

TRANSCRIPT

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Victorian Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Melbourne—Wednesday, 20 May 2020

Members

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Richard Riordan—Deputy Chair

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Gary Maas

Mr Danny O'Brien

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Ingrid Stitt

Ms Bridget Vallenge

WITNESSES

Ms Jacinta Allan, Minister for the Coordination of Transport: COVID-19,

Mr Corey Hannett, Director-General, Major Transport Infrastructure Authority,

Mr Paul Younis, Secretary, and

Mr Jeroen Weimar, Head of Transport Services, Department of Transport (*all via videoconference*).

The CHAIR: We will declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, and I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to them, their culture, their elders, past, present and future and elders from other communities who may be here today.

We welcome the Minister and her officials to the public hearings for the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee Inquiry into the Victorian Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. The Committee will be reviewing and reporting to the Parliament on the responses taken by the Victorian Government, including as part of the national cabinet, to manage the COVID-19 pandemic and any other matter related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

All mobile telephones should now be turned to silent. All evidence taken by this Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. Therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you repeat the same things outside this forum, including on social media, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript for you to check. Verified transcripts, presentations and handouts will be placed on the Committee's website as soon as possible. The hearings may be rebroadcast in compliance with standing order 234. I would ask that photographers and camerapersons follow the established media guidelines and the instructions of the Secretariat.

Minister, we invite you to make a brief opening statement of no more than 8 minutes. We ask that you state your name, position and the organisation you represent for broadcasting purposes. This will then be followed by questions from the Committee members relative to their representation at the table.

Visual presentation.

Ms ALLAN: Thank you, Chair. As indicated, Jacinta Allan, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, representing the Victorian Government. I would like to thank you, Chair, and your fellow Committee members for the opportunity today to talk to you about the ongoing operation of the Victorian transport network and also at the same time how we have been able to keep moving on the Government's Big Build agenda since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our emphasis in the transport portfolio has been to maintain business as usual as far as possible, and we have been able to do this through working closely with our partners, whether they are operators, unions or contractors, to ensure health and safety and protect jobs. We have done this because we felt it was really important to continue these operations not just for the duration of the pandemic but also as we look towards the state's recovery, and this is particularly true of our Big Build, which I will come to in a little moment.

What we have also seen during this period of the pandemic is that the ongoing delivery of public transport has been important in helping our vital health service workers, our nurses, cleaners and people in retail get to work and also for those kids who do need to go to school to continue to be able to get to their local school. That is why, apart from the additional cleaning and some of the other changes that I will talk about shortly, there has been no change to the service delivery and to the way we deliver our public transport network.

Also too our road network is operating normally. There have been some changes to the delivery of registration and licensing services in order to meet the physical distancing requirements set out by the Chief Health Officer, but largely the road network has remained, as I am sure many of you will have experienced, operational during this period of time.

I just want to turn firstly, though, in talking about different modes of transport across our transport networks, to public transport. As has been reported previously, we have seen passenger numbers drop on our public transport network as people—Victorians are doing the right thing—are heeding the messages around staying at home, particularly that message about if you can work from home, you should work from home. What we are seeing at the moment—and this is in the last week or so—is passenger numbers are sitting at around 300 000 trips on the Victorian public transport network every day. That is down from what was an average 2.1 million trips a day that were undertaken in February, and that is pretty standard for non-coronavirus travel time. Many of the trips, as I said before, are undertaken by people performing crucial frontline jobs, and that is backed up by some of the research that has been undertaken by the Department of Transport that shows that around two-thirds of travellers who continued to use our public transport network during this time are people travelling to and from their home and their place of work or study. Then the remaining third are people who are travelling to pick up essential grocery items and the like.

As I said before, our approach to the provision of public transport during the pandemic has been to protect the safety of passengers, to protect the safety of our great staff who operate the network and also to protect jobs. That is why we decided to keep with the regular timetable, so that Victorians who needed to undertake those critical journeys could do so with maximum physical distancing at the time they needed and also so that our public transport network could remain in work. We have also really ramped up our cleaning of our transport infrastructure: our trains, trams and buses are undergoing nightly sanitation, in addition to the normal cleaning arrangements; things like all touch surfaces are being wiped down; and entire carriages are being sprayed with disinfectant.

Moving on to roads next, weekday traffic volumes have been sitting around 40 per cent below normal during the stage 3 restrictions, although in the last week or so we are currently seeing them sit at around 30 per cent below February's figures. What has been less significant, in terms of the drop in numbers, has been the decline in commercial vehicles. The drop in the number of commercial vehicles on our roads is around 13 per cent on normal volumes. Also too, for the Committee's information, based on the latest medical advice we have suspended light vehicle drive tests and all computer-based licence testing as well as all medical review-related drive test assessments. Although whilst that has been a change, what has not changed and we have maintained is heavy vehicle testing, because of the important role we know that truck drivers play in ensuring that the supply chain continues to operate during this period of time. We have also maintained licence testing for light vehicles in those instances where people can demonstrate exceptional circumstances or hardship requirements.

