

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2025-26 Budget Estimates

Melbourne – Friday 6 June 2025

MEMBERS

Sarah Connolly – Chair

Nicholas McGowan – Deputy Chair

Jade Benham

Michael Galea

Mathew Hilakari

Lauren Kathage

Aiv Puglielli

Meng Heang Tak

Richard Welch

WITNESSES

Melissa Horne MP, Minister for Roads and Road Safety;

Jeroen Weimar, Secretary,

Will Tieppo, Deputy Secretary, Network Design and Integration, and

Fiona Adamson, Head, Transport Services, Department of Transport and Planning; and

Tracey Slatter, Chief Executive Officer, Transport Accident Commission.

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

On behalf of the Parliament the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2025–26 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, any comments repeated outside of this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

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

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.

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.

I welcome the Minister for Roads and Road Safety the Honourable Melissa Horne as well as officials from DTP. Minister, I invite you to make an opening statement or presentation of no more than 5 minutes, after which time committee members will ask you some questions. Your time starts now.

Melissa HORNE: Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to address the committee on this year's Victorian budget. It includes a number of initiatives that will contribute significantly to the safe and efficient way that Victorians use and interact with the road network.

Visual presentation.

Melissa HORNE: Since 2014 we have delivered an unprecedented level of investment in a reform program to ensure Victoria's road network safely and efficiently connects people and freight to their destination. Without a doubt, Chair, we have had a big year in the roads space. Since October 2024 we have had crews out in every corner of the state delivering a \$964 million maintenance program, and this work is still continuing. We are on track to deliver over 180,000 on-road jobs in the current program. That totals over 500 kilometres of large-scale rehabilitation and resurfacing works across the state. This scaling up of the maintenance program followed previous years' focus on strengthening roads and patching following significant flood and storm events. In fact with much of that work completed, conditions have now allowed us to reallocate more resources to building longer term resilience into the network, and we have been able to complete more of this work than is actually reflected in the budget papers. In the coming year we will continue this work, with additional funding provided in this year's budget allowing \$976 million to be invested in maintaining our roads, beating this year's record as the largest single-year investment in Victoria's history.

Chair, we have got a significant program of upgrades to arterial roads throughout the state. These upgrades will make travelling easier and safer for a range of road users. This budget invests an additional \$44 million to improve the transport connections that Victorians rely on across the state. Some of this investment includes pedestrian-operated signals in Oakleigh, a signalised pedestrian crossing in Parkdale, upgrading Mount Emu

Creek bridge in Terang, flashing signage at Caledonian Primary School in Ballarat and an upgrade to the southern roundabout intersection of Mount Alexander Road, Napier Street, Fletcher Street and Russell Street in Essendon. We will also futureproof our road network, with funding provided for major structural works for the San Remo bridge, that key link to Phillip Island which ensures that residents and the 3.5 million tourists who visit the island each year can get there easily.

Chair, since the implementation of the VicRoads joint venture almost three years ago there has been a huge uplift in services to customers. Around 1.9 million Victorians, including 400,000 L and P licence-holders, have downloaded their digital drivers licence since it was introduced in May last year, and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. They love the convenience.

VicRoads has also rolled out a new vehicle history report product, which helps customers make an informed decision on price and safety when buying a second-hand vehicle. This has also been incredibly well received, with more than 100,000 customers taking advantage of this product. VicRoads is also making its digital services much more secure, and passkeys have been implemented as a quick and secure way of guaranteeing that safety.

Chair, we are also investing \$1.1 billion dollars in the *Road Safety Action Plan 2*, which was launched last year, and that includes \$412 million in this budget alone. This includes funding for a package of road safety infrastructure initiatives, and that includes things like the installation of road safety barriers at high-risk locations on the rural road network and on high-movement urban roads. It includes road safety infrastructure at priority rural intersections and extending and expanding mobile phone and seatbelt detection cameras.

Finally, Chair, local government owns and operates 87 per cent of Victoria's road network, which is why we need to work together with councils across the state, and we are investing \$210 million into the safe local roads and streets program to deliver safer local roads across the state. We are working with local government right across the state to deliver this.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. The first 7 minutes is going to go to Ms Benham.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you, Chair. Evening again, Minister. Minister, could you open the department performance measures budget paper to page 135, and under 'Road asset management' near the bottom of the page – it is about three up – can you find 'Road area major patched: roads in regional Victoria'? You will see that the target for the area patched was 1.033 million square metres. Can you read out the expected outcome for 2024–25, next to that?

Melissa HORNE: The thing that we need to do – and I appreciate that these departmental performance measures –

Jade BENHAM: No, you can just read the number.

Melissa HORNE: are incredibly complicated. We do actually provide more granular detail than any single other jurisdiction in the country. The expected outcome reflects a point in time. These were provided in March by the department to allow these budget papers to be printed.

Jade BENHAM: So is there a revised figure as the expected outcome?

Melissa HORNE: If you turn the page, Ms Benham, and have a look at 'Road area resurfaced or rehabilitated', we have got an expected outcome of approximately 3 million square metres. The actual outcome of that – because what we did was we moved the patching to more rehab, which is a longer term, more sustainable sort of measure –

Jade BENHAM: So you changed the metrics?

Melissa HORNE: No, we have just done more work.

Jade BENHAM: In the interests of time, because it is very limited, if the expected outcome is 566,000 square metres, barely half of the original target, then you will read out the target for 2025–26, and that target is 70,000 square metres, is there a reason? Have the goalposts changed? Are the metrics now different?

