunnel fraud. When you became aware of the issues occurring, did you inform the Premier?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: We have in place – and it is really important we highlight this – a strong expectation, which we have been bolstering with mandatory reporting requirements, that if incidents occur onsite our contractors and any other person who has information have an obligation to refer that. The incident –

Jade BENHAM: But did you refer it to the Premier, Minister? I am not asking about onsite. When you were briefed, did you inform the Premier or the Premier's office?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: I ensured it was referred to Victoria Police to ensure that it could be adequately investigated, which is what is now taking place. That is the most –

Jade BENHAM: So you did not feel like the Premier's office needed to know?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Look, I can come back to you about whether we notified the Premier specifically on that issue.

Jade BENHAM: You do not know whether you informed the Premier's office?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: What I prioritise, Ms Benham, is making sure that our agencies that have responsibility for ensuring integrity on our sites, whether it be Victoria Police, whether it be Fair Work, whether it be other integrity agencies, are aware and can investigate so that we can clamp down. Now, the Premier and I are on a unity ticket on having a zero tolerance for criminal or conduct –

Jade BENHAM: How can you be, if you are not informing her?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: That is not what I said, Ms Benham, and I would really appreciate you not putting words into my mouth. What I am explaining to you is the priority that any minister worth their salt would have when these sorts of allegations arise, which is ensuring it goes to the agencies that can act. Victoria Police –

Jade BENHAM: Okay. I am going to ask a question on that. Mr Elliott, when you first became aware – the fraud occurred in October 2024, and it has been stated that you became aware of it in October 2025 – did VIDA conduct any internal investigations?

Duncan ELLIOTT: No. As I said earlier, CYP, which is the consortium we engaged to build Metro Tunnel, became aware of the issue themselves. They then conducted their own investigation.

Jade BENHAM: When did they become aware of it?

Duncan ELLIOTT: I am not aware of that at this moment. As I said, I was not in the chair at the time, but I understand during the course –

Jade BENHAM: Surely it would be documented somewhere, though.

Duncan ELLIOTT: Well, as part of their investigation it would have been documented, but the important thing here is that they conducted an investigation. Schindler, as an organisation, as a subcontractor, also conducted an investigation. Both those investigations were briefed in to us in October 2025, and we made the referral then in November 2025 to VicPol.

Jade BENHAM: So it took 12 months to conduct those internal investigations by the different companies.

Duncan ELLIOTT: Well, as I said earlier, I am not sure exactly when they became aware of the issue, because they picked it up themselves after the event. They discovered it, and they launched those investigations off their own bat.

Jade BENHAM: Okay. Are you able to tell me when the Premier or the Premier's office was first informed of these issues?

Duncan ELLIOTT: No, I cannot tell you that. What I can say is that our job as VIDA is to ensure that under the information-sharing protocols that were established as part of the Wilson review, when matters of significance in relation to conduct on worksites is understood, then it is referred to the appropriate body, and in this case we referred that to VicPol.

Jade BENHAM: Will you provide the committee with all the documented timelines and correspondence between yourselves and Victoria Police so we can understand a clear timeline of when it was first uncovered, when it was first referred to Victoria Police and when the Premier's office and the minister were first informed, because at the moment it is not very clear at all.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Ms Benham, I am a bit curious as to what is not clear. Both myself and Mr Elliott have explained when the matter was first raised by the contractors with VIDA, and then the process that immediately took place then to refer to Victoria Police.

Jade BENHAM: What exact date, Minister? Could we have some exact dates?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: As we have said, the contractors – it was CYP in this case – notified VIDA in October –

Jade BENHAM: What date in October, please, Minister?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Look, we can find that out for you, Ms Benham, but October –

Jade BENHAM: Could you supply the committee with that on notice, please, Minister?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: and then the referral to Victoria Police was made shortly after in the November, and –

Jade BENHAM: On what date in November, Minister?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: I have now become aware that Victoria Police are investigating. That is the critical timeline here, and I think what is most important is that there is an expectation that any matter or any allegation that goes to criminal or corrupt conduct on government sites gets appropriately referred. Now, we have reiterated that to our contractors – our expectation that all worksites be conducted in accordance with the law and to the highest standards of integrity and that reporting is a critical part of that. We have made it –

Jade BENHAM: Exactly, which is why we would like exact dates for our report into this board, which reports were not made until 12 months after. The committee, for the basis of this reporting into budget estimates with taxpayer money, require exact dates, not thereabouts. If we could please submit that to the committee on notice.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Ms Benham, we have made it, as a part of our reform agenda, easier for our contractors and others with information to report; we have strengthened the powers of, for example, the Labour Hire Authority; we have created a dedicated police taskforce to investigate these sorts of allegations; and we continue to roll out reforms that are about ensuring we can stamp out poor conduct where it exists. We have –

Jade BENHAM: And you will not offer clarity and give us exact dates and correspondence of when the fraud occurred, when referrals were made and when investigations started to occur.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: We have indicated that a referral was made in the November last year –

Jade BENHAM: What date, Minister?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: and that the police are currently investigating. The critically important fact here is that an allegation of criminal conduct took place and –

Jade BENHAM: The critically important fact is that there is still zero transparency into this fraud, why it took 12 months and the exact dates in which things rolled out. The taxpayers deserve a little bit of transparency here, Minister. Surely you can understand that.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Ms Benham, with all due respect, it is a live police investigation. Everybody has their role to play in this, and elected representatives are not akin to Victoria Police in the roles that we play. This matter sits with Victoria Police. It has been referred –

Members interjecting.

The CHAIR: Order! Members are to come to order. The minister is answering the question.