Moving on to our Big Build program, our transport infrastructure program—putting aside the pandemic, our Big Build agenda is worth around \$107 billion for the Victorian economy and employs 17 000 Victorians across 119 major projects. It is a big job generator. It is the biggest investment in transport infrastructure the state has ever seen, and that is why we have worked extremely hard to see the ongoing support for jobs, for the construction sector to operate during this period of time, and at the same time ensure the safety of the workers on each worksite. To support this work we have established the Big Build consultative panel, where myself and the director-general of the Major Transport Infrastructure Authority sit with representatives of the construction companies and union representatives as we work cooperatively together on every aspect of the pandemic, looking at how we can support the workers, operate safely and also support the industry as well.

We have had one of the COVID testing vans visit a number of our Big Build sites, and I am pleased to report that as of this morning there are no positive cases to date from the more than 800 workers tested across 14 different worksites. We have also at the same time on our Big Build sites increased safety and hygiene measures, again making sure that they are in line with the advice from the Chief Health Officer. We also have a dedicated team through the Major Transport Infrastructure Authority of safety specialists, who have undertaken more than 1200 site visits as well. This has seen our ongoing operations with the tunnel-boring machines on the Metro Tunnel, early works on the North East Link Project and work on road and rail able to continue throughout this period of the pandemic.

Moving now to ports and freight, there have not been some of the big changes in this area that we have seen in other modes on the transport network since the introduction of stage 3 restrictions. The supply chain continues to function normally, although we are seeing the beginnings of a slight fall in volumes. Container input through the port of Melbourne is down around 10 per cent on last year's figures for the same period.

In the rail sector, freight volumes handled by interstate and bulk rail operators are holding up well, and this is due in large part to the 8 per cent increase in retail trade that we have seen during this period of time. We have also been working with local government and industry around the lifting of truck curfews for a period of time to enable retail stores to receive their goods as efficiently as possible.

On walking and cycling, in terms of numbers, we have seen across the state that pedestrian activity has been down—a 24 per cent drop in pedestrian crossing activities during stage 3 restrictions—and that has been particularly pronounced in Melbourne CBD locations, where they remain down by around 75 per cent on average. Also though, similar with what we have seen on road and rail in the last week or so, we have seen some modest increase in those numbers. Weekday cycling volumes on popular routes in and out of the CBD have declined on average 60 per cent compared to early March, but conversely we have seen, particularly on weekends, cycling volumes along popular recreational trails increase significantly, in some instances by between 200 and 300 per cent, on weekdays and weekends. Also, I have mentioned before—

The CHAIR: Sorry to interrupt you there, Minister; the time for the presentation has expired.

Mr MAAS: Good morning, Minister, and good morning to the departmental officials present with you also. Thank you to all of you for your appearance this morning, and thank you for that presentation, Minister. In your presentation you touched upon some of the work that is being done to protect staff and passengers. I was wondering if you could go into more detail about what the Government has done to protect passengers and staff on the public transport network throughout the crisis.

Ms ALLAN: Thank you, Mr Maas. Yes, there has been, as I indicated through the presentation, a huge focus, a huge effort that has gone into supporting those Victorians who needed to continue to rely on safe and reliable public transport services, to be able continue to use those services every day during the pandemic. And that is why we have been asking Victorians, though, who do need to try and travel on public transport, if they can think about the way they use public transport, to maybe think about travelling outside some of the peak periods. Whilst our peak periods during this period of the pandemic have still been very low numbers, they are still obviously a busier time of the day, so we have been asking people to think about their time of travel and also to really think about the message we have been giving more broadly to the Victorian community: if you are not well, please do not travel or move about our community.

Also part of this effort has been about supporting the jobs of the people who work on our public transport network. Thousands of Victorians work on our public transport network doing a range of different jobs, and we have been working closely with our workforce, their union representatives and the operators to develop a range of measures that are supporting the safety of the workers, which in turn supports the safety of passengers as well. Also I should note there has been a huge amount of work with the department, the Chief Health Officer and the department of human services in terms of sharing information. In terms of the workforce we have put in place some additional measures to protect our workers, particularly with some focus on people like train drivers and our control centre staff, and also looked at how teams can be appropriately socially distanced in their workplace, and there is the enhanced cleaning regime. This enhanced cleaning regime has been a feature of the points at which passengers interact with the network as well, so additional cleaning and sanitisation on all of our touch points on our train, tram and bus surfaces. We are seeing daily cleaning. There is a huge regime that has been going, and can I really say that we are also thankful for the support of the work of our public transport operators that have been partnering with us, focusing on how we can support their staff and in turn how we can support passengers as well.

