

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 Public and Active Transport; and
Jeroen Weimar, Secretary,
Fiona Adamson, Deputy Secretary, Transport Services,
Adam Maguire, Deputy Secretary, Network Design and Integration,
William Tieppo, Chief Executive Officer, V/Line,
Tracey Williams, Interim Chief Executive, Safe Transport Victoria, and
Stuart Johns, Executive Director, Modal Planning, Department of Transport and Planning.

The CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and 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 today is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, comments you repeat outside of 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. The broadcast includes automated captioning, and members and witnesses should be aware that all microphones are live during the hearings and anything you say, even if you say it quietly, can be picked up.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check, and 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 Public and Active Transport, the Honourable Gabrielle Williams, as well as officials from the Department of Transport and Planning. Minister, I am going to 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. Thank you, Chair. I wish to start today by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting today, the Wurundjeri people, and pay my respects to their elders past and present and any other First Nations people we may have here with us today.

Visual presentation.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: I am going to ask Adam Maguire to be my clicker for the presentation, and I will do my best to indicate when we want a change of slides. So thank you, Adam.

The last 12 months have seen the biggest transformation of the state's rail network since the city loop, with the opening of the Metro Tunnel. Victorians are now enjoying more than 1200 extra services a week since the big switch timetable went live on the 1 February and, through it, better access to health services, education and jobs. With this year's budget the Victorian government continues to invest in reliable and easy to access public transport for our growing state, helping Victorians to connect to employment opportunities, education and of

course entertainment as well. This is even more important now, with Victorians experiencing cost-of-living pressures because of the war in Iran and the pressure that that is putting on fuel prices.

Next slide please. In this budget we are delivering \$432.5 million for free and half-price public transport. This measure began in April and provided early relief for Victorians from surging fuel prices. Free public transport will continue now to the end of May and remain half price from 1 June until the end of the year. We have also invested \$673.6 million for an additional 25 X'trapolis 2.0 trains for the Metro train network, which builds on the 25 that are already in production. There is also an investment of \$92.3 million for additional train services and capacity across the regional and metro networks, \$99 million for new and upgraded bus services to better connect our growing suburbs and communities, \$75.9 million for upgrades to the tram network to deliver level-access tram stops and improve reliability, \$9.6 million to upgrade stations and active transport infrastructure to improve safety and accessibility, and \$317.7 million to ensure the regional passenger rail network remains safe and reliable.

Next slide please. Since 31 March we have provided all Victorians with free public transport, and this initiative, as I outlined, runs till the end of May. In that time more than 70 million trips have been taken, which is around about a 20 per cent increase on the same period last year. Free public transport saves regular users about \$228 per month, and from 1 June, public transport will be half price until the end of the year, and this will save a regular user more than \$800. It will also continue to incentivise more people to choose public transport over car travel, taking pressure off fuel demand and reducing congestion on our roads for those who do have to drive. Public transport will remain permanently free of course for under-18s, an initiative that came into effect from 1 January this year, and on weekends for seniors, carers and disability support pensioners.

Next slide, please. This budget also includes important investments in our train network. We are investing \$673.6 million in 25 locally built X'trapolis 2.0 trains, which will be rolled out on the Frankston, Craigieburn and Upfield lines. These state-of-the-art trains are more reliable and modern and can take over 1200 passengers across their six carriages. That is nearly 10 per cent extra capacity compared to the old Comeng fleet, plus dedicated wheelchair spaces and mixed-use spaces for things like prams and bicycles. This new order is on top of the 25 X'traps already being built. Trains from that order started running on our network earlier this month and to great fanfare. Importantly, the X'traps 2 trains allow us to retire some of our older fleet, which also has a benefit in terms of reducing maintenance costs and improving reliability on our network. Of course they are being built in both Ballarat and Dandenong, with at least 60 per cent local content, making sure we are supporting local jobs and local skills along the way.

Next slide, please. This budget will enable us to continue to deliver more trains more often thanks to the completion of the Metro Tunnel and the subsequent big switch. Since 1 February we have delivered about 1200 extra services a week on the Sunbury, Cranbourne and Pakenham lines. This will be followed later this year by more services on the Werribee and Sandringham lines, which will be connected to become a cross-city line now that the Frankston line has returned to the City Loop. The Upfield and Craigieburn lines are also set to get 20-minute evening and weekend services, and Seymour line passengers will get trains every hour between 8 am and 9 pm on weekends. The investment in this budget will enable us to complement all of this with service uplifts on the Lilydale, Belgrave, Alamein and Glen Waverley lines, as well as uplifts to weekend services on the Mernda and Hurstbridge lines. More peak hour Wyndham Vale services are to run as longer nine-car trains, increasing the capacity to support growing communities along that corridor. Shepparton line passengers will get nine return services every weekday, which has been enabled by the completion of the Shepparton line upgrade. It almost doubles the number of weekday services on that line and completes the delivery of benefits across our regional passenger network that was enabled by our \$4 billion regional rail revival program.

Next slide, please. Buses also play a key role in connecting our growing communities to where they work, where they learn and where they choose to gather. That is why in this budget we are delivering a package of upgraded and extended bus routes and services across more hours and more days of the week, and with better connections to universities and to train stations, as just a couple of examples. The package includes upgraded and extended bus routes in the City of Casey; new and extended bus services for growth areas in Melton South; an expanded range of hours, including Sunday services, for routes across Dandenong, South Morang, South Melbourne, Nunawading, Sunshine, Keilor and Springvale; and an uplift in key regional services as well.

Next slide, please. Trams are a vital means of transport for Melburnians, and that is why in this budget we are investing \$76 million to improve safety and accessibility as well as reliability on our tram network. This includes delivering accessible level-access tram stops on High Street in Northcote and Thornbury and planning level-access stops along Sydney Road and Keilor Road in Niddrie. We have also invested in a new substation at Wattle Park, Surrey Hills, to improve reliability and support larger trams on route 70. We will soon see the first 50 of Melbourne's new G-class trams progressively roll out on three routes – 57, 59 and 82 – benefiting passengers, including those in Maribyrnong and West Maribyrnong, Ascot Vale, Moonee Ponds, Flemington, North Melbourne, Parkville, Airport West, Essendon, Essendon North, Travancore, Footscray and Maidstone. We also recently announced that the next 50 G-class trams will be rolled out on routes 12, 48 and 58, which will benefit passengers in communities including Richmond, Collingwood, East Melbourne, Southbank, South Melbourne, Albert Park, Middle Park, St Kilda West, Docklands, Kew and Kew East, Balwyn North, Pascoe Vale South, Brunswick and Brunswick West, West Melbourne, South Yarra and Toorak as well.