Jade BENHAM: Were any other integrity agencies informed, Minister, including IBAC?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: I would have to refer to VIDA on the extent to which they referred and where they referred to at that time. I know Victoria Police was certainly in that list, if Mr Elliott could supplement that.

Duncan ELLIOTT: It was Victoria Police, that is right.

Jade BENHAM: And not IBAC?

Duncan ELLIOTT: No.

Jade BENHAM: Why?

Duncan ELLIOTT: Because this is a case where the investigation that was conducted by CYP involved its subcontractor, Schindler. It did not involve public servants. It involved a subcontractor of CYP, and therefore it was a matter for Victoria Police, in our view, rather than IBAC.

Jade BENHAM: So IBAC do not have the powers to follow that money?

Duncan ELLIOTT: No, that is not what I am saying. I am saying that our assessment at the time was that VicPol was the agency responsible for criminal investigations, was the appropriate referral body, and that referral was made in 2025, as we said.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: And, Ms Benham, also highlighting that the money was returned.

Jade BENHAM: Wouldn't you think it would be appropriate, though, for the anti-corruption commission to investigate corruption on Big Build sites with taxpayer money? You would think that would be the commonsense pathway, would you not?

Duncan ELLIOTT: Well, I think, as the minister said, the police are currently investigating the case, and if there is genuine fraud to be uncovered as part of that investigation, then then they will be the agency that will apply the charges.

Jade BENHAM: Genuine fraud – the money has been paid back, didn't the minister say?

Duncan ELLIOTT: It has.

Jade BENHAM: So clearly there was fraud occurring to the point where \$6 million needed to be repaid. How many police members are currently investigating Big Build fraud and corruption? Are you aware?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: That would be a matter for Victoria Police. We do not direct the operations of Victoria Police.

Jade BENHAM: Eighty-eight charges, and for a police force that is well under-resourced, you would think that IBAC would be given some powers to actually investigate. Minister, I want to go to Women in Construction and that company. When did you, your department or your office become aware of who the management team was at Women in Construction?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: In terms of the issue of Women in Construction, since I came into the portfolio in late 2024, the first time I became aware of these matters was I think on 8 May, which is when I was notified by VIDA. I understand that the allegations that have been aired in the media in recent days were alerted to VIDA, I believe it was, on the 7th. VIDA notified my office on the 8th, and that is –

Jade BENHAM: 2025 or 2026?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: This is this year, just prior to those allegations being aired in the media.

Jade BENHAM: So you had no idea who the management were?

The CHAIR: We are going to go to Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Good morning, Minister, Secretary and officials. Minister, I would like to turn to budget paper 4, page 75, specifically the initiative on the road blitz to get families home sooner and safer. Could you talk to me about what is expected under this initiative in the budget, Minister?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Yes, I sure can. Thank you, Mr Galea. I know that you are a very passionate advocate for the projects that particularly serve our fast-growing communities, given where you represent. The Allan Labor government has a strong history of investing in and delivering major road infrastructure upgrades in outer suburban growth areas and in regional Victoria to cut congestion in some of our busiest corridors, to improve safety for commuters, pedestrians and cyclists and to make the lives of Victorians easier. The road blitz to get families home sooner and safer is a notable example of that and is one part of our more than \$11 billion investment into road upgrades. In 2022 we committed to upgrading several key arterials in some of Melbourne's fastest growing suburbs, including in Wyndham Vale, Armstrong Creek, Point Cook, Clyde North and Wallan. It has been full steam ahead since then. All projects announced as a part of that program are in major construction, and there are many exciting milestones to celebrate on the horizon with those projects. For example, construction works on the Ballan Road intersection upgrade in Wyndham Vale kicked off in January. As a part of that project we are making it safer and easier for locals to drive, walk and cycle through Wyndham

Vale by removing one of the area's busiest roundabouts and replacing it with new traffic lights at the intersection of Ballan, Greens and McGrath roads, fully signalling the existing intersection at the southern end of Ballan and McGrath roads, and building new pedestrian crossings. There is a priority bus lane for one of the busiest bus routes in Wyndham and about 800 metres of new walking and cycling paths as well. When it is complete next year it will genuinely change the way locals get around, better connecting them to schools, services and local businesses.

In Armstrong Creek the second stage of the Barwon Heads Road upgrade has entered its peak construction blitz, having recently completed the upgrade to the eastern leg of the Boundary Road intersection, which opened earlier in May, with a temporary roundabout in place to safely manage traffic flow while works continue at the Parkfield Boulevard part of the intersection. There is plenty happening, and we have had a lot of very positive feedback from the local residents about how efficient and how well managed those works are in being delivered.

In relation to Point Cook – I know the Member for Point Cook is here on the committee today – it is one of the fastest growing communities in Victoria, it will be one of the fastest growing in the country, no doubt, as well. The growth in that community really highlights the importance of the Point Cook Road and Central Avenue upgrade. It has had a strong summer start, with construction starting in early January to replace the old roundabout with a fully signalised intersection, build a new outbound exit ramp that loops under the Point Cook Road bridge, build new lanes and pedestrian crossings and also upgrade nearby footpaths as well. We have also got the Thompsons Road and Berwick-Cranbourne Road intersection upgrade –

Michael GALEA: Hear, hear.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: you are well aware of that, Mr Galea – in Clyde North, which is full steam ahead, and the two vital projects in Wallan, being the Watson Street interchange upgrade and the Northern Highway intersection upgrade as well, where major construction works also kicked off in January of this year. All of these projects are on track for completion next year.

Michael GALEA: Indeed. And the Clyde Road and Thompsons Road upgrade is a massive, massive improvement, as is the Clyde Road upgrade through Berwick itself. I know Ms Kathage wants to ask a bit more about one of those projects.