Mr MAAS: Thank you, Minister. Would you be able to elaborate on the cleaning procedures for the trains, trams and buses?

Ms ALLAN: As I said before, there has been a huge effort from the get-go, I should say, in terms of when the severity of this pandemic really started to hit. We were giving careful thought to what needed to be done in addition to our existing cleaning regime. Perhaps I can ask Jeroen Weimar, the Head of Transport Services, to talk a bit about what has been built on, but we already had a fairly intensive cleaning regime of daily cleaning of our trains and trams and across the network, but we put in place an enhanced cleaning regime across all of our networks. We put in place a nightly sanitising regime for all of our vehicles, so this is for trains, for trams, for buses. On our metropolitan train network, in addition to these current cleaning arrangements, all carriages and drivers cabins undergo this nightly sanitation. I have mentioned touch surfaces before that are wiped down,

and entire carriages are sprayed with disinfectant. I understand there is like a fogging that goes on in each of the carriages that are part of our network. Similarly too, our trams are undergoing a deep clean every night in similar ways, wiping down of all the touch areas, and that is in addition to the current arrangements. Similarly for our V/Line network. And also increased cleaning is going on across our bus network as well—all with a focus on how we can support those points at which passengers interact with the network and also support the safety of our staff as well.

Mr MAAS: Excellent, thank you. Mr Weimar, did you want to add to that?

Mr WEIMAR: Yes, sure. Thank you. I think, just in addition to what the Minister said, we should add that as well as doing all of the nightly 24-hour cycle cleaning and sanitisation of all of our trains, trams and buses, this is also happening all across our entire regional bus fleet and school bus fleet, so we are going widely across all of the contact points on our network. We are also doing daily in-running cleaning at multiple locations, particularly the train network. So we have got cleaners walking through trains and walking through stations and dealing with those high-contact touch points that our passengers might experience. We are also now working with the Working for Victoria program, who are now deployed particularly on the tram network, and they will be rolling out on the train network in the coming weeks, to again provide very high-frequency cleaning of all those touch points that our passengers might encounter on different parts of the network.

What we also did right at the very beginning, back at the end of March, was around removing cash handling and ticket transactions from the network. We are trying to minimise the number of touch points that our passengers need to have. So removing cash was a major piece of all that: removing the cash facility and relying more on the myki touch-less system. Although we still deploy our AOs to support our passengers on their movements around the network and to ensure they can travel safely, we have suspended for the moment physical ticket checking arrangements, again to avoid people's cards and travel vouchers being touched.

Finally, just while we are on this sort of theme, we have also put arrangements in place for V/Line's long-distance ticketing solution. We do have passengers who continue to rely on V/Line for the longer journey trips. When they are making online bookings they can use their emails as their evidence of travel so they do not need to go and collect a physical ticket from the ticket office, again reduces some of those touch points. Those are, I think, some of the examples that we have deployed across the network to enable our passengers to travel safely and to reduce their physical touch points within their work.

Ms ALLAN: And as I said before, a lot of those things have been in response and working collaboratively with our workforce and their representatives as well.

Mr MAAS: Excellent, thank you very much. Minister, would you be able to explain how the Government is using school buses at the moment to help in this crisis when the majority of our schoolchildren have been at home?

Ms ALLAN: We have taken a very similar approach with the ongoing operation of our school bus services to the approach we have taken on public transport as a whole in that we have continued to offer our full suite of services across our train, tram and bus network to support people, recognising that there are still a lot of people who are wanting to use public transport to get to where they need to go. Whilst many of us with school-aged children know how this term has looked very different to any other term of school that we have experienced before with many children learning from home, we know that there has been a smaller number of school students who have needed to attend school. That is why we have wanted to support their attendance—those students whose families have no other choice but to send them to school. We have supported that with the operation of a full suite of bus services.

The way we have operated that is in close collaboration with the department of education and with schools as well, who have given us advice on a very small number of services—I think it is 6 per cent of services have been suspended during this period of time—based on the advice of the local school principals—

You're back?

The CHAIR: Yes.

Ms ALLAN: The overwhelming number of bus services are continuing to be provided. So for those who do need to use our school bus services, we are encouraging them to practice the social distancing requirements that we are encouraging right across the Victorian community, and I mentioned before in my previous answer the extensive cleaning regime that has been associated with running our services during this period of time plus the really important message that if any school student is unwell, they should not be travelling, they should not be attending school. This has been able to provide a balance between those students who must attend school being given that opportunity to do so and at the same time understanding that for the vast number of families they are educating their children at home.