Melissa HORNE: I think the thing that you need to understand around our arterial road network, of which there is 23,000 kilometres that the state is responsible for, is – think of it like the cardiovascular system of the Victorian economy. There are things that change all the time, so when there is one treatment that is occurring in one area, and the weather conditions might be –

Jade BENHAM: It has not rained for a long time in a lot of rural areas.

Melissa HORNE: No. I appreciate that. And that is why we have been able to do much more rehabilitation. As I said, on page 136, that top performance measure – the expected outcome or the expected number that we have actually done right here and now – whilst we expected it to be approximately 3 million square metres, it is now close to 3.5 million square metres.

Jade BENHAM: So how many potholes have been fixed?

Melissa HORNE: There have been tens of thousands of potholes that have been fixed. We get on with the job; we have got crews out there all the time.

Jade BENHAM: So are potholes classified as road maintenance or rehabilitation?

Melissa HORNE: No. Road maintenance covers a broad range of activities. It covers things like, absolutely, the black stuff on the roads, but it also includes things like replacing sound walls. It includes things like doing the lighting. It is about everything that is the maintenance program for all the assets that sit around the road network.

Jade BENHAM: Are potholes the priority, though?

Melissa HORNE: Depending on what the appropriate treatment at the time is. I appreciate neither you nor I are road engineers, so that is where I do take the advice from the department. We have got those contracts in place to be able to say that this is what we need to do at a particular point in time.

Jade BENHAM: Okay. Thank you, Minister. Last week in Parliament you accused the *Weekly Times* and the opposition of inaccurate representation of the road maintenance targets. Having now looked at them and explained the goalposts, do you now understand that you have failed, actually, to reach the target for patching roads in regional Victoria this year? Instead of fixing more potholes your target is going to in fact drop by 93 per cent next year. Why is that?

Melissa HORNE: As I said, we have been able to shift what we do to rehabilitation. The rehabilitation work is where you entirely dig out the road. Rather than just putting a bit of cold mix into a hole in the road, which is the most temporary form of road fixing, we have been actually now able to go out there and dig out large sections of road, re-base it and then re-asphalt it and then seal it, which gives us a lot more longevity.

Jade BENHAM: If you are doing more rehab and resurfacing – and hopefully they will last a little bit longer doing that, because it does not last long when it gets hot – is that why you have cut the road resurfacing target for this year? It is very clear in there that the number compared to last year is 70,000 square kilometres.

Melissa HORNE: As I said, it is a dynamic thing, and we move our targets depending on what the work is that we will do.

Jade BENHAM: So there are less roads that need rehab?

Melissa HORNE: No. What you can see is, if you turn over to page 138, we are actually doing a lot of work over the coming year of bridge strengthening and replacement projects. That is really critical work.

Jade BENHAM: No, Minister, I want to get to the bottom of why more money is being spent on road maintenance and our roads are getting worse. Meanwhile, the government is spending more money and reducing targets. That is essentially what we are trying to get to.

Melissa HORNE: No, I think what you are failing to understand, Ms Benham, is that road maintenance covers a wide variety of activities. That includes –

Jade BENHAM: What we understand, Minister – forgive me for interrupting – is communities in regional and rural Victoria are feeling unsafe on the roads and are saying to me that they no longer drive on the left of the road, they drive on what is left of the road. I am just trying to understand, while the targets come down and the spend is going up, how that is working, because we are not getting a better return on our road investment for what is being spent.

Melissa HORNE: As I say, you need to look at the department performance measures in their totality, and what you need to do is understand the broad spectrum of works that are occurring.

Jade BENHAM: Thanks.

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

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Chair. Minister and officials, it is great to have you here this evening. Thank you for bearing with us. I also would like to talk about roads. I have seen actually, Minister, examples of what you are talking about with that deeper work, with broad intersections being fixed up so that the potholes do not keep coming back. There is a real, lasting solution for some of those intersections, so thank you very much. I can see how the extra investment helps there. Roads are definitely a topic of conversation in my electorate. On page 83 of BP3 there is some funding outlined. Can you speak a bit, beyond what we have shared so far, about how this funding is helping to make sure that the roads are maintained to a level that Victorians need to get to where they need to go?

Melissa HORNE: Thank you very much. We have been out at a number of your roads and had a look at some of the important works that have been needed, whether it is some of that sort of maintenance on the road surface but also with vegetation and waste management removal and those sorts of things. It has been really pleasing that we have actually been able to deliver some of those things that your community has spoken to you about and you have had that important advocacy for.

In total with the investment that we have done of nearly \$2 billion last year and in this coming year, we have been able to rebuild or resurface almost 16,000 kilometres of regional roads and over 2000 kilometres in the metro area. That is what this funding allows us to be able to do. I know that there are people who talk down our investment, which is incredibly disappointing, because these are roads that our communities rely on, whether it is getting the kids to school, whether it is getting your cattle truck to market or whether it is about doing those commutes to work, it is important that we are able to do that.

On budget day, I would just like to point out, the *Age* actually listed Victorian motorists as part of their winners because of that huge investment of \$976 million. The Victorian Transport Association has also been absolutely delighted with the investment, and Peter Anderson, a dear friend and the CEO of that, has described it as a welcome and necessary step to ensuring that Victoria's road freight network is safe, efficient and also resilient.

We have got crews out every single day of the week. They are inspecting our roads; they are maintaining our roads. And as I said, there have been hundreds of kilometres of Victoria's roads that have been rebuilt, from the Goulburn Highway to the Bacchus Marsh Road, where we have had crews out, and Diamond Creek Road. In fact earlier this year I was in Mooroopna checking out a 1.4-kilometre section of the Echuca–Mooroopna road that we have completely rebuilt. I am sure Ms Benham knows that almost 3 kilometres of the Mallee Highway at Ouyen has been rebuilt as well.