Lauren KATHAGE: Yes. I was just going to say, Minister, as someone who represents a growing community, I think we have got a Big Build project in every corner of my electorate. We are really keen to see the everyday reality of the benefits of all those projects – Yan Yean Road, Donnybrook Road. With the Wallan ramps or Watson Street interchange in particular, I use that road every day, so I know how much people want to see it come on. How do those sorts of projects fit into the bigger picture of Victoria's road network?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Thank you for your question and for your advocacy for the roads in your community, Ms Kathage. I know it is a significant challenge, meeting the growth that is occurring. The road network is a really important part of how people enjoy their everyday lives, and you speak to me about that frequently, so I want to acknowledge in particular your advocacy on those matters.

Melbourne's outer northern suburbs are booming, as you well know, and with an expanding population we are delivering infrastructure upgrades to support people to get to where they need to go faster – and safer of course, as well – and providing better access to those key connector routes like the Hume. The Watson Street interchange upgrade is building two new freeway ramps, one outbound and one inbound, completing the full diamond interchange that will make access both to and from the Hume a much quicker and hopefully more pleasant journey for locals as well. The Hume as, as you will well know, is one of the nation's most significant national highways. It is a key connector between Melbourne and Sydney, but also, importantly, it is a crucial corridor that is central to linking new employment and housing areas for so many growing regional towns. The works at Watson Street go hand in hand with a number of other projects that we have invested in and are delivering in the outer northern suburbs – for example, the Northern Highway upgrade and the Donnybrook Road upgrade, which we just announced additional funding and scope for. They are very important examples of that, but also, for example, the upgrades at the Northern Highway's intersection with Watson Street will open up capacity for traffic heading to and from the Hume as well. At Donnybrook works will transform that roundabout at Donnybrook Road and Mitchell Street. I know you are very familiar with this project. It will

transform that into a fully signalised intersection and build a new bridge over Kalkallo Creek and now also a second bridge over the Hume as well.

Lauren KATHAGE: Hallelujah.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: We are also duplicating Donnybrook Road between the Hume interchange and Dwyer Street, which will significantly reduce peak congestion and improve traffic flow – something I know locals in your community are very eager to see and which, again, you have been a very big advocate for. These upgrades are not just standalone projects; they work together and they build on the benefits of one another to strategically build a much bigger picture and transform Melbourne’s northern arterial road network. Together they will reduce congestion, and they will deliver better safety outcomes and enhance connectivity for the growing local communities in Kalkallo, Craigieburn, Mickleham, Donnybrook, Wallan and Yan Yean. By combining new freeway access in Wallan with arterial road improvements, like those that we have delivered through the Epping Road upgrade, which was completed in November last year, as well as the works currently underway on the Northern Highway or those at Donnybrook Road, which is the next project in that strong delivery pipeline to move into construction, commuters can expect to experience significant improvements in terms of travel times, reduced congestion and new access points across the broader region.

Lauren KATHAGE: We are very excited. We cannot wait to see it roll out.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Minister. If I can now pivot to some other major projects, including ones that are completed, budget paper 4, pages 4 and 6, talks about projects such as the Metro Tunnel and such as the Level Crossing Removal Project, which is still underway as well, particularly as these have of course a statewide benefit but also a direct benefit for my constituents in the south-east of Melbourne. Minister, we have seen the Metro Tunnel open and go into full service on 1 February this year with the big switch and indeed as well with the level crossing projects well underway, including right now in Mordialloc, which I know to say the Member for Mordialloc is exuberant and excited about is probably an understatement. Minister, could you please talk to me about these projects and how, as you referred to in your presentation as well, the government is delivering these projects successfully?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: What was your budget paper reference there, sorry?

Michael GALEA: Budget paper 4, pages 4 and 6.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Thank you very much for that question. Would you like me to start with the Metro Tunnel? Because that is what you initially referenced. Would that be your best starting point?

Michael GALEA: Yes, that would be great.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Excellent. It is one of the most transformational projects for this state and one I know the community has really embraced and will no doubt continue to as it settles into our rail landscape. Your constituents and many others in fact, not just in the south-eastern suburbs but around our state, have been reaping the benefits since the tunnel opened late last year. It is so much more than the 9 kilometres of track that goes under our CBD and those five brand new beautiful stations, as gorgeous as they are. It has given the Cranbourne, Pakenham and Sunbury lines their own tunnel. It has freed up capacity in the city loop to enable more services over time – and for me, that is the real story of the Metro Tunnel, the reason for that being that the city loop was jammed effectively. It was full, and the problem with that is that you cannot keep adding services unless you add the Metro Tunnel.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We are going to go to Mr Riordan.

Richard RIORDAN: Thank you, Chair. I want to just go back quickly to one of the topics we touched on earlier. Ms Benham tried to clarify it, and I will seek one more clarification. The official report to Victoria Police in November 2025: Mr Elliott, you said you reported what you thought was fraud. Was that report to police an allegation of criminal misconduct by the Schindler company that needed to be investigated? What format or what allegation did you put to Victoria Police?

Duncan ELLIOTT: Under our information-sharing protocols we provided basically a summary of the outcomes of the investigation that both Schindler and CYP undertook as part of that information-sharing

regime. It would not be appropriate for me, given it is under investigation, to say too much about what was in that referral, other than to say that it was referencing the work that both of those organisations had undertaken to investigate the case, and that was then referred to VicPol.

Richard RIORDAN: Right. Without giving away what you are not allowed to, can you confirm that you gave to police claims of criminal misconduct?