Next slide, please. We have also invested in safety and accessibility upgrades at train stations and for active transport users. We have funded tactile ground surface indicators at Clifton Hill, Northcote and Eaglemont stations to boost safety for passengers with vision impairment. We have also invested in pedestrian safety upgrades and bicycle parking facilities at Donnybrook station, making it easier for people to get around. The budget also includes funding for improvements to pedestrian infrastructure along the Corio–Waurin Ponds road, making it easier for pedestrians to access adjacent shopping and entertainment facilities. Funding has also been provided for improvements to the Todd Road/Webb Dock Drive slip lanes, which will help keep cyclists using this popular connection safer. Broadmeadow station has received funding for some amenity and safety upgrades as well, and we have funded improvements to the safety and security of passengers at Ballarat, Little River and Beaufort stations on the V/Line network by supporting the design or implementation of some new or improved CCTV at those locations.

Next slide, please. Our regional rail network provides a vital link between regional Victoria and our major cities and has been even more popular with, first, our regional fare cap policy, of course with youth Myki as well and now that free and half-price public transport. Our regional train operator, V/Line, maintains over 3500 kilometres of rail track and runs over 2400 train services per week. In this budget we are making sure V/Line can continue to carry out its annual maintenance program and upgrade critical infrastructure to reduce the number of faults, which we know can impact reliability. Completing essential maintenance on the network is crucial to allowing V/Line to run new VLocity trains and continue to provide a safe and reliable service for passengers, including things like upgrading axle counters on the regional rail link, which supports the busiest corridors on our regional rail network. That brings to an end my presentation.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. The first 8 minutes are going to go to Ms Benham.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you, Chair. Morning again, Minister. We will get to regional rail; you know how passionate I am about that. But first, with references to Metro Tunnel in here and some issues that have been uncovered obviously in the *Age* this morning – just for courtesy, 'Budget overview', 20, and budget paper 2, page 9; there are plenty of them there, as well as your own presentation. As was quoted in the *Age* today, Victoria Police was advised in November 2025 of the incident. However, a formal report was not made by any party regarding any allegations of criminality. Now, by any account, there is a very big difference between raising something with police in a phone call, email or conversation and reporting a crime. Can you confirm that you or your department made a report of criminality to Victoria Police with regard to the fraud that was committed on the Metro Tunnel construction?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Thank you, Ms Benham. I am happy to again rehash what was discussed in detail in the last session. I do note I no longer have Mr Duncan Elliott with me, who can speak to the actions that VIDA took. We were able to confirm when VIDA received from the Cross Yarra Partnership, the contractor, information about the incident that you are referring to. When VIDA then shared that information with Victoria Police: I think he referred to – and you might have to go back to transcripts – the information-sharing collective that they use within VIDA to ensure that those referrals are being made, and he confirmed that that information and concerns were provided to Victoria Police on, I think he said, 21 November.

Jade BENHAM: As a report of criminality? He reported a crime?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: He reported the details, as he outlined. I do not want to verbal Mr Elliott in his absence, but I can refer you back to the response he gave in the previous session, where he talked about the information that they were able to provide to Victoria Police through the information-sharing arrangements they have, which reflected the concerns that the contractor had passed on to VIDA. My responsibility as minister is, always has been and always will be to make sure that where allegations of this nature arise they are properly reported. Why – because we have zero tolerance to criminal and corrupt behaviour on government sites. These projects are not only extraordinarily important, but they employ some 20,000 Victorians, who are overwhelmingly law-abiding, hardworking people, who have a right to be able to turn up to work knowing that they are safe to be able to return home to their families in the evenings. It is for them, Ms Benham, that I am outraged by the allegations that have been made across our Big Build program – the allegations that came to light first in the media in mid-2024 – as I am similarly outraged by the conduct that has been alleged in the incident that you are talking to, which is why I demand of my agencies and of our frameworks that we have set up and that we are strengthening that reporting is done, that everybody is very aware, including our contractors, of their obligations, that we do all we can to facilitate easier reporting, which we mandated, and that we have continued to implement a range of reforms to stamp out this kind of conduct.

Jade BENHAM: Then with all of that outrage, you will have no problem issuing this committee with the formal correspondence of reporting of a crime to Victoria – there is a very big difference between a referral of a matter to Victoria Police and the report of criminality on this project. And I appreciate that there is zero tolerance, so you will have no problem then supplying that correspondence to this committee?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Ms Benham, I am not sure if it is helpful to enter into a debate around semantics. The information was provided to Victoria Police, and Victoria Police are investigating, as is now public. I do not want to prejudice in any way a Victoria Police investigation, because they need to be able to go and do their work. They have obviously deemed it worthy of investigation, and I am very pleased to hear that, because there is no place for this kind of conduct in any workplace, let alone on state building sites. It is our expectation that contractors manage their worksites in accordance with the law and to the highest standards of integrity. I can relay to you the work that we have been doing to ensure that we are strengthening the frameworks and ensure that there are appropriate referrals.

Jade BENHAM: Minister, Victoria Police have said on the record to the *Age* that a formal report was not made by any party regarding any allegations of criminality. That includes VIDA. So does the minister concede that there has been a failure to formally report this criminality to Victoria Police, or is Victoria Police lying?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Again, Ms Benham, I would not like to, and do not seek to, verbal Mr Elliott in his absence, but he made it clear in the previous hearing that the information about the incident that had been reported to him was provided to Victoria Police, clearly, because there were concerns about what it represented in terms of criminal conduct. That is VIDA's firm position that that was done, and I believe that we need to rely on Mr Elliott's testimony in the previous session to that end. The referral was made. Our expectation of our contractors is very clear that referrals be made to the appropriate agency depending on the allegations that are made, as we would say to all Victorians, including members of the opposition and any member of Parliament. If you have information or an allegation, please do refer it, because it is critically important that these matters be investigated, and be investigated thoroughly, so that we can have confidence in the work that is being done in service of Victorians.

Jade BENHAM: Victoria Police cannot investigate if they have not received a formal complaint, and Victoria Police have said they have not received a formal complaint from any party with alleged criminality with regard to this. So they cannot investigate if they have not received a formal complaint.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: I would note that Victoria Police are currently investigating this matter, and I would again refer you to the testimony given by Mr Elliott in his position as effectively head of VIDA, who relayed in detail what VIDA was alerted to and how they then referred the matter to Victoria Police through the information-sharing protocols that we have in place for this very reason: to ensure that all matters, all allegations, all areas of concern can be appropriately referred to the appropriate agency. That is an integral part of us being able to stamp out corrupt criminal behaviour that has no place on our worksites, and we cannot be any clearer about our expectation of that.

Jade BENHAM: If, as you say, the crime was reported, are you aware of a detective that has been assigned to the case?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Ms Benham, the way Victoria Police conducts its investigations is a matter for Victoria Police. That would be deeply inappropriate for any politician –

Jade BENHAM: The reason I ask is we are looking for an exact timeline and what exact information has been provided to Victoria Police, after their formal statement is that they have not received a report of any criminal conduct.

The CHAIR: Order! We are going on to Ms Kathage.

Members interjecting.

Jade BENHAM: Someone is lying here.

The CHAIR: Excuse me, members are to come to order. We are going to Mr Hilakari, but let me remind all members of this committee that Mr Elliott is no longer here because we have moved on to public and active transport. We have just had an ample amount of time with transport infrastructure. We are now on public and active transport. Thank you, Mr Hilakari.