I should also note, though, that whilst those overall patronage numbers on our school bus service are low—and that is similar to what we had seen early on in the pandemic with our public transport services more broadly—our bus operators are also providing a really important and valuable service in getting education materials to students who are living in remote communities. I know this from my own direct experience. I have got a school in my electorate where the school bus operators are delivering curriculum materials, exercise books and work materials into the home as part of their bus operations. That has been, I guess, a wonderful additional service that our bus operators have been able to provide. It has predominantly—I think pretty much exclusively, Jeroen—been something that is used for country students, as I said, in some really remote areas, and it has meant that those students who are studying at home have been able to keep their connection to their local school in a really practical way. We have seen some reports about how there has also been a really delightful interaction between the bus operators and the families who are receiving that really valuable service.

I would like to acknowledge that we have had a tremendous amount of cooperation from our bus operators. There are hundreds of bus contracts that we have across our school bus network in normal times, and so there has been a lot of work that the department has undertaken in working with our bus contractors to modify and make some adjustments to their regular service over and above that obviously important service they provide in getting our students to and from school. As school goes back, with the first tranche next Tuesday and then also on 9 June, we will continue to work closely with them on the cleaning regime, on the distancing requirements and on monitoring really carefully the patronage and the number of students who are travelling to and from school every single day on our school bus network.

Mr RIORDAN: Just quickly, on the school buses, Minister, it was good to see you put so much attention on country school buses. It would be great to put that attention after the coronavirus on improving many of the crowded and overpacked services in my electorate.

But overnight, Minister, we heard Federal Labor line up to condemn the Andrews Government's Belt and Road Initiative with the Chinese Government. 'It is bad policy', said Senator Kitching. Minister, your Metro Tunnel and West Gate Tunnel projects are now wildly over budget and short on Australian materials. How much of Victoria's new \$24.5 billion in borrowings will you need to finish these projects, and how much of that is likely to come from your arrangements with the Chinese Government?

Ms ALLAN: So there is a bit in that question, and I am not sure whether to thank you for that question or not, Mr Riordan.

Mr RIORDAN: Well, your federal colleagues had plenty to say about it.

Ms ALLAN: In response to your observations about improvements to public transport services in your electorate that you mentioned at the outset of your question, can I point to the terrific work that is going on right now as part of the Warrnambool line upgrade, where as part of that program we were adding an extra—

Mr RIORDAN: Minister, no-one takes the Warrnambool train to school. Let us move on to how you are planning to fix the blowouts with the tunnels.

Ms ALLAN: Mr Riordan, you raised it as a point in your question, and I am just taking the opportunity to highlight—

Mr RIORDAN: I was talking about school buses, not your trains.

Ms ALLAN: Well, I am just pointing out that in reference to public transport services in your community, like we are right across regional Victoria, we are working very hard to improve our public transport network,

and that includes the work that is going on right now on the Warrnambool line, which of course adds an extra service on the Warrnambool line, which I would have thought as the local Member you may have been—

Mr RIORDAN: Minister, back to the tunnels. What are your commitments with the Chinese Government? What are your commitments with China—

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan, I will remind you of the terms of reference of this Inquiry, and I would ask the Minister to keep her answer relevant to the terms of reference of the Inquiry.

Mr RIORDAN: It is very relevant. We are wondering how it is funded. Go for it, Minister. Have you got an answer?

Ms ALLAN: Well, Mr Riordan, I do have an answer, but I did want to make sure that I had provided an answer to the first part of your question there.

Look, in regard to the Metro Tunnel, and I think you also mentioned the West Gate Tunnel, these are two really important projects that have been talked about for a very, very long time, and we are really pleased to be getting on with them and seeing work happen on the Metro Tunnel. We have got three of our four tunnel-boring machines in operation right now. We have got something like 3000 people working on—

Mr RIORDAN: Sorry, Minister, we know about the projects because you talk about them a lot. What you will not talk about is how much of the \$24.5 billion in new loans that this Government is arranging will be required for the blowouts that are currently skyrocketing for both those projects.

Ms ALLAN: Well, as I believe the Premier and Treasurer have previously appeared before this Committee in the last week or so, they have both indicated that when it comes to that \$24 billion facility that has been provided for in the legislation that passed through the Parliament—passed unanimously, and I appreciated the cooperation we had in the Parliament during the sitting on 23 April—the expenditure of those funds will be accounted for in accordance with the requirements set out in the *Financial Management Act*. And I have got nothing further to add to those comments about how that—

Mr RIORDAN: So you do not know. The answer is: you do not know. You do not know what—

Ms ALLAN: I would appreciate the Deputy Chair not verballing me in that way. I have made it clear to you, Deputy Chair, that the Premier and the Treasurer and I all indicated to you that the \$24 billion facility that is being provided for, remembering of course that—

Mr RIORDAN: Hang on. Minister, this is filibustering. You do not seem to know. The Treasurer said yesterday if the budget blows out he will be using the \$24.5 billion. Your two projects that you have been managing are the big blowouts. You know, we are talking billions and billions on both those projects. The money has got to come from somewhere. You know, where is the money magicking from?