We are also doing things that are quite innovative too and trialling new technologies to be able to make sure that our road network is more resilient. That is pleasing, to see that sort of level of innovation coming into the work that our crews do. I know there are some who like to forget that the October 2022 floods occurred, but they did do enormous damage to our road network. And seeing the devastating floods, actually, in New South Wales, I know that those communities will feel the impact of those floods on their road network pretty much for years to come. We have been focused on repairing this damage with that smaller scale patching work, and there has been 518,000 square metres of it following the 2022 flood event.

We have also been able to do some significant capital works as well, and that has been in things like where we have repaired the Hyland Highway with landslip remediation. We have got the McCoys Bridge work on the Murray Valley Highway, and the Goulburn Valley Highway rehabilitation work has happened as well. So now

that that flood work has been completed, pretty much, we can now move on to that rehabilitation and that rebuilding of the road network.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Minister. You spoke in your presentation about a 10-year strategy. How does that guide investment year to year?

Melissa HORNE: That has been a bit of a game changer, because previously the way that road funding worked was that it was a year-on-year allocation, and the road maintenance season in terms of the stuff that you put down on roads and the stuff that you repair on roads pretty much goes from about September, when the weather is starting to get a bit drier and a bit warmer, to about May. We have been able to extend it longer this year, predominantly because of the drought that is affecting so many farmers out in the west. To be able to have that long-term funding horizon where we can plan the strategic investment over the years has made a significant difference, and supporting that has been a road maintenance strategy that we have also released, because different parts of the road network do different jobs. The metropolitan road network is a bit of a living organism. Because of the way that people move and the freight task that is around Melbourne, it is entirely different from, say, up in the north-west or down in the south-west, with different topography and different bases and those sorts of things.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you. We are talking about –

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

Jade BENHAM: Thank you, Chair. This might be one for the Secretary, perhaps. As at today, how many potholes have been filled this financial year? With 70,000 square metres of patching forecast – I am going by the figures that are in the performance statement – to be filled in regional roads this year, how many do you forecast will be filled next year? There are actually two questions there: how many potholes have been filled this financial year, and how many do you forecast for next year?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Thank you, Ms Benham. I may take you back to the DPS, pages 135 and 136, which we were discussing earlier.

Jade BENHAM: 135, specifically.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Yes, but they are related. I do not have a number for potholes for you, I am afraid, because we have two types of maintenance that we operate on our network.

Jade BENHAM: Does that not get measured anywhere?

Jeroen WEIMAR: No, because essentially the way we operate is we have routine maintenance operations. In the year coming up we have around \$464 million for routine maintenance. That is our crews going out. We have seven regional maintenance contractors all operating across the state. Those crews are out on the network every single day, with 23,000 kilometres of roads that we have to manage. They are out there doing grass cutting, they are out there checking on the safety and integrity of the road and they also do spot repairs if they get to things which they regard as unsafe. Every now and then you will see the white paint on the road that says, 'Here is something we've got to come back to and to repair properly.'

Jade BENHAM: We are very familiar with the white paint, Secretary.

Jeroen WEIMAR: The routine maintenance teams work through that, and my colleague Ms Adamson can give you more detail on that. But we also do planned maintenance work. The rehabilitation work that the minister was going to earlier addresses that, and those are the bigger sections and the rebuild of the road infrastructure. I will take you to 136, if I may, on DPS. As the minister said, we have exceeded our target so far already this year of 3.4 million square metres of rehabilitation on regional roads, a significant uplift from where we expected it to be, and we deliberately invested in that, which meant we had a lower outcome on the patching. Rehabilitation is always our preference, so that we actually get the proper work done for the long term.

Jade BENHAM: Interesting.

Jeroen WEIMAR: We recognise some of the resurfacing is necessary as well.

Jade BENHAM: I thought there had been some narrative around boasting about how many potholes had been filled up to certain dates over the past, so there must be some sort of measurement there that you could supply.

Melissa HORNE: Look, without a doubt, we do have the metrics on that; they are just not contained in the DPS measurements.

Jade BENHAM: Okay. Could you supply them to us on notice?

Melissa HORNE: Absolutely, we can give you the work that has been done to date.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you, Minister. Thank you. Secretary, as of today, how many sections of road are there subject to a 'pavement in poor condition' management plan?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I may go to my colleague Ms Adamson on that question. I do not know whether we have that or whether we should take it on notice.

Fiona ADAMSON: Thank you, Secretary. As you understand, 'pavements in poor condition' is a rolling figure, because we have got our contractors out there. If they assess it and decide due to various conditions that it is in poor condition and we need to reduce speed et cetera, it goes onto a list, but we have also got our contractors out there fixing them as they go along.

Jade BENHAM: So you do not know how many sections of road are subject to that plan at the moment?

Fiona ADAMSON: I do not have that number.

Jade BENHAM: Could you supply that to us?

Fiona ADAMSON: We should be able to give you that figure, yes.

Jade BENHAM: On notice – thank you very much. Maybe this is for the Secretary. How many Victorians have lodged claims for property damage from roads so far this financial year – or, if we have not got this financial year, for the 2024 calendar year?

Melissa HORNE: One thing I will say about this is, firstly, the state is not a third-party insurer, so the way that this scheme operates is if the state has not met its requirements under the *Road Management Act*, then there is a prescribed fee that can be –

Jade BENHAM: Yes. We are just after the number of claims due to damage on the road.