Duncan ELLIOTT: What we gave to police were the outcomes of the investigation that CYP and Schindler had undertaken.

Richard RIORDAN: So you have copies of those investigations?

Duncan ELLIOTT: Our team would have copies of those investigations, at least in part, yes.

Richard RIORDAN: And the minister has been privy to those reports?

Duncan ELLIOTT: I do not believe so.

Richard RIORDAN: So you have a major fraud on what is the government's signature project, and you have not briefed the minister on those claims?

Duncan ELLIOTT: No. The minister was briefed, as she said, but what we referred to VicPol was a summary of the outcomes of the investigations that both of those organisations –

Richard RIORDAN: So the minister has seen those summaries?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Not to my recollection.

Duncan ELLIOTT: No, the minister –

Richard RIORDAN: Once again I ask the question: we have got a major fraud on a signature project, and the minister has not seen the allegations of what they are.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Mr Riordan, if we could go back to first principles, we have very clear obligations that if there are allegations of criminality or misconduct on government sites, they be appropriately referred to the relevant agency. Our delivery agency VIDA oversees and manages the relationship with our contractors, and when these issues arise it is typically VIDA that will become aware of those issues. Contractors will sometimes refer directly. At other times VIDA will make the referral to the agencies that can then investigate – in this case, Victoria Police. When that happened – and in this case when they became aware and the referral was made – I was also advised that there had been an issue. I was given the details of that insofar as what the alleged conduct was.

Richard RIORDAN: So you do have the details of the misconduct.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: I was given the information of what it related to. And what we consistently do and our number one priority is to make sure that the referral is made to the appropriate agency. We need to have great confidence –

Richard RIORDAN: Okay. I understand that, Minister, but there is actually something much greater than your capacity to refer to the police, and it is called the Westminster system, which requires ministers to take ultimate responsibility for their departments. You are telling me that you get a report of a multimillion-dollar fraud, on top of a series of frauds that we know is up to \$15 billion worth of fraud, and you do not have enough interest in the details of that fraud.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: No. My responsibility, Mr Riordan, is to make sure that that is referred to Victoria Police. It is an allegation of very serious criminal misconduct. The police are best placed to investigate that and work out whether any charges –

Richard RIORDAN: Yes, but you are the responsible minister. Don't you want to know?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: And as a responsible minister I need to ensure that it is referred to the agency that can progress that investigation. Mr Riordan, I am not a member of Victoria Police, and I do not have the responsibilities of Victoria Police –

Richard RIORDAN: You have the responsibilities of the state.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: but I have great faith in the work of Victoria Police.

Richard RIORDAN: You have the responsibilities of the state.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Which is why it is my responsibility to make sure that those matters are referred to the appropriate agency, including Victoria Police. You may not have great faith in Victoria Police, Mr Riordan, but I do.

Richard RIORDAN: We are not questioning. We are questioning your capacity as a minister.

Now, next question please, Minister – my questions. Minister, the next question I have for you is on the women in construction issue, another example of where we seem to have to involve the police to sort of keep government projects on track. Minister, you are also the minister for women and responsible for that, and I refer to your public statements, still up online, dated 23 July, where your number one achievement as minister for women is that Victoria's major road and rail projects are providing opportunities for women in traditionally male-dominated roles, through programs including women in construction. Now, as we know, Women in Construction is also the name of a company that fulfils the government's outcomes in that area. I can only assume, Minister, as the minister for both construction and the portfolio, that you will have met the owners and operators of that company, perhaps Wayne Carter and Luke Ellery. Is that a fair assessment?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: No, Mr Riordan. That is not an accurate assessment at all. I am not –

Richard RIORDAN: So you have never met the people that provide the signature program to both your portfolios?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: To my knowledge, Mr Riordan, I have not. I am happy to go back and check my diaries from prior to having this portfolio, if that is what you require. But Mr Riordan, can I just clarify something: are you asking this question in my capacity as Minister for Women and Girls or my capacity as Minister for Transport Infrastructure –

Richard RIORDAN: No, as minister for transport. I am just pointing out that –

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: because you are conflating two portfolios here, and I am a little bit confused.

Richard RIORDAN: No, I am not conflating them at all. I am bringing to your attention that in your role as a responsible minister, you will have more than likely come across the people that provide to your infrastructure build a signature part of this government's program. The aptly named Women in Construction is a government program, and it is also a major provider of labour services to your infrastructure program. Is that correct?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Mr Riordan, no. I think you are drawing quite a long bow there. Can I make one comment very clear. The allegations that have come to light in recent days about Women in Construction are appalling and distressing. I was not briefed about Women in Construction, the entity, in terms of the matters that were reported until my office was notified on 8 May of the show cause notice that had been issued to them by the Labour Hire Authority. And I am advised that VIDA were notified on 7 May this year by the Labour Hire Authority that Women in Construction were issued that show cause notice.