Ms ALLAN: Your question referred to the \$24 billion that has been provided for so that the Government can respond to the circumstances we face—both the health crisis and the economic crisis that we face—as a result of this unprecedented pandemic, and we will be accounting for the expenditure of those funds in accordance with the *Financial Management Act*.

Mr RIORDAN: Okay. So not a tunnel crisis, then, on top of a pandemic crisis and an economic crisis?

Ms ALLAN: Well, of course there was no issue with the Metro Tunnel when you left it sitting on the shelf for four years when you were in government.

Mr RIORDAN: Well, no. That is deflection 101. I mean, the simple question was: what commitments have you made with China to help you get through this time on your overblown projects? The answer is: you do not have one. And I guess we will leave it at that and move on.

Ms ALLAN: Excuse me. Chair, if I can respond: that actually was not your question, Deputy Chair. You asked a very different question. That question that you go to around commitments made with China and commitments on our projects I think is more than a little overstepping the bounds of the terms of reference for this Inquiry and the bounds of any sort of decent public discussion about public delivery of transport

infrastructure projects in this state. We have responsible and appropriate discussions with all of our contractors. Some of them are international contractors; some of them are domestic contractors. We talk with all of our contractors on all of our projects all the time on how best to deliver those projects and, importantly, the thousands and thousands of jobs. We have kept these projects going during this time because they have been supporting jobs—jobs in the construction sector, jobs in the manufacturing sector—

Mr RIORDAN: That is not the question. Minister—

Ms ALLAN: and the families that rely on those workers going to work every single day during this period of time and being in work.

Mr RIORDAN: Okay. So just finally then on this issue, will you rule out using the Belt and Road agreements with your Government and the Chinese Government to help finish these projects?

Ms ALLAN: Chair, I seek your guidance on that questioning on two counts. One is that I fail to see the relevance to the terms of reference of your Inquiry. And secondly—

Mr RIORDAN: I think Victorians think it is a relevant question.

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan, the Minister is talking, and you cannot hear her if you talk over the top of her.

Mr RIORDAN: She is asking for your protection so she does not answer the question.

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan, if you could allow the Minister to finish, please.

Mr RIORDAN: She has just asked you for protection, and I am saying the budget is in crisis because of coronavirus. The Government has made a commitment to borrow another \$24.5 billion. These projects are overblown, and Victorians need to know and want to know where the money is coming from. And I think it is an entirely reasonable question which the Minister has now for the best part of 10 minutes dodged answering.

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan, the Minister has answered your question. You cannot continue to hear her answers if you continue to talk over the top of her.

Mr RIORDAN: I think Hansard will prove she has not answered the question. But we will move on.

The CHAIR: Minister, was there anything you needed to add to that?

Ms ALLAN: Well, no. The \$24 billion is being provided for through the legislation that was passed through the Parliament and that I recall was supported unanimously.

Ms VALLENCE: So it will be used.

The CHAIR: Ms Vallenge, you will get your turn.

Mr RIORDAN: So we will leave that question unanswered. Moving on, Mr Weimar, a question: the COVID-19 restrictions have meant that during April the metro rail system ran a service with very few customers—I think an 85 per cent reduction in transport passengers over the month. However, the April public transport performance data tells us that despite just about no passengers—15 per cent of its normal load—there were still over 2200 late services and about 1250 cancellations, bypasses, short trips and stations skips. My question is: why is it that even with almost no passengers the train system has failed to run at 100 per cent punctuality, or close to, without cancellations, bypasses, short trips and station skips being required?

Mr WEIMAR: Thank you for the question. I think the challenge for the entire transport system during the last eight weeks has been how we sustain service delivery with the great uncertainty of the coronavirus hanging over us. I would like to maybe just express our appreciation for the 16 000 people who work for our operators, who have kept all of our services running during the last eight weeks in this environment of great uncertainty.

You are absolutely right: during the past eight weeks we have continued to deliver all of our maintenance and renewal activity. We have continued to deliver all of our infrastructure investment upgrades, and that has meant, absolutely, from time to time we have had some disruptions. We have put some planned occupations

and planned events in place, which have caused some passenger inconvenience, but I think it is important to use this time to ensure that we do all the activity to maintain the network and to improve it for future generations.