Mathew HILAKARI: I actually do have a question on public and active transport, so that will be a refreshing change from this morning. Cost of living on fares across public transport – you mentioned it in your presentation, but also I refer us to budget paper 3, page 83 and the line item ‘Free and half price public transport for Victorians’. These investments are being made at the moment, and you mentioned particularly the challenges of the war in Iran. I am a big fan of free public transport. So, Minister, how is it all going, and is it being taken up by the community in a really substantial way?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Thank you, Mr Hilakari. I know this is an initiative that you have been incredibly proud of and promote deeply within your own constituency. It is based on a fundamental truth, which is that with rising fuel prices household budgets are under significant pressure right now. And while a state government cannot influence global conflicts or indeed global fuel prices, we have been wholeheartedly focused on what we can do for Victorian families at a time when they need that help the most. That is why we introduced the free public transport until the end of May, with those half-price fares starting from 1 June until the end of the year. That means that for April and May, all Victorians, including your constituents, will have the benefit of catching free trains, buses and trams, depending on where they are, to connect them to jobs, to education and to major events.

Since the start of that free travel period, the Department of Transport and Planning have been working closely with all of our operators to understand the impacts on the network. For example, popular local routes, and I am talking specifically to buses now – including the 495, which may be familiar to you, Williams Landing station to Point Cook South; the 497, which is Williams Landing station to Saltwater Coast Estate; and 498, Laverton Station to Hoppers Crossing station via Dunnings Road – have all been very busy, as we have been able to see from our discussions with the operators, as residents have taken advantage of free public transport. That is in addition to those commuters in your community in particular using, for example, train services to take up the opportunity for free travel, making the most of the more than 200 additional services that we have delivered to the Werribee line since coming to government. And with more people in your community and communities around Melbourne – I am using yours as an example – making the choice to mode shift onto public transport, it is even more important that we have invested in the extra services that make that choice genuine and make that choice make sense for Victorians. That includes, of course, the two additional trains per hour on the Werribee line in the mornings and afternoons, which will come into effect later this year.

Free public transport has always been a temporary measure to help Victorians right now, and it remains temporary, but we are committed to continuing to help with the cost of living for the rest of the year. The reason we are doing that is because the impacts of this war, we know, will be felt for a long time to come. Since free public transport commenced on 31 March – and I mentioned this in my opening remarks – more than 70 million public transport trips have been taken, which is around about a 20 per cent increase from the equivalent period last year, and half-price travel we know will save commuters up to a bit over \$800 for the remainder of the year. From June, no PT user will pay more than \$5.70 for fares each day. If you are a

concession holder, then you will pay even less than that – it is about \$2.85 for a day of travel. We know that this will not only ease pressure at the pump by allowing people to take public transport and giving them the option to leave the car at home if they can, but it will reduce congestion for those who must drive and also preserve fuel at times where it has been in challenging supply. It will preserve that for those who need it most.

Mathew HILAKARI: I was at the Laverton train station just the other week, and one of the walking groups locally made the decision to go to Halls Gap to do their walk because they are making use of the free public transport that exists.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Good.

Mathew HILAKARI: \$2.85 for the rest of the year to get all the way to Mildura is an excellent amount of money. Minister, I am happy to hear more about the patronage numbers, particularly about the buses in the community that I represent – I am always keen to hear more about that – but also particularly about youth Myki. I represent one of the youngest electorates in Victoria, so I am really keen to hear about that. I know, when I speak to members of the community on the doors, they are really keen to hear about youth Myki and how it saves the parents from paying for train tickets and bus tickets.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: That is right, because while it does have great benefits for young people – and I will talk to them – it is also, as we know, about taking pressure off household budgets and ultimately giving families a choice to spend that money and reprioritise that spending elsewhere where it may be needed. We made the investment around youth Myki in last year's state budget because we knew what it would mean to families, helping them put more money back into their household budgets. We know that that policy represents a saving of about \$755 per child per year, so multiple children – add that up. It can be a very significant saving by simply allowing kids the freedom too to get around on their own and for families not having to foot that bill. I know in your electorate of Point Cook, Mr Hilakari, there have been more than 2385 youth Mykis issued in the mail and about another 1700 – a bit over – issued via retail stores. I know in the Chair's electorate there are about 1300 youth Mykis that have been sold at Laverton station alone since the 1 January. Hundreds of thousands of Victorians are now benefiting from free youth public transport, with more than 526,000 youth Mykis in kids' hands and more than 4.9 million tap-ons to date since the initiative came into effect earlier this year.

That initiative also included, as you might remember, a design competition to design the look of the youth Myki card. We were looking for something that would stand out and be vibrant, and 11-year-old Charlie Bindokas delivered on that brief and won top honours in that competition with a really inventive artwork that now features on all of those youth Mykis. If you have not seen it, it features every mode of transport. It has got V/Line, it has got our Metro trains and it has got our iconic green Melbourne trams and our PTV bus as well, all capturing the ways young Victorians are now able to travel free. I think the second most important – apologies.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We are going to go to the Deputy Chair.

John PESUTTO: Thank you, Chair. Mr Weimar, you became Secretary of the Department of Transport and Planning in January 2025. Is that correct?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Yes.

John PESUTTO: And prior to that role, you have occupied a number of senior roles in the delivery of public transport services and the infrastructure that goes with them, but in particular public transport services. Is that correct?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Yes.

John PESUTTO: So in light of the references that my colleague Ms Benham described earlier, with the same budget references, I would like to draw your attention to the discussion we have been having this morning about the fraudulent behaviour by a number of employees of the Schindler Group. On becoming Secretary of the department of planning, when did you first become aware of the fraud or potential fraud that was committed, and whether or not that was formal advice or informal advice, given your experience in this sector, can you advise the committee when you first became aware?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Thank you, Deputy Chair. Specifically, with regard to the allegations around Schindler Group, I became aware of that informally from VIDA in November of 2025. I should add, given you have taken us back to it, my role under section 13 of the *Public Administration Act* with regard to VIDA is very clearly laid out around ensuring the overall governance and structures are right with the administrative office that is VIDA. My role over the last 18 months has been to ensure in particular that we have the delivery of the programs but also the implementation of the measures referred to in the Wilson review and referred to in the Merritt review, which the minister has referred to, and to ensure they are followed through, both within VIDA but also within of course the Department of Transport and Planning.

John PESUTTO: Do you think it would be a reasonable conclusion for Victorians to draw that if that work was being done, something like this fraud being committed would not occur?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, again, I think we are sort of straying into the world of transport infrastructure, and I would rather Mr Elliott was here to delve into the detail of that so you can understand the interaction between his organisation and the department. But in terms of the measures that are in place around the Labour Hire Licensing Authority, around the information exchanges between VIDA, SRLA and other infrastructure organisations with Victoria Police and other anti-corruption agencies, those measures are well established and well in place. They have been in place for a while now. We continue to drive through, with our supply chains, both within the department and I think Mr Elliott does with VIDA, to ensure that all of our suppliers in this space are complying with those rules and ensuring that information is shared.