Melissa HORNE: You have got to appreciate that it will depend on the state failing to meet its obligations under the *Road Management Act*. For different classes of roads there are different requirements of how often we go out to inspect.

Jade BENHAM: Secretary, do you have a figure there?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I do, yes. As of yesterday we have currently – this is claims only; of course all those claims will be assessed and tested carefully – 711 claims. That is down about 40 per cent on this time last year.

Jade BENHAM: So that is the total amount of claims.

Jeroen WEIMAR: The total number of claims made is 711.

Jade BENHAM: Over the 2024 calendar year or this financial year?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Over the current financial year, the 2024–25 year.

Jade BENHAM: The current financial year?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Yes. It is not the full financial year. Compared to this time last year, it is down by about 30, 40 – about a third.

Jade BENHAM: What was the number for last year?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Last year was 1158.

Melissa HORNE: Plus 40 per cent.

Jade BENHAM: Yes. Well, 30 or 40 per cent I cannot really do, it is not simple arithmetic when I am working with approximates.

Jeroen WEIMAR: The number for last year's PAEC was 1158.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you very much. Secretary, how many kilometres of road will be subject to roadside grading or drain clearing works in 2025–26, and how many will be completed in 2024–25?

Jeroen WEIMAR: As I think we said earlier, we have a huge amount of performance data, a lot of which finds itself in the DPS. I might refer to my colleague Ms Adamson to see whether we have that data to hand.

Fiona ADAMSON: I do not at the moment. The program is just being set at the moment, so we would need to come back with that.

Jade BENHAM: Okay. You are happy to supply that?

Fiona ADAMSON: If we can get the specific details around that.

Jade BENHAM: Okay.

Jeroen WEIMAR: And Ms Benham, could you just clarify exactly what you are looking for?

Jade BENHAM: Sorry. How many kilometres of roads will be subject to roadside grading or drain clearing works?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Okay. We will see what we can do and we will let you know.

Jade BENHAM: Great. Thank you very much. Talking about the 2022 floods, as the minister was talking about earlier, given that we are three years on now, has every road that was damaged in the 2022 floods now been fixed?

Melissa HORNE: We have been doing an enormous amount of work, which is why it was reflected in last year's budget of the \$964 million, which was predominantly focused on getting our road network back up and running. The approach that we took was that, first and foremost, with those roads – and look, I appreciate there were roads in your neck of the woods that were underwater –

Jade BENHAM: Plenty.

Melissa HORNE: for a considerable period of time. Once the floodwaters had receded, it was about getting the road network back up and running. The most appropriate response to that was pothole filling. Then as it got warmer and drier we moved to the patching work, and now we are able to move into the rehabilitation work, because, you know, last –

Jade BENHAM: Is that rehabilitation work still from flood-affected roads?

Melissa HORNE: Some of it is, yes.

Jade BENHAM: So they have not all been fixed yet?

Melissa HORNE: It was a huge task.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We will go to Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Good evening, Minister, Secretary and officials. Thank you for joining us. Minister, I would like to take you to the *Road Safety Action Plan 2*, from which output funding is outlined in this budget of \$17 million for 2025–26. Could you please tell me how this funding will be used to drive road safety initiatives in the state?

Melissa HORNE: Look, thank you very much. I would like to recognise that we have got a terrible road toll at the moment. We have seen – Tracey, it is 136 people, isn't it – 136 people have lost their lives on our roads at this point in time. This is not a phenomenon that is just contained to Victoria, it is something that we are actually seeing globally. Therefore, to be able to have the road safety action plan, the second tranche of it, which we launched at the end of last year, it was so important to commit that \$1.1 billion over three years to try and reduce road trauma. In order to have a safe road system you need to focus on four key things. You need to have safe behaviour. You need to have safe infrastructure, so the wire rope barriers, the appropriate treatments at intersections, those sorts of things. You need to have safe vehicles, so making sure that people have got the safest vehicles that they possibly can is absolutely critical. And Tracey, just refresh my tired old brain. What is the fourth component of road-safe behaviour?

Tracey SLATTER: It is safer roads, safer vehicles, safer driver behaviours and safer speeds.

Melissa HORNE: And safer speeds, because we know that it is speeding that is the number one factor in road trauma. And I know, Mr McGowan – and thank you for your advocacy – it was so good to be able to go out to your local school, where Mr McGowan has done an enormous amount of work to get that speed limit dropped, and that will have an impact on our safe road network.

In terms of some of the things we are doing, we are installing targeted road safety barriers at high-risk locations on the rural road network. We are installing median and side safety barriers on divided urban roads, on those high-movement routes. We have got safety signals at more than 100 high-risk sites across the state, particularly to protect our vulnerable road users – so your cyclists and your pedestrians. We are working with the Commonwealth through their road safety program and the black spot stuff. And I know, Ms Benham, you and I had a couple of very important conversations to be able to address the site of terrible, terrible multiple fatalities. So that is really pleasing, and thank you too for your work.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you, Minister.

Melissa HORNE: I think it is really important to recognise that road safety is not something that should ever be politicised, and we should always work collectively to be able to save lives and protect people.

Some of the new funding that is occurring in this year's budget includes \$240 million in asset investment. We have got \$154 million for critical road safety infrastructure; that is safety barriers on high-risk curves on rural and urban roads and pedestrian safety upgrades to more than 100 intersections. We have got \$40 million in the Victorian contribution to the Victorian road safety program, and that comes through the TAC. As well as that, we have got \$45 million in the Australian government contribution to the Commonwealth road safety program.