Richard RIORDAN: Minister, I am not after your timeline. The question I am trying to raise here is about your capacity as minister to ask the relevant questions and make yourself aware of the situations of your portfolio. Now, a cursory glance at the internet will list a mile long of allegations and court cases and violence against women against a signature program that you are running. Of course, because you do not take that detailed advice you do not know about it is what you are saying. You did not know until Nick McKenzie from the *Age* rang you last Thursday. That was the first you had heard of it. And yet a signature program that you put as your key achievement – your key achievement – you had no knowledge of. No-one in your department spoke to you. Mr Weimar did not notice. Mr Elliott did not notice. No-one noticed that these guys are crooks

and gangsters and taking advantage of women, something that should be so close to your heart – and I do not for a minute question your commitment to that cause. Nothing was noticed. I mean, we have got a pattern of behaviour here, Minister, where unless it is written by Nick McKenzie on the front page of the *Age*, your government, you as a minister and your senior bureaucrats never look into anything. You never look.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Mr Riordan, I would appreciate it if you did not verbal me or seek to put words in my mouth, because I do not think that is in the spirit of a good exchange in this very important forum of PAEC. I have outlined to you when I first became aware of the issues that related to Women in Construction and the action that has then been taken by the Labour Hire Authority. My understanding is now that the licence of Women in Construction will not be renewed. As minister, I have set very firm expectations since coming into this role in late 2024, several months after the ‘Building bad’ allegations came to light, that it has been my number one priority to implement a reform agenda that stamps out this conduct to make it abundantly clear, in partnership with VIDA, to all of our contractors that they have a responsibility to operate their worksites in accordance with the law and to the highest standards of integrity, and to do all we can to make reporting easier, to make reporting mandatory.

Richard RIORDAN: A google search – seriously, Minister.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We are going to go to Mr Tak.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Chair, Minister and officials. Minister, I just would like to follow on Mr Galea’s question. I am really interested in investment in south-east rail infrastructure, in particular the level crossing removals. I refer to the ‘Department Performance Statement on page 145, which demonstrates that the government is successfully meeting 100 per cent of its milestones for the 2025–26 financial year as part of the delivering of the Level Crossing Removal Project. Minister, can you please explain the exceptional progress and advise what milestones were achieved?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Thank you, Mr Tak, for your very important question. The government is removing, as you know, 110 dangerous and congested level crossings, and 89 of those are already gone. You referred to the departmental performance statement and the Level Crossing Removal Project quality measure in that statement tracks the government’s progress in meeting our project milestones for the 2025–26 financial year. So that reflects two critical performance metrics for the Level Crossing Removal Project, assessing whether our projects are delivered to agreed annual budgeted expenditure and the scheduled program of level crossing removals for the financial year.

For the 2025–26 financial year the Level Crossing Removal Project is recorded as on track to achieving 100 per cent of its milestones to agreed budget and timelines, and that outcome means that the Victorian government is on track to achieve perfect budget and time performance for this financial year on that project. The Level Crossing Removal Project milestones achieved so far for the 2025–26 financial year are the Calder Park Drive in Calder Park and of course the Watsons Road and Diggers Rest projects. I am pleased to advise that as of today the government has also successfully removed the dangerous and congested level crossing at Hopkins Road in Truganina on time and on budget. We are also on track to close out a further two level crossing removals and make Mordialloc level crossing free in just a matter of days, and that is at Station Street, Aspendale, and McDonald Street in Mordialloc. From my viewing of the Member for Mordialloc’s social media, he has got quite the countdown going on to celebrate the removal of those level crossings, which I know is a source of great joy not only to him but for his community.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Minister. I cannot help myself too in terms of the removal at the Clayton train station where the boom gate, the ping, ping, pings –

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Yes, it made a huge difference.

Meng Heang TAK: It has made a huge difference to the local community but also to the Monash hospital’s emergency services along the way.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Yes, that is right.

Meng Heang TAK: Minister, joining your electorate, also on the Cranbourne and Pakenham lines, I refer to budget paper 4, page 6, the Cranbourne and Pakenham lines, which travel through my electorate and yours, are

now completely boom gate free. What are some of the benefits for passengers and motorists in my electorate and across Victoria?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Thank you, again, for an important question and one that is close to my heart, being on the Cranbourne and Pakenham line as well, with my own community benefiting from the multitude of works that are being done along that line and watching the improvement to services on that line since this government's investment. You know all too well, Mr Tak, the negative impact dangerous and congested level crossings have on community safety, but also on connectivity and journey times. Although it is a thing of the past, that Centre Road, Clayton, level crossing used to be, as you have outlined, this unavoidable daily feature for constituents travelling through your electorate, which is why I am so proud that in 2018 we successfully removed that level crossing by elevating the rail line overhead. It was delivered as a part of the Caulfield to Dandenong level crossing removal project, which removed nine level crossings. It also built five new stations, including of course the new Clayton station, which has settled in nicely to the local community there. But of course we have also gone further than that. As of October last year we have removed all level crossings on the Cranbourne and Pakenham lines. That amounts to 27 sets of boom gates – every single one consigned to the dustbin of history, which I think we would all be very pleased about.

But we did not embark on this critical infrastructure project for the sake of it. The Level Crossing Removal Project delivers really significant benefits for not only rail passengers but also motorists and workers who worked on those projects as well. As a result of the project we have reduced collisions and near-misses between trains and vehicles by almost 80 per cent, preventing 112 of these incidents annually. Every morning peak there are 58 less hours of boom gate downtime, and 54 new and upgraded stations have been delivered. We have got 20 MCGs worth of open space created so far, including 4 million new plants and about 30,000 trees; 70 kilometres of shared user paths and over 3500 bike parking spaces have been built; 8300 new car parking spaces have been constructed; and 6000 jobs have been created over the life of the project, with about 112 million hours worked so far.