In addition to that, and I have the data here in front of me, the metropolitan train service ran at 96.2 per cent punctuality; the tram network ran at 94 per cent—just under 93.8 per cent—punctuality, which I think was an all-time high; the bus network ran at 94.3 punctuality; and the regional train network ran at 92.1 per cent punctuality. Now, I would not for a moment want to say that this is a normal time—it is clearly a very abnormal time—but I think it would be fair to say that the network has continued to deliver huge choice and options for those essential journeys that need to continue. I think that has been an important part of ensuring that we can keep Victoria running and particularly supporting people who need to get to work and who need to make critical journeys during a very uncertain time.

Mr RIORDAN: So it does not worry you, or it does not raise flags with the department, that there are in fact inherent problems in the scheduling and timing of schedules that you work to that with only 15 per cent of customers using the service there are still such large numbers of bypasses, cancellations and late services?

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan, I will again remind you of the terms of reference of the Inquiry.

Mr RIORDAN: It is during the coronavirus period that these issues have been highlighted.

Ms VALLENCE: It is still an essential service.

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence, you will get your turn.

Mr WEIMAR: I think just moving to address your question, the important thing for a public transport service is to deliver affordable, safe, reliable transport to the vast majority of people. I would maybe look at it this way: I do not pretend for a moment that improving overall punctuality and reliability of our network by up to 7 per cent during this period is a good outcome, because we have far fewer passengers that we are serving. We want to serve the Victorian community. We want to ensure that many people can make good and reliable journeys. Absolutely we have a daily focus on operational performance with all of our operators, but equally we recognise that there are disruptions and that there are events that are outside of their direct control. We have a very open network here in Victoria. We have level crossings that cause a fair amount of conflict with the rollout or running of our train—

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Weimar. Sorry to interrupt you, but the Member's time has expired.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you, Minister, and thank you to the officials who are appearing for the compelling evidence as part of your presentation. Perhaps, if you will indulge me, Chair, if you could pass on our thanks to those people who are continuing to serve us through this pandemic—the drivers and the people who are keeping our trains, buses, trams clean. We are very grateful, and of course so many of them are part of our community as well. If you could pass that on, I would be grateful.

To turn to a topic that is close to my heart and I am sure something that is important to all of us, can you talk through how construction is continuing safely as our Big Build continues?

Ms ALLAN: Yes. Thank you, Ms Richards. As I indicated during the presentation earlier, just as we have been keeping our public transport services operating during this period of time—it has been a big focus—so too have we kept construction work going on all of our worksites, that are spread right across Victoria, and also been doing it safely from the point of view of the workers and also the community during this period of time. I should say at the outset though—and Corey Hannett, the Director-General, may want to go to this as well—putting aside that we are in the coronavirus pandemic period of time, every single day the Major Transport Infrastructure Authority has the focus of safety and the safety of workplaces as its top priority. We already were placing before the pandemic a premium on having safe workplaces, and so what we have been able to do with the impact of the pandemic is build on those safety practices and procedures—those well-established practices and procedures—to make our worksites safe in terms of how we protect our workers from the coronavirus pandemic.

As a result of this work we have been able to keep our worksites going pretty much as business as usual, apart from some modifications that have been made on the workplace to enable social distancing to be put into

practice, and I will talk about that a little bit in a moment. I have mentioned this before, but again it is absolutely worth underscoring that we have only been able to achieve this because we have been able to work in collaboration with the construction companies and contractors that partner with us on these projects and our program but also too the workforce and their union representatives. It has been a tremendous collaborative effort that we have been able to put in place to protect the safety of workers and also to protect the jobs. Particularly in a time when we know that so many Victorians have lost a job as a result of this pandemic, we have been able to keep the construction jobs going on the transport infrastructure program.

There have been some strict rules put in place around physical distancing. We have also increased the industrial cleaning of sites and also increased our provision of personal protective equipment. Anyone who has visited a worksite knows you pop on the hi-vis vest and the helmet. We have gone even further for some of the workforce, particularly those who work in closer quarters, and this is particularly relevant for some of our level crossing removal works or people who do some of the signalling works where there might be the construction of a new station—those parts of the project that require people to work in closer quarters. They have enhanced personal protective equipment. We have also increased the cleaning of their tools and equipment, and we have also increased the number of different tools and equipment provided onsite to reduce the amount of sharing of those tools and equipment. I think I mentioned before that we are yet, Corey, to see one positive test on any of our sites. We have had over 800 people tested across our Big Build project sites, and we continue to work with the department of human services on that testing regime that we are seeing rolled out more broadly across the community.