I know that the Minister for Police talked at length in his evidence earlier this week about some of the things that he is doing with the enforcement cameras, because we know that this helps to drive behaviour and drive that safe behaviour. Of course I have got to say, for a state that was the first state to introduce compulsory seatbelts – we were early adopters of really safe road driver behaviour – what we are seeing is that the lack of wearing seatbelts is one of the top five contributing factors to fatalities. I find it extraordinary that people are choosing not to put a seatbelt on. They are choosing to either clip it in behind them, or they are taking the top sort of section off and just having a sash. It is extraordinary. Doing things like that just blows my mind. The other thing too, though, I was down at the TAC the other day and there is a program that the TAC runs around knowing whether your car is safe. I met – her name was Chris, wasn't it?

Tracey SLATTER: Chris. Yes, Minister.

Melissa HORNE: She was an older lady, who told an incredible story that she had been to an event where the TAC had been doing a 'check the safety of your car'. She said, 'I had an old Golf. I loved it. Did the assessment, went, oh, it's a 10-year-old car. It doesn't have quite the safety features. I'll think about upgrading it.' She upgraded it to a newer car or a car that she could afford, and I think a week later she was in a crash. Basically with the new features of the side airbags and the front airbags, she said it knocked her out for a

second, but then she could open her car and she could walk out of that accident. She said if she had been in her older car she most probably would have been another statistic in the road toll. So those programs are so important.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Minister.

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

Nick McGOWAN: I will just be brief, but can I share in the same sentiment, Minister, and thank you and your officers for what they did for Antonio Park Primary School. In that vein – I have written to you, but I would appreciate it if you were able to take a look when you can – we have a similar situation in the sense that we have probably too few 40-k signs in front of Mitcham Primary School and Mullauna. There are flashing signs, but there is a great distance between the two. A number of parents have raised with me the concern that the distance between them is so great that people actually forget, notwithstanding there are static signs; they are not the flashing signs. That is one issue. The other issue is Heathmont Village. The intersection, I understand from your letter to me recently, is undergoing a review by your department. All I would ask in that review is if you can consider a public information session so the public have an opportunity to feed into that review. That would be most welcome.

Melissa HORNE: Sure. Will oversees the road safety section in the department, and I am sure we can follow that up.

Nick McGOWAN: Thank you.

Will TIEPPO: If we could have the details, Mr McGowan, that would be great.

Nick McGOWAN: Thank you very much. Thank you, Minister.

Jade BENHAM: This one is for the Secretary again. The government claims to be spending \$976 million on road maintenance next financial year. Can you tell the committee how much of that will be spent on roadside maintenance, as in litter removal, grass mowing and weed spraying? I would love some native vegetation trimming, because it is getting very dangerous on some rural roads, and you cannot see around bends.

Melissa HORNE: If you can get us the details of those precise locations, absolutely.

Jade BENHAM: Can do. How much of that is going to roadside maintenance?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Thank you, Ms Benham. As the minister said earlier, the road maintenance budget – \$976 million – is not just on the black stuff. It is on all aspects of maintaining the roads – the structures, the bridges, the culverts that sit underneath them, the technology that sits around them and the sound walls on some of those big corridors that we have. I will give you some high-level numbers, and I will see if Ms Adamson has some more detailed numbers around grass cutting in particular. I mentioned earlier that we operate the network through seven regional maintenance contractors. They are operating in all of our regions across the state. Their job is to really be on the network every single day making sure it is in good shape and that it is safe and operable to run. They undertake that routine maintenance work that I have described, as well as pothole repairs, grass cutting and other vegetation control. As part of that \$976 million, \$464 million of that will go on routine road maintenance that deals with all those immediate things that we all see upon our road network.

Jade BENHAM: That is the potholes. That is not the roadside maintenance?

Jeroen WEIMAR: That would also include things like the grass cutting and the vegetation control.

Jade BENHAM: So that includes roadside. Can you provide a breakdown of what is roadside maintenance?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I might just ask Ms Adamson if there is any detail she wants to provide.

Fiona ADAMSON: The program is still being developed at the moment. We have just got the budget figure and are working through it, so we will not have the breakdown at the moment.

Jade BENHAM: Could you provide that to the committee when the program is finalised?

Fiona ADAMSON: In the specific buckets?

Jade BENHAM: Yes, that would be great.

Fiona ADAMSON: Yes, but it will be after five days. The program is still being worked through.

Jade BENHAM: Yes, that is fine. Thank you very much. Moving on to a different topic around road safety programs now, this relates to budget paper 3. Page 89 lists the *Road Safety Action Plan 2* as being \$239 million of asset funding. The explanation of this funding on page 93 states that funding is also provided to extend and expand the mobile phone and seatbelt detection cameras, which you spoke about earlier. How much of the \$239 million is dedicated to cameras, and how many cameras will that purchase?

Melissa HORNE: The camera component is a matter for the Minister for Police. We operate in a road safety partnership, so there is the road safety minister, but there is also the Minister for Police, and there is the Minister for Health too, because as you can appreciate, they deal with a lot of the road trauma. So that is a matter for the Minister for Police.

Jade BENHAM: Okay, but it is part of the road safety action plan. I am just wondering if there is a breakdown on how much is being used for cameras and –

Melissa HORNE: Tracey, have you got that detail to hand?

Tracey SLATTER: Yes, I do.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you.

Tracey SLATTER: Thank you for your question. As the minister was saying, there is the \$239 million, which is for the *Road Safety Action Plan 2* for road operations. In addition to that is \$155 million or \$156 million over five years, so it goes beyond the –

Jade BENHAM: Over five years.