As you can see from all of this, the Level Crossing Removal Project is a very important contributor to our economy and to that skills pipeline that I talked about earlier, but it is also critical to delivering safer, easier and more convenient journeys for passengers. Despite the commitments of the Liberal–National coalition to cancel all infrastructure projects and not have an agenda going forward, we are not going to stop delivering the projects that we know Victoria needs and that ultimately contribute to the livability of our community.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Minister. You also mentioned the car parks for commuters. I refer to budget paper 4 on page 155, which makes it clear that the government has successfully completed delivery of the statewide car parks for commuters program. Minister, can you please confirm how many new and upgraded parking spaces were delivered on the Cranbourne and Pakenham lines and what this means for accessibility for our transport network in the south-east?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Thank you, Mr Tak. The Allan Labor government made a commitment to Victorians that we would deliver 21,000 new and upgraded car parks at train stations across both metro and regional Victoria. I am pleased to advise that since my last appearance before this committee, our government has delivered on this commitment, in total, 10,000 new and upgraded spaces delivered through the Big Build, and 11,000 have been delivered through the car parks for commuters program. This investment has been delivered, as I said, through that car parks for commuters program, with support, though, from the Albanese Labor government and some local councils too. In relation to the number of new and upgraded parking spaces specifically on the Cranbourne and Pakenham lines, we have delivered 2540 new and upgraded car parking spaces along this important corridor. As the member is well aware, providing commuter car parking is a really critical aspect of our government's priority of making our public transport network more accessible for all Victorians, particularly in some of Melbourne's fastest growing outer suburbs. Free commuter car parking means locals only have to drive that short distance to catch the train, particularly for accessibility reasons, if they do not have other options. Not only does this reduce congestion on our local roads, but it also helps to lessen the impact of rising petrol prices, giving people that choice to catch public transport and having the services and the infrastructure that ultimately facilitate that choice.

With the free public transport initiative that we introduced now extending to the end of May and then half-price fares funded to the end of the year, these new and upgraded car parking spaces are a critical part of facilitating that safer, easier and more affordable travel for all Victorians, as are our investments over time into better bus

services across much of Victoria, which is particularly around facilitating better connection points to train stations and really promoting that integrated public transport network that is the objective of every jurisdiction investing in its public transport system.

The car parks for commuters has not just meant new and upgraded car parking spaces, it is also about improving the safety, convenience and accessibility, as I mentioned before, of public transport. That is why the program has also been focused on delivering more accessible car parks. There are about 450 new and upgraded accessible spaces, more than 700 new bicycle hoops, 18 Parkiteers, two new bus interchanges and things like upgraded lighting, upgraded CCTV et cetera.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Thank you, Minister.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Tak. Mr Puglielli.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Good morning, Minister and officials. Just to start us off, I will go to budget paper 4, page 152, 'Metro Tunnel readiness', and also 'Department Performance Statement', page 186, on the same project. There were several wider network enhancements to the tram network that were descopeed from the Metro Tunnel project, including a 300-metre link along Park Street and a corner linking Elizabeth Street to Flinders Street. The previous minister had indicated that planning was ongoing for a Park Street tram link, but no word on Elizabeth Street. Can I confirm: are these links still planned to proceed?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Just bear with me, Mr Puglielli. I did have something specific on Park Street with me. Related to Park Street and the plans there, we did not make changes to the current South Melbourne tram configuration as a part of the Metro Tunnel project. I think that is right. While this was a part of the original funded scope, a decision was made to effectively wait for the tunnel to open to assess the changes to travel patterns on the tram network resulting from that new piece of infrastructure, that station obviously being critical, because I think it is now the world's largest tram-train interchange in the world.

While outside of the scope of the Metro Tunnel project, we are continuing, as per your question, to investigate future transport options in that Anzac precinct, including the potential for the Park Street tram link. A Park Street tram link could connect Anzac station to Clarendon Street in South Melbourne and improve the travel options, for example, to the west of the CBD, and planning for tram infrastructure for Park Street and other projects is effectively ongoing. We will continue to work with the City of Port Phillip and other key stakeholders to ensure that those future designs consider nearby projects. That includes proposed bike lanes and important considerations like minimising impact on local residents, considering also of course they have been through quite a bit of disruption with the construction of the tunnel in that area. But I think now that the Metro Tunnel is opening and we are getting more of a sense of how people are using not only the tunnel as a whole but the separate precincts that have been created as a part of it, we will be able to continue to monitor the tram network too to better understand how travel patterns are changing around Anzac station and that St Kilda Road precinct in particular and to get community feedback as to what those future network changes need to look like. It is always a risk if you go too early on these things and you miss a fundamental shift in the way people move and you miss an opportunity too to genuinely improve. On that particular set of earmarked changes it was determined that it would be best to wait and let the new infrastructure settle in before then working out what would best meet the needs of the local community in any further work on the tram network there.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay, thank you. Just to make sure I have understood correctly: they had previously been scoped, they were then descopeed and we are hearing now about the current status post the tunnel opening. Should I take from what you have said – are they still planning to proceed, or is there a question as to whether they proceed at all?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: I think there is a recognition that there will likely be further work needed to be done. It is just the nature of that and what that needs to be to be able to facilitate movements that take into account the way people have changed their modes of transport. Probably more are taking the train now from Anzac than may have been previously. This is just an opportunity for us to see really what needs to be done, evaluate that and then determine what those next steps are.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: So for that evaluation, is there a timeline you can give the committee? Is it going to conclude over the forward estimates?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: I am happy to hand to my Secretary here, who might have more context for some of that planning or may wish to refer it on. But we are still early days since the opening of the tunnel, and I think we are still waiting for some of the patronage patterns to settle to get an idea of exactly what would be required, which I think then sets us up to be able to do some more detailed planning about what the tram changes would need to be to facilitate that change. Secretary?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Yes, if I could just add to your comments, Minister, in this current budget, 2026–27, there is \$76 million invested in ongoing tram development and tram planning. I think we recognise that with the Metro Tunnel we have now got, what, 60,000 people a day using the Metro Tunnel stations, which are also on the world's busiest tram corridor, so we are interested in seeing how those patronage shifts happen. You will recall a few years ago when we were doing the development work for Metro Tunnel we introduced tram route 58 again to enable those more westerly routes through the CBD, and we will continue that development work over the coming years.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay, thank you. I might move on to another matter just with the time I have left. Currently there is a plot of VicTrack-owned land along Moonee Ponds Creek in Kensington. It is known as Macaulay Terraces. It was supposed to be turned into parkland. It is currently behind chain link fences. Can I get a confirmation of the status of negotiations between government, VicTrack and City of Melbourne regarding transfer or acquisition of land required for those terraces to become open space?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: We may have to come back to you on the status of that particular project, if that is okay, Mr Puglielli.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Yes, that is okay. That would be appreciated, thank you. In that case, I will move on to the West Gate Tunnel – budget paper 4, page 5, box 2. Before the West Gate toll road was built the state government promised the people of North and West Melbourne they would spend \$100 million, half being from state, half being from council, for a transport amenity program to do things like traffic calming in West Melbourne and prevent the huge impacts of thousands of cars and trucks being funnelled onto local streets from the toll road. Can I ask how much of that initial \$100 million of TAP funding has actually been spent to date?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Sure. First and foremost, there has been significant investment, both ahead of the West Gate Tunnel opening in terms of some of those key local intersections and making sure that traffic flowed correctly. I think there was also some effectively set aside to see how the traffic settled post the opening of the West Gate Tunnel to determine whether there were further works that were required. I might hand to the Secretary now to talk about some of those considerations in the expenditure of that funding.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Thank you, Minister. Yes, as you say, Mr Puglielli, there was a joint fund between the City of Melbourne and the state government of \$100 million; \$76 million of that has been committed to traffic works, particularly in that Hawke Street corner north-west of the CBD. What we have agreed with the City of Melbourne and the local community is that we want to see how the West Gate Tunnel traffic patterns settle down in that part of the city, and I am pleased to report that actually we have seen a very strong flow of traffic through that area. We are now continuing to work with the city council and local community around the final measures we want to take in that area. I expect that work to be done over the next six months or so.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. Thank you. Can I ask: how many transport amenity program projects affecting North Melbourne, West Melbourne and Docklands remain uncompleted following the opening of the West Gate Tunnel?