John PESUTTO: Mr Weimar, when you said you were informally advised, how did that take place, and if you can, tell us who told you?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Sure. With respect, Mr Pesutto, I do not have access to my diary for that period of time, but I would have been in the verbal conversations and in the discussions through my regular meetings with VIDA, with Mr Elliott and his predecessors, to ensure that we understood what was going on in individual projects and what actions VIDA was taking.

John PESUTTO: Would it be right to say you were alarmed when you learned of this fraud?

Lauren Kathage interjected.

John PESUTTO: That is a question.

Lauren KATHAGE: No opinions.

John PESUTTO: What was your reaction?

The CHAIR: Look, I am going to say this early on because I know you have a lot of these types of questions, Deputy Chair: please, we do not ask for opinions or hypotheticals here at this committee. You can ask a question of Mr Weimar, and he can respond to the best of his ability.

Richard Riordan interjected.

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan, it is not an invitation for you to start chattering over there. Deputy Chair.

John PESUTTO: Mr Weimar, can you describe what your reaction to that was?

Jeroen WEIMAR: My reaction, Mr Pesutto, was concern and interest in the follow-on actions that VIDA was taking with regard to this, with them and with their supply chain.

John PESUTTO: On learning that information, Mr Weimar, did you tell the minister?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Mr Pesutto, I would need to go back and check my records of that period of time in terms of exactly what happened, when and what day. I do not have that to hand.

John PESUTTO: I understand that. So can I ask you: is it possible then that you advised the minister, either in writing or orally, upon learning that information?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Mr Pesutto, with respect, I would need to go back and check my records of that period of time.

John PESUTTO: Will you do that and come back to this committee?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I will see what information is available to me.

John PESUTTO: Yes. Mr Weimar, given your experience, does it concern you, given your role as Secretary, that this matter did not come to light, given all the procedures that are put in place, anytime sooner?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Again, Mr Pesutto, I am not privy to the full details. But I think what I would say is that we have a large and complex delivery organisation for Metro Tunnel, which is what this was a part of. We have a PPP involved, CYP, that was responsible for the delivery of the construction phase of that project, and we have a large and complex series of governance arrangements between the PPP and VIDA in terms of how that project is managed. There are accountabilities in this space for the contractors and for how they manage their supply chain. I do not have the information in front of me to go back and account what happened to whom when and who knew what when. That is work that I think Mr Elliott has given some evidence on earlier today. I am always alarmed to hear of any potentially corrupt or fraudulent conduct on any of our sites, as I would be within the Department of Transport and Planning. We have strong processes and procedures in place to ensure that those things do not happen. We have audit arrangements in place in VIDA, in the department –

John PESUTTO: Sorry to interrupt, Mr Weimar, I apologise, but isn't it hard for Victorians to understand and accept? If something like this has occurred, how can we say those processes are robust? Clearly they are not robust.

Jeroen WEIMAR: I would say, Mr Pesutto, the fact that this alleged fraud came to light and came to light when it did, and the fact that VIDA were –

Richard Riordan interjected.

Jeroen WEIMAR: sorry, Mr Riordan – aware of it I think in October 2025, was Mr Elliott's evidence this morning, and that he acted upon it and pushed it further with Victoria Police, shows that some of those procedures were clearly working. This fraud did not go unaddressed, and as I understand it, the money has been repaid.

John PESUTTO: Mr Weimar, appreciating that you do not have your documents in front of you, and subject to that caveat and the commitment that you will come back to this committee, do you recall if and when you did provide Minister Williams with either written or oral advice of what you had learned?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Mr Pesutto, I would need to go back and check my records for that period.

John PESUTTO: So at this point in time you do not know whether you did or did not? Would that –

Jeroen WEIMAR: I would need to go back and check my records. You will appreciate it was a number of months ago and there is a fair amount of work that flows over my desk and in my conversations with the minister, which are daily.

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

John PESUTTO: Sorry, can Mr Weimar answer?

The CHAIR: Excuse me, Deputy Chair. Excuse me, Mr Hilakari. Mr Weimar has answered your question, Deputy Chair. I hope you were listening. Would you like to repeat that, Mr Weimar?

John PESUTTO: No, that is okay.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Thank you.

John PESUTTO: Mr Weimar, I think it is fair to say there has been a concession there that the processes did not work. I think that is fair. Did you – are you saying the process of identifying corrupt behaviour did work? I thought that was –

The CHAIR: Excuse me, Deputy Chair. I have been saying this to you now for the last – I think we were here 12 hours –

John PESUTTO: Mr Weimar, have you ordered an investigation into what went wrong?

The CHAIR: No, Deputy Chair. A point of order has been raised, and we will hear the point of order.

Michael GALEA: On a point of order, Chair, Mr Pesutto is directly contradicting the witness in order to verbal him.

John PESUTTO: We will check the transcript on that, Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Well, I think you need to listen to what he is saying, because you are directly contradicting him in your attempt to verbal him.

John PESUTTO: Can I ask the question?

The CHAIR: Deputy Chair, I am going to rule on the point of order. I have said this repeatedly: please do not put words into the mouths of witnesses. Deputy Chair, you will be very pleased to know a draft transcript of this recording will be with us by tomorrow, and we will check that and perhaps bring it back to this inquiry. We are going to go to Ms Kathage.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you so much, Chair, Minister and officials. I want to talk about train service improvements, and I can see on page 83 of BP3 that \$92.3 million is allocated there. It is the more trains, more often package – I think something we can all get behind. Can you talk about how these uplifts build on previous investments in rail services?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: I certainly can. Thank you for the question, Ms Kathage. As I outlined in my opening remarks, this year we really had the opportunity to capitalise on the recent completion of some of our key Big Build projects, most notably the Metro Tunnel, but of course also the regional rail revival, with the completion of a couple of very key projects in that program as well. It is because of this investment and these major infrastructure projects that we are able to deliver additional services year after year, with more than 3500 new weekly services added since we came to government on our rail network, and I think now over 20,000 on our bus network. But I know you have asked about trains, so I will try and stay focused on that.

In this year's budget we have invested in new weekend services on the Mernda and Hurstbridge lines to cut wait times to 20 minutes all weekend, which is an improvement on the 30 minutes on weekend evenings and the 40 minutes that existed on Sunday mornings previously. We have invested in new weekday evening services on the Belgrave, Lilydale, Alamein and Glen Waverley lines to cut some of the longest wait times on our metro network, again to 20 minutes down from 30. These metropolitan uplifts also deliver trains every 10 minutes between, say, the city and Ringwood on weekday evenings, and every 10 minutes between the city and Clifton Hill on weekends.

On our regional network we are delivering significant capacity uplifts to the Wyndham Vale peak services, which currently run six-car trains, making every train in the morning and afternoon peak now a nine-car VLocity train. We are also delivering new weekday rail services on the Shepparton line, almost doubling the number of services to nine return services each weekday, and further investment has been made to continue the additional morning and afternoon peak services on the Seymour line that were delivered earlier this year.