Tracey SLATTER: It goes beyond the forward estimates for the camera program. So it is in addition; it is not part of the \$239 million.

Jade BENHAM: Okay. So that \$155 million is in addition to that *Road Safety Action Plan 2*.

Tracey SLATTER: Yes.

Jade BENHAM: So how many cameras are being bought and installed?

Tracey SLATTER: I can tell you that. Do you want to go on to another question while I find that?

Melissa HORNE: We can get that for you.

Jade BENHAM: Yes. Okay. I am just interested to see how many are going to be installed and bought with that money.

Melissa HORNE: Look, I am sorry. I do not have that detail, because you know, it is part of the police minister's responsibility, but we will get it.

Jade BENHAM: We were just talking about the road safety cameras earlier and how people do not wear seatbelts.

Melissa HORNE: I know.

Jade BENHAM: I thought you would be well up to date. That is okay, Minister. We will move on; it is fine. Again on page 83 of budget paper 3, a line item for the output funding for the *Road Safety Action Plan 2* is

\$17 million but for next year only – so nothing in the out years. The footnote indicates that there is \$172.5 million of output funding in the plan. Why is none of this allocated to the out years of the budget?

Melissa HORNE: Tracey, do you want to answer Ms Benham's question on that one? I do not have that to hand.

Tracey SLATTER: Yes. Do you mind just repeating that so I am clear on that.

Jade BENHAM: Sure. And I will just find the – oh, I am on the page. On page 83 it shows a line item for the output funding for the *Road Safety Action Plan 2*, which is three up. So there is \$17 million for next year, but that is it; there is nothing more. The footnote indicates there is \$172.5 million of output funding in the plan, so why is none of this allocated for the out years?

Tracey SLATTER: I am not sure. I cannot answer that.

Melissa HORNE: We will take that on notice.

Jade BENHAM: You will take that on notice. Okay.

Melissa HORNE: Yes – for sure.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you. How many kilometres of new safety barriers are going to be –

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

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Chair.

Michael GALEA: Where is Danny?

Jade BENHAM: Where is Danny? He is with us in spirit.

Melissa HORNE: Watching from home? Playing from home. Hello! Hello, Danny.

Meng Heang TAK: Minister, you said earlier in terms of safety there are four components, one of which includes infrastructure. I am interested in regional road upgrades – capital programs. I refer to page 91 of budget paper 3, which refers to the regional roads upgrade program. Minister, can you please outline to the committee how this will support the industries that use these critical highways?

Melissa HORNE: Sure. And thank you very much for your interest in things that are happening across regional Victoria. It is really pleasing to be able to see the level of investment that this government is putting in regional Victoria, because this budget will see over \$28 million invested in critical road upgrades across regional Victoria, many of which have got a key focus on supporting freight movements. I know that pertains to my previous session, but we have got that living organism of our arterial road network that does so many things. As I said, our regional roads do that heavy lifting, and without a doubt, particularly throughout regional Victoria, they are an economic enabler. They connect goods to market and they support businesses. This builds on our track record of almost \$60 billion worth of new roads and maintenance since 2014. But some of the things that we are doing – we have got the Barr Creek bridge. Now, this is the highest priority bridge in Victoria for upgrades to enable higher productivity freight vehicles. This funding in this year's budget will replace the existing bridge on the Murray Valley Highway over Barr Creek in Cullen. It is one of our top priorities for bridge upgrades because that will enable those critical HPFVs access across there. We have also got work occurring on the Princes Highway west, the Mackinnons Bridge replacement in Terang. Now, this existing structure is unable to withstand the desired loads that industries wish to carry and has restrictions for A-doubles.

As you can appreciate, what we are seeing are larger, heavier trucks across our network, because they are so much more efficient and deliver that productivity benefit. Upgrading that structure will open up the network for high-productivity freight vehicles, particularly those A-doubles, and provide that flexible and efficient freight transport network that links ports, links our interstate routes, links key industries and encourages that real economic development for those important regional areas. We have just released the provisional maps for the

freight routes particularly around western Victoria so that heavy vehicle freight carrying fodder to drought-affected farmers actually know the routes that they can take and take safely.

We have got the Western Highway Nhill trailer exchange, and we are putting in there female facilities. It does not sound like much, but it is terrific to partner with the Commonwealth on this, because guess what, we have run a program with the VTA to train more female truck drivers, and they are taking to this field with enthusiasm. But there is a big barrier if you cannot have female-friendly facilities along the side of a highway, and this was the number one priority of the VTA. I would also like to thank the livestock and rural transporters association, as well as my good friend Senator Glenn Sterle for their direct advocacy to me to get this important project over the line. State funding will allow that project to be submitted early for Commonwealth funding under the heavy vehicle rest access initiative. We have got work going on on the Goulburn Valley Highway rest area project development as well, because there is a lack of rest areas on the Goulburn Valley Highway, and that will allow us to better plan and have that development work. And see you later, Ms Benham. Enjoy your long weekend.

Jade BENHAM: It is a long way to drive on regional roads.