Jeroen WEIMAR: As I said, at the moment my understanding is we have committed \$76 million of that \$100 million budget. I do not have the project breakdown in front of me, but I can see what information is available.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: There was in advance of the opening of the tunnel, I believe, works to about half a dozen intersections that needed to be completed in order to facilitate best movement post completion of the tunnel. That is just to supplement the Secretary's remarks. Again, further work is being done now, monitoring how it has changed the way people move and what further work may be required.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. I will move on to the North East Link – budget paper 4, page 15. The urban design and landscape plan – there was a new wildlife crossing under Lower Plenty Road between Borlase Reserve and Banyule Flats. I understand that has now become a rope bridge across the road, proposed at Lower Plenty Road, Yallambie. What was the plan here for that change? Why did that happen?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Mr Elliott may be able to supplement my remarks here, but as a part of the urban design and landscape plan process there was a wildlife crossing that was marked on I think it was the 2023 UDLP design, after some consultation. We have not, to be clear, removed the wildlife crossing. I know that has been a feature of some of the commentary around this, but the question has been about how we do it. As you have identified, the preference has been for an overpass corridor now – and that has been based on expert advice – selected for things like possums and other climbing species, based on ecological advice and design assessment of that area. Mr Elliott might like to supplement.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Can I just check, though: if we are talking about things like possums climbing over, where do the kangaroos go? How does that work?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: I will pass to Mr Elliott, who may be able to supplement the thinking and the advice that was received in order to land on that conclusion.

Duncan ELLIOTT: Yes. Certainly the predominant movement of wildlife in that area was those that are going to be using the wildlife crossing over the road – the bridge. The strategy is to avoid kangaroos being anywhere near the road and the intersection in particular.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: How does that happen?

Duncan ELLIOTT: Through other controls north of that location.

The CHAIR: Apologies. I am going to go to Mr Hilakari.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you, officials, for your attendance this morning. We have got the pleasure of your attendance for a little while next – at least some of you. I would like to take you, Minister, to budget paper 4, page 4, around new stations and the Metro Tunnel. Obviously five new stations have opened up. I think they are amazing additions to this city, and I think anyone who has used them would agree with that. I am just hoping you could update the committee on how many new and upgraded stations we have delivered through Victoria's Big Build and how many more we have got to go.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Thank you for the question, Mr Hilakari, and for being such an enthusiastic believer in the Metro Tunnel project and its brand new stations, as well as many of the stations we have had –

Mathew HILAKARI: I am not a gunzel, but I do appreciate it.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: But you are getting there. Everybody is a gunzel in waiting, as far as I am concerned. You just have to find the right project to excite you enough or to become the minister for transport – that helps as well. As referenced in my previous comments around the Metro Tunnel – and I will start there in particular – this project represents the biggest transformation of our rail network in more than 40 years. As a part of that, as you have outlined, we have delivered five new world-class underground stations a year ahead of schedule, of course those being Arden, Parkville, State Library, Town Hall and Anzac. Since the opening of the tunnel what we have seen is Victorians getting to know those new stations for, what, about six months now, and I think it is safe to say that the community have recognised these as kind of new local landmarks. Not only are they independently beautiful, but they have also completely reshaped the way that we move and travel around our city.