Many of the services funded in this budget are being delivered later this year, and we will be delivering the remaining services funded in the 2025–26 budget – many of those services being delivered as well. This includes the two additional trains per hour in the mornings and afternoons on the Werribee line and services running every 10 minutes between the peaks on the Sandy line, with the Werribee and Sandringham lines being connected across the city when these services go live. We are also delivering an increase in shoulder-peak and off-peak services, with trains running at least every 20 minutes on the Craigieburn line, and a similar off-peak story for the Upfield line, including late at night and on weekends. Beyond this, we are adding more regional services later this year too, with trains running every hour between 8 am and 9 pm on weekends on the Seymour line, and five return services every Saturday and Sunday on the Shepp line.

We know Victorians are travelling substantially differently to the way they were seven years ago. The pattern of movement has changed, which also means we need to look at how we service those changes. It used to be that there was a very clear delineation between peak and off-peak, and that is now no longer the case for a range of reasons – working from home or flexible working arrangements, and those alterations to the way people move and the times that they are moving as well. That is why we have been focused on adding more services at all times of the day on both weekdays and weekends to get people to where they need to go but also of course to get them to where they want to go, facilitating those recreational activities as well. And of course in terms of our regional network, with the regional fare cap as well as many of the other fare initiatives that we have introduced, free and half-price, there has also been a huge boon for our regional economies, with more people seeking to take up the opportunity to travel into the regions.

Lauren KATHAGE: Minister, as a representative of the Seymour line and noting that the Nationals have asked only about metro trains and no questions on regional – and I imagine the Member for Polwarth will not be asking about regional trains either, so I am happy to fly the flag for the regions – as you were saying, with the fairer fares for the region and more recently making public transport free for two months and then half-price for the rest of the year, can you tell us how the government has continued to deliver services to support regional public transport trips?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: I certainly can. As I was just about to say too, we introduced that regional fare cap back in March 2023, and that has so far saved Victorians more than \$194 million on our regional public transport network, with over 75 million train and coach trips taken in the last three years, and of course regional passengers are now able to access more than a thousand new V/Line train services that the government has delivered, and we are about to add more. I outlined before our additions to the Seymour line, and passengers on the Seymour line are seeing the benefit of that additional morning and afternoon peak service. We have now invested in those services ongoing. These services are helping Victorians, as you would well know, in the northern growth corridor, particularly those accessing Donnybrook and Wallan stations, helping those communities get where they need to go, and also at the most critical times of the day. Further north, we are now able to deliver those nine return train services on the Shepparton line each weekday following our very significant investment in the Shepparton line upgrade. That represents almost a doubling of the current number of services, which obviously greatly improves connectivity through the north-east. These new Shepp services are able to be run with also a more modern fleet, with V/Line's modern VLocity trains providing not only better accessibility but also better reliability to Victorians along the corridor. In the south-west we are making every train on the Wyndham Vale line in the morning and afternoon peaks a nine-car VLocity and delivering about 680 weekly services at the brand new West Tarneit station once it opens later this year.

The capacity questions for these growing areas are really important. Being able to meet them with longer rolling stock is critically important, and I know, speaking to my western colleagues, they have been hugely excited about what that extra capacity means. It is more locals being able to avail themselves of cheap public transport in the immediate term, and that is great where there are pressures on household budgets, but it also encourages more people to use a public transport system that we have been investing in for that very purpose. We do not just invest in services either, as important as that is. We are also investing – and I mentioned this in my opening remarks – money into V/Line maintenance, which is about ensuring greater reliability of those services too.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Minister.

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

Richard RIORDAN: Thank you, Chair. Just to finish the question of my colleague, Mr Weimar, have you ordered any investigations into the procurement and management of contracts within your areas of responsibility, either since the reports from Nick McKenzie in the *Age* or just as part of due diligence?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Thank you, Mr Riordan. Certainly over the last 15 months or 16 months that I have been in the department we have been working very hard on the back of the Wilson review and the Merritt review and all the allegations we have all read about in the media to ensure that we have got measures taken by VIDA and by the SRLA but also by the department in its own contracting chain. So yes, there has been a lot of work to ensure that we have got those pieces in place.

Richard RIORDAN: Have you ordered reviews?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, I have ordered actions to be taken. I have ordered contact to be made with my suppliers. We have written to 118 of our suppliers across 2626 contracts.

Richard RIORDAN: But does it worry you, as the leader of the organisation, that we have to wake up and read the newspaper to know that there is corruption going on within your portfolio?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I think what Victorians would expect, rightly, is that the department is working with all of its agencies and entities on a day-to-day basis to drive out those kind of practices, and that is the work –

Richard RIORDAN: Have you uncovered any yourself?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Not directly, because again, if I look at the work that the Wilson review –

Richard RIORDAN: So without Nick McKenzie we would not know about these problems?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I cannot comment on that, but I think what I can say is –

Richard RIORDAN: You said you have not found any yourself.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Not personally, no.

Richard RIORDAN: Well, reviews that you have ordered have uncovered no corruption, so without Nick McKenzie we would not know about the corruption, would we?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I would suggest that all the actions that are being taken by VIDA and our various other entities to continually manage their supply chains and to identify the areas of malpractice that we did read about this morning are evidence of some of those procedures working quite well, and the actions that have been taken by other agencies to follow that through –

Richard RIORDAN: What do you mean they are working quite well? You have not found any of them. The *Age* journalist is finding them.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, I think the Schindler allegations that we read about this morning were identified by CYP – reported to VIDA – back in October 2025, which I think was the evidence Mr Elliott gave earlier today.

Richard RIORDAN: Moving on to another contract management issue that you will be in charge of, Myki. How much are you budgeting this year to continue to hide the 16 documents that both the FOI process and OVIC have suggested that you release to the public?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I am sorry, Mr Riordan. I am not aware of what you are referring to.

Richard RIORDAN: Currently you have engaged Clayton Utz to stop the release of 16 documents about the Conduent contract.

Members interjecting.

The CHAIR: Excuse me.

Richard RIORDAN: Myki is one of your signature projects.

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan, please do not talk over the top of me. Mr Galea! Mr Riordan, perhaps you can provide a budget reference.

Richard RIORDAN: If the department secretary of transport does not know about Myki in the budget, then I am asking the question. He has engaged Clayton Utz to continue to suppress 16 documents, and I am sure he knows about it because Clayton Utz does not come cheaply to the taxpayer. How much is he spending or allocating in this year – because it is an election year and you are fighting hard to suppress it. How much are

you spending this year to make sure those 16 documents that OVIC has suggested that the government release

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan –

Richard RIORDAN: I am happy to take it –

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan. Look at me, Mr Riordan – the budget paper reference, please.

Richard RIORDAN: I do not have to give it. It is in the budget. Myki is referenced in the budget. It is a signature project of this government.

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan, it would assist the witnesses, including the minister and the secretary.

Richard RIORDAN: There is no reference to the court case in the documents. That is why I am asking the question, because the department secretary knows he has engaged Clayton Utz to participate in this.

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan, the budget paper reference. I am conscious about the evidence before the committee being relevant to the inquiry that we are hearing. The budget paper reference, please.