Melissa HORNE: This will have development and design of four rest areas on the Goulburn Valley Highway corridor. Planning on this allows drivers to take breaks, which are so important. We know one of the five key contributing factors to the fatalities that we are seeing on our roads is actually fatigue, so having these rest areas is so critical to allow drivers to just pull over and take a break. It is a shame Ms Benham has left, because her advocacy has had a direct impact on the way that we are going to partner with the Commonwealth to deliver a project that I know is so dear to the Member for Mildura's heart, and that is the Sixteenth Street and Deakin Avenue intersection – I think six young people died at that site. It is terrific that we will be able to install new traffic lights, improve pedestrian safety and upgrade the lighting to boost visibility. We have got the design work well and truly underway at the moment, and then what we need to do is have landholder engagement to occur. We will do that over the coming weeks, and I will be sure to let Ms Benham know when we are doing that before we put that project out to tender later this year. Those are many of the things that we have got going on. We have also got \$255 million that is being invested into the iconic Great Ocean Road, and that is to make that safer as well for generations to come. Regardless of where we are in the state, there are works happening apace.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Minister.

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

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Good evening. Back in November 2023, in response to my colleague Dr Tim Read, the Member for Brunswick, you said the department was considering including 30-kilometre speed limits in Victoria's standard speed zoning policy. Can I ask: since then, what advice have you received on this? For example, does this require legislation?

Melissa HORNE: Great question. It does not require legislation. We are in the process of removing some of the red tape around it. Previously it needed to go through a trial process, and that was both for a 30-kilometre-per-hour speed drop but also a 70 one. Road Safety Victoria has worked very hard to be able to remove that paperwork, and instead we can work directly with councils. I note that most recently the Lord Mayor of Melbourne wrote to me requesting a speed limit drop of 30 kilometres per hour in East Melbourne, and we will certainly do the necessary work to be able to keep people safe.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Can I ask: over this term of Parliament that is remaining would you hope to see this progress – to have that standard speed zoning policy changed?

Melissa HORNE: I think that is what is happening, isn't it, Will?

Will TIEPPO: Yes, it is. I think some of the trials that have been happening have been quite successful, and we want to move away from continuing to do trials but to make it more of a standard thing that we use. We are also getting really good community acceptance for some of these, particularly in really highly urbanised, pedestrianised areas – I think some of those have been well received as well.

Melissa HORNE: Just by way of example, in the City of Yarra – as an interesting fact – dropping the speed to 30 delivered a 50 per cent reduction in the total number of crashes and a 70 per cent reduction in serious injury from crashes in the five years prior to that. It is a no-brainer.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Yes. Can I ask: what are the barriers that remain for this policy change coming into effect?

Will TIEPPO: I think it has been just getting the assessments out of the trials and the data out of the trials, and I think we have got all the data we need now to work on and finalise some of the work that we are doing on policy.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: And you noted it does not require legislation. How does this change happen?

Will TIEPPO: It is actually a departmental speed zoning guideline, and that is something that Jeroen himself, as Secretary, will be able to approve.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Great. Okay. And are you hoping to see that before this term of Parliament ends?

Melissa HORNE: One hundred per cent.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Brilliant. I will go to another very specific issue: out in Hurstbridge it has been noted that on Hayleys Gully Road and also Arthurs Creek Road these locations have repeatedly seen drivers hit and kill wombats as they cross. There have been several of these road strikes recently. Can I ask: has this been raised with you? Is there state funding that could be directed to addressing the road conditions in these areas to prevent –

Melissa HORNE: What was the name of the road, sorry?

Aiv PUGLIELLI: There was Hayleys Gully Road and Arthurs Creek Road.

Melissa HORNE: They have not been raised with me – not that I can recall that that has been raised with me directly. I know that Georgie Purcell is particularly active in this space as to what we can do. Having lived in the country previously and having once hit a wombat, it is not something I would ever want to do again. But I have no knowledge of these particular roads.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: That is all right. Is there state funding, though, that could be directed to this sort of incident?

Melissa HORNE: I would need to take the advice from the department about the sorts of treatments that would help prevent that sort of activity from occurring. I am happy to explore that further.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: That is all right. Thank you. Just back onto seat belts – you were talking about earlier the significant rates of people not wearing them. Has the department given you advice as to why this is happening, and are there initiatives in this budget that are going to turn that around?

Melissa HORNE: It is something that we are seeing worldwide. It is post pandemic. Drivers' behaviour has changed significantly, and it is really, really disturbing. It is why the TAC spends a lot of money on education campaigns. But Tracey, is there anything that you are seeing in particular that you think is driving this fairly shocking statistic?

Tracey SLATTER: There is, as you mentioned earlier, Minister, a change in behaviour right across jurisdictions, not only in Australia but across other jurisdictions around the world as well, and we are doing some preliminary research to try and understand what the cause of this sort of change in behaviour is. Nonetheless we are very, very concerned about it, and it is a contributing factor to the serious situation that we see with tragedies on our roads at this time.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. That research, is any of that finalising in the near future, or is this just ongoing?

Tracey SLATTER: It has really just recently progressed, and it will be, I think – there are a lot of different organisations looking into understanding what has caused this change, but we are certainly doing a lot of education work generally, a lot of promotion of road safety. We spend a lot of money each and every year to try and make sure that we are targeting that education and those sponsorships to those who really need to hear the message, because of course most people do the right thing on our roads so it is very important that we are targeting and getting the messages to those communities and people who we feel we are not reaching just through sort of standard communications.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Just looking at the annual report from the department, page 53, seeing those steadily increasing road fatalities over the per 100,000 population, how is the approach to the *Road Safety Action Plan 2* different from what we have been doing in past years?

Melissa HORNE: There are a number of things that we do, and I take the advice from the road safety experts as to what we need to address, you know, whether it is changing the campaigns that we run to address some of the behaviours that we are seeing or assessing where the hotspots are on the network as to actually delivering infrastructure upgrades or whatever.