I should also say that the Major Transport Infrastructure Authority have a squad of safety specialists. There is a team that consists of 70 staff, and these staff are travelling the state undertaking spot checks on each of the project sites. These spot checks are obviously to ensure that these worksites are complying with the COVID-safe practices that have been put in place. If there are instances observed where these practices are not being followed, there is a process put in place that includes potentially a re-induction on sites to ensure those practices are adhered to. As I said, this has been a really important part of the work that has been undertaken in partnership with the workforce and the union representatives to make sure we can keep our projects going, keep the worksites safe, and to date it has been going well. But we remain vigilant because there is still a long way to go with this pandemic, and we will continue this work of the spot checks, continue the work on that regime, for as long as this pandemic continues.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Can you explain how Victoria's Big Build is supporting local jobs through the coronavirus pandemic?

Ms ALLAN: Look, it certainly is, and this is why it has been so important. Supporting construction jobs and supporting this part of the economy is important in the best of times. In the worst of times that we are experiencing as a result of so many Victorians losing their jobs it has been vital that we have been able to continue on with our major transport infrastructure program. I think I mentioned the statistics in my introductory presentation. We have got 119 major road and rail projects. Over 15 000 jobs are supported through these projects, and then there is the supply chain, the associated supply chain, that feeds into these construction worksites.

I should also point out that we have added to this. Many of you will have seen the announcement made on Monday by the Premier of a big package of additional works that are going to be added to our construction program here in Victoria across a range of different sectors of government, but when it comes to the transport family we have got an additional \$328.4 million of investment in road and rail maintenance work, in minor capital works, to support a further 600 jobs during the coronavirus crisis. That is again all being done in a way that we are operating under those safe workplace practices.

As I said before, you can see that there are worksites right around the state. I was talking this morning about the massive level crossing program that we are going to see roll out over the coming winter months with level crossing removal works being undertaken at Mentone and Cheltenham, on the Upfield line, at Mooroolbark and Lilydale, in Hoppers Crossing and Werribee, in Cranbourne and Narre Warren as well, and Pakenham. So we have been able to continue with these works and continue with this program of works. That has, as I said before, been a critical part of the work that Corey and the team have been doing over this period of time to keep these jobs supported.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you, Minister—very excited community members in our patch. Beyond the construction jobs, can you outline the benefits to the construction supply chain?

Ms ALLAN: This is an important point to note because often we focus and talk about—I have mentioned the 15 000 construction jobs that are supported through just our infrastructure agenda alone, and obviously the private sector has a number of projects going on as well, but that also in turn supports a significant supply chain across the Victorian community. For example, in the manufacturing sector there are a lot of jobs that are supported, thousands of jobs that are supported there, as they supply goods to the worksites as part of our transport program.

A terrific example and a very recent example of this is the beams that were installed to build the bridge at Toorak Road, as we got rid of that dangerous and congested level crossing at Toorak Road. That work was completed around Easter time—I think just before Easter or just after Easter. I think it was completed around Easter time. That level crossing has been removed—it is gone and it is gone for good—with the construction of a rail bridge. Those bridge beams were manufactured in Kilmore. So it is not only a great example of supporting Victorian manufacturing jobs but supporting Victorian manufacturing jobs in regional Victoria as well. We have also got a concrete batching plant that is operational in Deer Park that supplies concrete segments that line the tunnel walls for the Metro Tunnel.

So there is a really diverse workforce that is supported on our transport infrastructure program beyond those construction jobs. Just to give you some examples, we employ, as part of the program, architects and carpenters, there are electricians, there are obviously our engineers who do great work, but there are also other workers, like human resource managers, like lawyers, cleaners, people who provide services to the worksites. There are electricians, overhead line workers, plumbers, track workers and traffic control managers. So there is a wide spectrum of jobs across a range of different skill sets, some more highly skilled, some more medium and lower skilled, but it is providing a really diverse range of opportunities for members of the Victorian community that at a time like this is more important than ever before.

We have all had to change our workplaces. One of our project teams are doing the some of their project work from home. They are using interactive maps and different interactive tools as they keep their part of the project going. Then similarly out in the field, as I mentioned before in answer to the first part of your question, there is also a huge amount of work that is going on on the site around social distancing and some changed work practices like staggering work start hours, staggering morning smoko, spreading out morning smoko at different places on the worksite, to ensure that our work can keep going on our Big Build agenda.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you, Minister, compelling evidence. Can you outline the way Victoria's Big Build, in the face of unprecedented health and economic challenges, is delivering benefits to the broader economy?

Ms ALLAN: Yes. Again, this is an important point to reference. There is understandably a really heightened focus on the state of the Victorian economy and the national economy at this time, and all governments are working through some of the big challenges that go with supporting I guess the survival of our economy during this period of time of a pandemic and then how we look to future recovery. That is why—

The CHAIR: Sorry to interrupt you, Minister. The Member's time has expired.