Richard RIORDAN: The Myki budget paper reference is in the government ‘Department Performance Statement’, page 137, where it refers to public transport, Secretary.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Mr Riordan, I am very comfortable talking about the CVTS contract that we have, the services it is delivering. I do not have off the top of my head that contract information you are looking for and who is looking for it.

Richard RIORDAN: Your department has since 2023 – since the announcement of the contract – been fighting to suppress to the Victorian public the details of the contract.

Jeroen WEIMAR: I am aware – you will appreciate this is before the time I started as Secretary – that when the CVTS contract was issued that was on the back of a very long and extensive procurement process. It is a pretty aggressive market, the provision of ticketing services globally. I am aware there was some commercial dispute. I am very happy to go back and check my records on that.

Richard RIORDAN: It is not about the dispute. On 9 June last year OVIC made the decision that you need to release 16 documents, and you are now back with Clayton Utz in the legal process fighting the release of those documents.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Chair, can I seek your guidance? I think this is speaking to a process that has some existing parameters around it in terms of how FOI is dealt with and what actions are available to –

Richard RIORDAN: So, Minister, you are wanting to keep it quiet.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: No, I am just –

The CHAIR: Excuse me, Mr Riordan –

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: I think it is beyond –

The CHAIR: It is around the clarity of what you have asked. Minister.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Yes. Our FOI system has some agreed parameters and processes around it that enable both sides of a request to pursue whatever vehicles of resolving that matter they can. I am just not clear on why we would be prosecuting and whether we are able to within a PAEC environment – a process that sits quite separately to PAEC and instead has its own legal parameters around FOI.

Richard RIORDAN: For the minister’s benefit, it goes to the heart of what we have been talking about all morning, which is the preparedness of the minister and senior staff to actually be transparent about contracts. We have just heard from the department secretary, who has not had an inquiry and has uncovered none of the corruption and crime, which we have estimated –

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan –

Richard RIORDAN: at \$15 billion –

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan –

Richard RIORDAN: and here is a major contract –

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan, please do not talk over the top of me.

Richard RIORDAN: Well, stop interrupting my questions.

The CHAIR: Excuse me, Mr Riordan. Look at me. Please treat me with the respect that I deserve. Do not talk –

Richard RIORDAN: Well, stop wasting time.

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan, do not talk over the top of me. Do you have a question for the minister?

Richard RIORDAN: Yes, I have a question.

The CHAIR: Then I suggest that, in the minute that you have left, you ask it.

Richard RIORDAN: The contracts that have been let – so my point is that you have admitted today that we have not uncovered these through process. This is a \$1.7 billion contract, which –

Members interjecting.

Richard RIORDAN: let me finish the question – a \$1.7 billion contract that was to have been delivered at the same time as the failed Commonwealth Games, which has now passed. We are no closer in Victoria to a tap-and-go public transport system, a Myki system –

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: That is simply not true. The rollout has commenced. It was paused –

Richard RIORDAN: If we were hosting the Commonwealth Games last month, you would not be getting around Melbourne with a tap-and-go system.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Mr Riordan, I am more than willing to answer your question – in fact I am really eager to. If you had a question about the contract itself or indeed the rollout, we could answer that. You have just chewed up the entire period of time on an FOI process which has to run according to its own rules.

We have initiated the rollout of tap and go. It was paused during the free public transport period, and it will recommence from 1 June. That rollout will start with trains –

Richard RIORDAN: In the last second: when will Victoria be covered by a tap-and-go system like every other state?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: That rollout is soon to initiate. It will start with trains, and then it will roll out from the rest of the network there. We look forward to sharing the details with you from 1 June.

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan, your time is up. The minister has gone over time in answering the question you eventually were able to get out. Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. I think we finally got a question about public transport towards the end of that. That was exciting. Minister, I would like to ask you about bus services, specifically budget paper 3, pages 83 and 90, which are in relation to the ‘Improving bus and ferry services’ output in the budget. It contains funding of more than \$104 million over the output and asset initiatives. Could you please talk to me about what will be delivered under this program?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: I certainly can, Mr Galea, and I want to acknowledge at the outset your supreme skills when it comes to bus routes and bus service planning. Over the many years of your advocacy you have

consistently impressed the Department of Transport and Planning bus planning team with your route knowledge and your deep understanding of how this planning should take place and the objectives that we should have at the heart of our considerations, so thank you. I am not at all surprised that you would be asking this question about bus services given your deep knowledge.

We are incredibly proud as a government of our investment into delivering a better bus network for Victorians. We have delivered over 24,000 new weekly bus services across the state since coming to government, and the investment that you refer to will continue on that pipeline of bus network uplifts, bringing our total investment into better bus services to close to \$1 billion, with very significant investment in the last three budgets to make sure that we are in particular meeting the needs of some of our fastest growing communities. In last year's state budget we had a strong focus on those growth areas, particularly in the outer west and north, and connecting those services to not only local amenities and services but train stations and employment hubs as well. The investment in this year's budget continues this focus, boosting services to better connect our suburbs, with expanded hours and additional weekend services, new and upgraded routes in growing suburbs and more connections to universities. Importantly, more bus services help Victorians save money and time, and we have already had an extensive conversation around free public transport and the reduced fares and why they are important for giving people genuine options to leave the car at home.

In Melbourne's northern suburbs we will be improving access to employment hubs, with additional weekday and evening services to routes travelling to La Trobe's Bundoora campus, helping students and workers to travel to that education precinct and also of course saving them time and money. We will be delivering additional weekend services and longer operating hours to key routes, providing better services for communities in Roxburgh Park, Pascoe Vale, Mernda, South Morang and the inner north, including Brunswick, Northcote and Coburg.

In Melbourne's western suburbs this investment will deliver two new services for Melton South, one connecting Weir Views to Melton South and the other Strathulloh to Cobblebank station. I was out there with the Member for Melton recently having a look at the additional levels of connectivity that those services will provide for his local community and also chatting to a couple of locals who were very excited about those announcements as well and just happened to walk past as we were celebrating them. We will also be doubling the frequency of route 454, which travels east-west between Melton and Cobblebank stations, and extending the service to travel to Woodgrove shopping centre, which the Member for Melton tells me is a hugely sought-after connection and one that will deliver enormous benefits for the local community and in particular local families. We will also be upgrading services between Moonee Ponds and Watergardens and between St Albans Station and Highpoint.

Residents across Melbourne's eastern and south-eastern suburbs will benefit from new services as well, new Sunday services. Those ones are being added to route 273, which connects commuters from Nunawading station to The Pines shopping centre; route 885, which travels from Glen Waverley to Springvale market; and route 236, which links Garden City in Port Melbourne to South Melbourne and the Queen Vic market. Further south we will be connecting routes 777 and 778 to travel between Seaford and the Karingal Hub shopping centre and delivering more weekend services to route 833 in Carrum and Frankston. We will also be delivering substantial improvements to routes 802 and 804 in Dandenong and across Casey, which I am hugely thrilled about. It has been the source of a big community campaign; I am sure you received the correspondence on that as well. It is a real reminder to us of what these services mean for local communities and of local communities' willingness to really advocate for them.