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

Mathew HILAKARI: Minister, officials, thank you so much for your attendance this evening. It is very appreciated. Minister, I am going to take you to metropolitan road upgrades and budget paper 4, page 75. I think you know that I love to talk about roads and upgrades of roads and how we can make sure that people can get home quicker and safer. I am just hoping you can talk through what some of these upgrades are related to and how they are going to support that aim of getting people home quicker and safer.

Melissa HORNE: For sure, and thank you for your question. You and I have spoken about roads many a time, and I appreciate that particularly for a growing community like you represent, making sure that there are those upgrades is absolutely critical.

Mathew HILAKARI: And Point Cook Road and Sneydes Road, which has got the lights up and running: it is really a great investment for the community because there were so many near-misses in the past. You have seen it very directly yourself a number of times, and I appreciate the work that you have done in getting that going. There is more I would like to say about it, but I should let you answer rather than talking.

Melissa HORNE: Well, no; look, I would love to come out and have a look at that, because I think the last time we tried to cross that road it was taking our lives into our own hands.

Mathew HILAKARI: That is right; I think your chief of staff will never forget it.

Melissa HORNE: Nevertheless I appreciate we are on the last question of a Friday evening before the long weekend, and we might start to get a little bit frivolous, but –

Nick McGOWAN: Has he only got one question?

Michael GALEA: Never.

Mathew HILAKARI: No, not on roads; I am happy to go first on this.

Nick McGOWAN: The minister has spoken, I am afraid.

Melissa HORNE: Well, at the last section of questioning. Look, what we are doing is, without a doubt, investing in our city and suburbs as our population continues to grow. This year's budget commits \$13.7 million to road upgrades in the metropolitan region, and we are investing hundreds of millions of dollars every year to improve the road network, which helps get people around. Some of the things that we are doing, the projects selected for the upgrades, will help boost safety, especially for those vulnerable road users. This is determined by locations that have got an unacceptable crash history, and that includes crashes which have resulted in people, tragically, losing their lives or being seriously injured. It was really pleasing actually just a couple of weeks ago to go down and see the work announced in last year's budget at Stud Road, down in Dandenong, with our good friend the Member for Dandenong. We will see the start of works down there,

because we have been planning and doing that detailed design and now it is ready for that work to get underway.

But look, it is not only our investment in roads: we are also investing in another project that is very close to our hearts – the West Gate Bridge resilience program, and that is \$24.4 million; it is so important.

Whilst we are very excited about the West Gate Tunnel Project coming to fruition later this year – game changer for us westies, and I know the Chair is very excited about that too – making sure that the West Gate Bridge is strong and is repaired regularly, particularly with bigger, heavier trucks going over it, is absolutely critical. We need to make sure that we have got those interactions between vulnerable road users such as cyclists and pedestrians – we need to make sure that is well managed.

And of course, as I mentioned previously, we have got that \$412 million investment into road safety. But some of the projects of the new road capital projects funded in this budget that will be delivered by DTP are the installation of pedestrian-operated signals on Ferntree Gully Road between Princess Highway east and Stamford Road in Oakleigh. I am sure the Member for Oakleigh will be over the moon about that. We are upgrading – and I know that the Member for Essendon could barely contain his excitement –

Nick McGOWAN: It does sound like him, yes.

Melissa HORNE: He is very enthusiastic, isn't he?

Nick McGOWAN: That is before the chocolate, Minister.

Melissa HORNE: Is that right? And maybe if you have got five kids, you need to have that level of energy.

Nick McGOWAN: I think it speaks to his overexertion, doesn't it, Minister?

Mathew HILAKARI: Minister, if I might take you back to the roads.

Melissa HORNE: Apologies. It is the time of night. We are upgrading the southern roundabout at Mount Alexander Road, Napier Street, Fletcher Street and Russell Street in Essendon, because whilst I have not walked through there, I have driven through there, and it can be a bit of a white-knuckle drive. That will be a terrific thing to get done too. In Altona Meadows we have got the Newland Street ramp refurbishment that will happen.

Mathew HILAKARI: That is right. I was hoping you would get to that.

Melissa HORNE: And is it going to be a game changer?

Mathew HILAKARI: It is just so important for people's pride in the community. When that is your main entrance and it has been underdone, once it is done – it is how people feel about where they live. When they invite their friends and family, that pride in the road network I think is something that probably we do not always think about – we think very strongly about the safety components – but that is really important, and the community has been calling for that for a long time. I was so glad you received the petition, how seriously you took it and how seriously the cabinet took it. That has been really something that has been important for the community I represent, and I thank you for being a great advocate in Melbourne's west as well. Thank you for these projects.

Melissa HORNE: Thank you. You are absolutely right that it is the design that actually is so important to community pride. I think, having a look at, say, the West Gate Tunnel Project, with some of the most stunning architectural features that I have ever seen on a road project, it is such a game changer for the west, because it gives us such a sense of pride that this is the investment that this government does in the west, and it is fantastic to be able to see that.

Mathew HILAKARI: You can see everywhere across the west what Labor has delivered.

Melissa HORNE: Yes, that is absolutely right. I am sorry; we have run out of time. There is so much to talk about.

The CHAIR: I really do hope I am the first one across and through that tunnel, as the proudest westie, Mr Hilakari, sitting on this side of the table. On that note, Minister and officials, thank you very much for appearing before the committee this evening. 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.

I would like to thank all ministers and officials who have given evidence to the committee today, as well as Hansard, the committee secretariat and parliamentary attendants. I would also like to thank the hospitality, security and cleaning staff who have looked after all of us today. The committee will resume its consideration of the 2025–26 budget estimates on Tuesday 10 June at 8:30 am. I declare this hearing adjourned.

Committee adjourned.