Investment in modern, safer and more accessible stations, though, as you have rightly outlined, is not just happening as part of the Metro Tunnel project. Those stations represent only five of a total of 93 new and upgraded stations that the Allan Labor government has delivered through our Big Build. We have also delivered 47 new and seven upgraded stations through the Level Crossing Removal Project; four new stations, three rebuilds and 13 upgrades through the regional rail revival; 10 through the Sunbury line upgrade; three through the regional rail link; the Frankston line; and the Ballarat station upgrade delivered through our

network improvement program as well, which as I outlined in my opening remarks has recently opened to passengers in March.

As you will be aware, as part of the Level Crossing Removal Project we opened the new Clayton station back in 2018. I was just talking to Mr Tak about that in my previous answer, and the new station really does make it safer and easier and more accessible for passengers to connect to the surrounding community, including really key local hubs in Mr Tak's area, including of course Monash University, CSIRO and that important Monash Health precinct and the hospital there, which sadly used to see, before the removal of the level crossing, ambulances banked up unable to get into the hospital there. That has been a really critical contributor not only to people's time, but indeed it has been life saving for many who urgently need health care as well.

Passengers are enjoying, as well as that enhanced layout, dedicated bus links, improved lighting and CCTV – I was just getting to that in my previous answer – which has been a feature of many of the new stations that we have built. The upgrades that we have delivered have really been about enhancing the amenity, making those who rely on our public transport do so in a way that makes them feel safe and that boosts passenger experience as a part of the infrastructure that is being delivered.

We have also, as a part of our projects and rebuilding stations and upgrading stations, made a point to improve pedestrian and cycling connections and infrastructure, including secure bike parking and access to many kilometres of walking and cycling paths across the state. We were just talking earlier about the Cranbourne–Pakenham corridor. I know that that is a corridor that has benefited greatly from some of those new active transport connections that have been unlocked through the work that we have done at stations and in level crossing removal projects across the way.

As I outlined before, we are not stopping. The work continues to deliver new stations, many set to open this year. I referenced earlier the excitement of the Member for Mordialloc and his countdown for the Mordialloc level crossing removals, an elevated Mordialloc station as a part of that, as well as, in terms of other projects being delivered, a safe, new and accessible West Tarneit station, which is critically important – the Member for Tarneit has been a very key advocate for that project and his community – as well as a new, modern and futureproofed Melton station. I was out there recently with the Member for Melton, seeing progress on the new station – longer platforms to accommodate longer trains, futureproofed for the future electrification of the Melton line as well, particularly with that stabling there at Cobblebank, and a piece of infrastructure that really will serve that community for generations to come.

We are also transforming the station precinct in Boronia. Earlier this year I was also out at that site just as works were beginning to kick off, with the Member for Bayswater, looking at not only the fact that it delivers a brand new, shiny station but also delivers significant benefits in terms of connection points to the local shopping precinct there and some safety upgrades too in terms of lines of sight, visibility, lighting and CCTV – all those things that we were talking about. They become parts of our local community hubs, not just train stations. They become facilities that are there to improve connection points, whether it be through active transport or whether it be through better thoroughfares to things like shopping precincts. I think these modern stations reflect the role that infrastructure like this has in modern communities, not just as a platform to stand on and catch a train but as local landmarks that form a part of our local precincts.

Mathew HILAKARI: And it is interesting over time, with elevated rail in particular, the changing attitudes of, well, the opposition, really, to this, where they ran a huge campaign against it, which fell pretty flat when people saw just how extraordinary these stations and the unlocked land below it are. Minister, I am taking you to budget paper 4, page 152, and some of the stations outlined here, particularly the Albion station upgrade in Melbourne's west, but I am also keen to understand, with the limited time that we have left, some information on Melbourne Airport rail stage 1, both of which are really important to the communities that the Chair represents and that I represent.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Absolutely. It is an incredibly exciting project. It is one that, as you will be aware, is co-funded by the Albanese Labor government as well. You might also remember that early last year the state, the Commonwealth and APAM signed an MOU to get moving on and negotiating on some of the finer elements of the entire airport rail link. But we have not waited for that work to be finalised; we have got on and got moving on the work that we can do, so that we can deliver the benefits – not only the longer term benefits of the airport rail link but also the immediate benefits that are unlocked through stage 1 of Melbourne Airport

rail, which is that West Footscray to Albion link. It effectively involves untangling 6 kilometres of track between West Footscray and Albion, allowing us to get about a thousand trains through Sunshine every day. That allows us to deliver more services to one of the fastest growing regions not only in Victoria but in Australia and also deliver greater efficiencies through separating out metropolitan passenger, regional passenger and freight in a way that deals with one of the most significant bottlenecks that we have currently got in our network.

We will also, as a part of that, be transforming Sunshine into a major transport superhub as well as delivering two new stations as a part of the project at both Tottenham and Albion. The new Sunshine superhub will include a range of very important features that deliver genuine benefits to the community. Those are things like new walking and cycling links, creating better community connections, talking to the point I was making earlier around what these facilities now need to be – they are more than just a train station; they have got to be a part of the community – the new City Place plaza, featuring landscaped open space – again, a place for the community to gather; a new station forecourt, also with open space and landscaping; two new regional platforms; an extended station concourse; additional lifts, so improving accessibility while we are there as well; upgraded station car parks; Parkiteers; bus interchange upgrades; security cameras; improved lighting; and all those things that I have talked about. As we review the community feedback on those early designs that have now gone out around the Sunshine superhub and stage 1 of the project, we have got diggers in the ground getting the work done.

The CHAIR: I could hear you talk about that for much longer, but I will call time on it. Minister, officials, thank you very much for appearing before the committee today. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses are required within five working days of the committee's request.

The committee will take a short break before beginning its consideration of the public and active transport portfolio at 10:15 am. I declare this hearing adjourned.

Witnesses withdrew.