In terms of – just concluding – regional Victoria, we will be delivering a new route connecting Drysdale to Ocean Grove, an additional return trip every day between Castlemaine and Harcourt and more services on the Bass Coast coach routes from Cowes and Inverloch to Dandenong as well, so it is a very comprehensive package of bus uplifts for the benefit of the Victorian community.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Minister. Certainly with the 795 going through Botanic Ridge and Junction Village, the Member for Cranbourne and I have had amazing feedback from talking to locals around Botanic Ridge, especially with our street stores there, so it is good feedback to pass on. You did correctly say that I do love talking about buses. I also love talking about Clyde North, and, happily, I can talk about both because the 888 and the 897 will both be extended further into Clyde North and Clyde. You touched on the Casey package.

I am wondering if you could elaborate further on what benefits people in communities like Clyde, Cranbourne and Berwick will see.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: I sure can. I want to acknowledge your advocacy for boosting bus services in some of those fastest growing parts of the City of Casey. We are proposing service changes that will expand the bus network across this growing corridor, with a strong focus on improving travel options for some of those newly developed areas, as you have highlighted. Upgrades will include extensions to existing routes, and that is around improving coverage and service levels. Those upgrades also go to the realignment of some existing routes to better meet local access needs and also the introduction of a new route to provide additional coverage in some of those particularly fast growing pockets, which you have outlined as well.

Those upgraded routes will provide coverage to an estimated 132,000 residents, delivering better access to those key destinations in their communities, including, as you have noted, Botanic Ridge, Casey Fields, Clyde, Clyde North, Junction Village, Devon Meadows, Warneet and Tooradin, so they are quite comprehensive. For these localities, it will link them up to key destinations such as Cranbourne and Berwick stations and also connect them to of course the turn-up-and-go Metro Tunnel corridor. We have been incredibly keen to ensure through our bus packages that we are connecting people to the uplifts that we have been able to deliver on key rail corridors as well to make sure that we are maximising the benefit for all Victorians of some of that investment, and I think we would all agree that that is incredibly important. What I have just outlined is in addition to the connections – this is in terms of the link-up to Cranbourne and Berwick stations and the link-up to the Cranbourne–Pakenham line more broadly. That is in addition to that, that is a connection that will be created to Federation University, where the upgrades will improve access, particularly during evenings and on weekends. And there are a number of other proposed service uplifts that will serve new estates.

Michael GALEA: Thank you.

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

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Good morning. I will start with the 78 tram – budget paper 3, page 83, ‘Outputs’. The 78 tram is a Chapel Street icon, but unfortunately it is a particularly bad example on the accessibility front. It has got no platform stops along the whole route, and I understand it is still fully run with the old high-floor trams, which are not only inaccessible, they are small, they are cramped, and they have no air conditioning. Can I ask what planning has been done to upgrade accessibility on the 78 line?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Look, I might make some introductory remarks on our investment in accessibility across our tram network.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: If you could keep it to the 78 tram line, that would be great.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Sure. The secretary will supplement my remarks on that. As you are aware, and I think we have had calls to talk about in previous hearings, our public transport network, as it is in many jurisdictions, is a legacy network, which does present us with some significant accessibility challenges. And as such, we have a task in trying to upgrade our network to ensure that we are delivering greater levels of accessibility. We have done that incrementally through our Big Build agenda and also with bespoke investment. Our tram network is perhaps the biggest challenge in terms of accessibility given its age and its size, which is why we have year on year in budget after budget invested in both early planning and then implementation of level access stop development where it can be done.

This year’s budget has \$75.9 million to further that work. I outlined some of the investments that we are making across trams more broadly. In terms of our investment into level access tram stops more specifically, we are currently in the process of preparing our network for low-floor accessible G-class trams. Obviously the stops are one thing, the rolling stock is another. We are making changes to the route 57, 59 and 82 tram corridors in particular to be able to accommodate that new fleet. I talked in my opening remarks about some of the planning works being done on High Street, Northcote and Thornbury, and some further planning around Sydney Road. Secretary, I know you were nodding to me that you wanted to contribute some additional information perhaps.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Particularly to the 78.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Thank you, Minister. I think, as the minister said, the focus at the moment for us is about rolling stock rollout. So we have 200 fully low-floor accessible trams now on the network. We have another 100 on the way with the G-class tram. As the minister said, a lot of the focus is on the Sydney Road, Northcote and Thornbury, areas and in the west around Droop Street. We will, as we start to cascade those trams through and start to retire the high-floor Zs, As and Bs off the network, start to look at some of the corridors, like the 78, in terms of the next round of prioritisation.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Is there a timeline, though, for a route like 78?

Jeroen WEIMAR: As we discussed earlier with the Park Street discussion, we continue to evolve and look at what does the future demand on the tram network look like, particularly as we have, running parallel to Chapel Street, the whole St Kilda Road corridor, the Metro Tunnel corridor. So we will be looking, in the coming year, at what is the next iteration for those corridors.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: We have effectively got a rolling analysis done of where we can do the planning to deliver future upgrades. We are very keen, through dedicated investment and also through sort of incidental investment, if you like, through our Big Build agenda, to make sure we are improving accessibility where we can, including to our tram stops. We have been very focused on delivering a consistent investment across budgets to make sure that we are working through a very large tram network and identifying the particular challenges that exist on some corridors, particularly where there is limited road space, for example, to be able to make sure that we are, in a continual way, delivering uplifts that aid in accessibility. And we have done that again in this year's budget.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: For this line, again appreciating that there are things that are rolling in their evaluations and progress, as a ballpark, how long would it take to upgrade a line like this where there are no platform stops currently, in terms of years?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: In terms of the infrastructure timeline, to be able to deliver?

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Yes, if we are looking to accommodate this line, how many years away would we be talking?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Look, I think that sort of timeframe of construction and delivery would be determined by that sort of early planning work. Secretary, I do not know if you wanted to complement that any further with the details that you have?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Again, Mr Puglielli, if you look back at the history of our recent work, 102 tram stops upgraded over the last few years at 54 locations – you are getting those level-access tram stops in and getting the low-floor trams in. So currently the cascades of the trams we have committed to with the 100 new G-class coming on stream takes us a long way forward. About 63 per cent, I think, of our tram network will be low-floor and accessible at that point in time. And of course traction power substations are the other thing. We have introduced 17 power substations on the network, because the newer trams we have tend to be heavier, tend to be longer and tend to be air-conditioned, so they require more power. All that work takes a number of years, as does the network development plan. I think what you have seen us do over the last few years is continue to revolve not only the tram plan in isolation but how does it fit within the wider rail plan for the CBD and inner Melbourne, how does it fit with the bus plan and how do we put these pieces together.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Yes, just to keep us moving – I have limited time – could I ask with respect to the 86 tram corridor, Gertrude Street and Smith Street, is there a date set for those particular sites?

Jeroen WEIMAR: In terms of the –

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Delivery of upgrades for those sites.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, the 86 already of course has the benefit of having E-class trams running upon it, so it is a low-floor stock. It is a good, accessible corridor. Right now our focus is very much on getting Droop Street organised for the route 82, getting the G-class out into Thornbury and getting Northcote sorted out. We can come back to you on what the timelines are for the stops on Gertrude Street.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. That would be much appreciated. Can I also move on to another matter, budget paper 3, page 94, looking at Richmond station. Could I just ask: is there a dollar figure that the committee could be provided with as to how much has been spent on upgrades for Richmond station, say, over the last decade? Is that something you would be able to source?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Look, I would have to take that on notice. I would not have that figure to hand.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: That is all right.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Obviously I have spoken extensively in my previous comments about the upgrades and rebuilds or new stations that have been delivered across our network. Similar to the conversation around trams, we have got a very extensive public transport network across many modes. We are always looking at ways to – in a way that ensures the best value for money that we can – deliver the upgrades to our facilities that both facilitate better accessibility but also offer more services or more reliable services. In some sites that work is more challenging than others for a range of reasons, but we take the opportunities that we are given each budget cycle to make sure that we are progressing that work, and that is what we are doing in this cycle.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: If you are taking that question away to follow it up, can I also ask for Burnley station as well? Is that all right?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: In terms of – sorry, what was the full question?

Aiv PUGLIELLI: You were going to take away to get me, over 10 years, the investment.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Over 10 years, the investment and the upgrades. Sure. I am just noting that I am not sure how you want to categorise upgrades here because some upgrades might be to things, for example, like tactile or ensuring there are safety uplifts but also CCTV, lighting, painting and those sorts of improvements. In terms of Richmond station, there are some technology uplifts that I know MTM have been introducing to stop pit access.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Tak.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Chair, Minister and officials. I refer to budget paper 3 on page 93. Under the initiative description 'Critical priorities for Melbourne's tram network' it indicates that it will improve accessibility across our legacy tram network. Minister, could you please provide more details on this?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: I certainly can, and it is a nice little segue from Mr Puglielli's questions on trams and more broadly, I guess, on accessibility. As I outlined in the previous response, the Allan Labor government is committed to – and has been since we have come to office – delivering a safer and more accessible transport network. And that of course, as I was just saying, includes the challenging task of upgrading the world's largest tram network along with it. This year's state budget continues our investment into supporting the rollout of G-class trams, as I have just had cause to say then. Level-access tram stops are hugely important, but so is having the rolling stock that also facilitates accessibility. We should not underestimate the importance of the rollout of the G-class tram onto the network later this year.

We have also, as part of delivering that new rolling stock, been able to start retiring our older high-floor Z-class trams and also doing things like undertaking bridge strengthening assessments and making sure that the infrastructure around the network is what it needs to be to support greater accessibility outcomes. We have also just announced in recent weeks that we will be rolling out that G-class tram on routes 12, 48 and 58, servicing communities in Melbourne's inner north, south and south-east, and including those in Albert Park, St Kilda, Pascoe Vale, Brunswick West and Richmond. G-class trams, just for those who are not familiar with them, are 25 metres long. They can hold up to 150 passengers. That is almost twice as many as the old high-floor trams that operate on those routes, so they deliver a pretty direct passenger benefit as well as accessibility in capacity. They feature, obviously, that more accessible lower floor design, but they also have more doors, more handrails and improvements to passenger information on the tram to make it easier for everyone to use public transport. Those trams, the new trams, the G-class are in testing and will start servicing passengers later this year.

What I had cause in both my opening remarks and in the previous question to outline is the work that we are doing to both deliver and develop more level access stops. In coming months we will be constructing five level-access stops on Droop Street and Gordon Street in Footscray, which support level-access boarding to those G-class trams that will be rolled out on route 82. But importantly, they will improve access to the brand new Footscray Hospital as well. So we are trying to prioritise where we know there are particularly acute needs for greater level of levels of accessibility as we continue our incremental work to improve the accessibility of the network as a whole.

Now, this investment followed extensive consultation on preferred stop locations and stop types. That happened in 2024, and then subsequent to that there were finalised detailed design and development activities. During that same time we were also consulting on level-access stops along the High Street tram corridor in Thornbury and Northcote on route 86. Following the finalisation of design and development activities there, we have been able to, in this state budget, invest in delivering level-access stops along that corridor as well. I just stepped that out so you can sort of see the phasing of our planning, consultation and then ability to fund the delivery and how that has been rolling out now over a number of years. High Street, as we know – that one funded in this budget – is a very vibrant hub of local shops. It has also got residences, cafes, bars, restaurants. It is a thriving hub and a very important transport route for people travelling to and through that area and to all the amenities that it has to offer. I visited the future location of one of those stops earlier this month with the member for Northcote at the intersection of High Street and Separation Street, which is, she was telling me, a very significant kind of local access point, providing better access to Northcote shopping centre, All Nations Park and of course a bus stop that delivers route 508. So again there is that interconnectivity through the investments that we make.

It is also worth noting that level access tram stops may, on their face, seem minor, but they are actually really significant upgrades, which effectively change the layout of an entire street and then also change the way people move. So that consultation and planning phase is really critical in order to make sure that we get it right and that we understand what any other flow-on impacts of that change to infrastructure may be. It is why we undertake such extensive development work. It is why we make sure that we are meeting community expectations with what we are delivering and why we take that corridor approach that the tram plan recommended that we do. Noting that, we have, through the budget, invested in the development work too of level-access stops for the future tranche, if you like, of delivery, that being Sydney Road in both Brunswick and Coburg and Keilor Road in Niddrie. My Parliamentary Secretary for Public and Active Transport Sheena Watt; and Anthony Cianflone as well, the member for Pascoe Vale; and the member for Niddrie have all raised with me and my office the significance of those corridors and the benefits that can be achieved of having a more accessible tram network operating through those areas. We look forward to being able to do the work to really iron out what those projects need to deliver and how it is best to deliver them.

We have also met – over the years, my office and I – a number of advocates and advocacy groups to discuss some of the areas that have particular challenges around them in terms of road space and how we might best meet the challenges of that contested road space. Sydney Road is always a good example of that. The Department of Transport and Planning have now begun to work through the planning for those corridors, the Sydney Road one included. We look forward to having more to say about our approach to the public consultation more formally around that at a later date.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you. In terms of safety and security, certainly those outer suburbs are quite – and you also mentioned safety. Can you please provide a bit more, in terms of information, about how this investment builds on the government's initiatives to improve safety and security on public transport?

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Yes, I certainly can. As you have heard me say many times, it is a key priority for us not only to deliver the services that Victorians want and need but also to make sure that our network is safe and that it is accessible for all Victorians. That continues to be an ongoing priority that we progress through each budget cycle. Safety, it should be noted, does not just relate to surveillance and crime prevention but also to equitable access on our public transport network. Whether you are a woman travelling alone at night –

The CHAIR: I am going to stop you there, Minister.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Minister.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Minister, Secretary and officials, thank you very much for taking the time to appear 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 women and girls portfolio at 11:35 am. I declare this hearing adjourned.

Witnesses withdrew.