Mr HIBBINS: Thank you, Minister, Secretary and officials for appearing today. Minister, governments around the world are putting in place pop-up cycleways, widened footpaths to assist people in social distancing and to reduce congestion on other forms of transport. Just some examples, the New South Wales Government has allocated \$15 million to do just that, to councils to do that, and have announced some pop-up cycleways yesterday; the New Zealand Government is providing funding to its cities to do that; the UK Government is providing £250 million to its municipalities to do that. Yet we have had nothing from the Victorian Government. Why is that?

Ms ALLAN: Well, thank you, Mr Hibbins, for your question. I am very familiar—I have seen those media reports and followed very closely what other jurisdictions both here in Australia and around the world are doing to respond to the coronavirus pandemic in terms of transport service delivery. Can I just say I do not agree with your characterisation that the Andrews Labor Government is doing nothing in this space, and I think you and I—

Mr HIBBINS: Well, you have not made any announcements.

Ms ALLAN: You and I have engaged on this a little bit before.

Mr HIBBINS: Not since COVID.

Ms ALLAN: Sorry, Mr Hibbins, I did not quite hear that interjection.

Mr HIBBINS: Not since the COVID crisis. I am referring to announcements or funding allocated from the Victorian Government for this purpose.

Ms ALLAN: I will come to what we are doing in terms of what we are doing through the pandemic, but I did just want to point you to the fact that we are already actively supporting walking and cycling and there is a number of examples and, as I said before, I know we have talked about this on a number of occasions.

Mr HIBBINS: Sorry. The terms of reference are in regard to the Government's response to the COVID-19 crisis, so if we could just stick to the terms of reference, Minister, that would help everyone.

Ms ALLAN: Well of course as part of our preparations for the return of face-to-face teaching of students in significant numbers from next week and then on 9 June we are working with the department of education about how we can encourage more walking and cycling to and from school. I know just last night I received a notice from my own local primary school where my children go talking about how they are wanting to ask parents to think about using cycling and walking more to get the students to and from school. The Victorian Government through the Department of Transport and its discussions with the department of education are big partners in that push to encourage more school students to travel by bike and walk as they return to school in the next few weeks. The Minister for Roads has been having some discussions, and I believe the department as well, with the City of Melbourne. The City of Melbourne, as we have seen, I think, in the course of the past week have been quite public about their desire to do more in this space, and we have been having discussions about that with them.

So I think it would be wrong to characterise the Government's response as doing nothing in this space; there is a huge amount of work going on in this space. We do know that as part of our response to people returning to school and returning to work we do want to encourage more people to walk and cycle as best as we can. We know that that will need to consider some additional policy responses as we move through that. But I should also point out that walking and cycling is not going to be the only solution for how we support people returning to school and returning to work, and I think many families will need different modes of transport. Families will need to use a car or a bus or a train or a tram, depending on their need of public transport and depending on their own circumstances. It is pretty hard to do if you are a parent—

Mr HIBBINS: No-one is saying it is the only form of transport, but you can understand, Minister, why I would characterise it as the Government doing nothing, because this is the first public statement that you have actually made in regard to cycling and walking. What I am referring to is funding committed, road space reallocated or actually announcements of decisions made by the Government. If you just look at the cities around the world—Sydney, London, Manchester, Auckland, Paris, New York, Vancouver, Berlin, Athens, Dublin, Budapest, Milan; the list goes on—yet we have not seen an announcement from the Victorian Government. Why hasn't there been an announcement to date?

Ms ALLAN: Well, I will get Jeroen to supplement my answer, but the pandemic is not over. I know from the terms of reference for this Committee you still have multiple reporting dates ahead of you. The pandemic is not over—it is far from over. So it would be wrong to suggest a line has been drawn under any response in the transport space or indeed any policy area of government in terms of how we may make our next set of responses. Circumstances have changed and evolved rapidly over the past few weeks.

Mr HIBBINS: I guess governments around the world are acting rapidly. You might not characterise the Government as doing nothing, but certainly you are acting very slowly if governments around the world are already acting and all at this stage the Victorian Government is doing is having discussions.

Ms ALLAN: Well, can I also point you to, Mr Hibbins, the fact that we have maintained full service provision of our public transport network during this period of time, and many of those other jurisdictions that you referred to did not do that. I know in London I think they reduced their public transport provision down to 60 per cent of regular services. They have increased that, I think, in the last week or so to 80 per cent, but they

are not at 100 per cent full service provision. We, however, in Victoria are at 100 per cent full service provision of our public transport services, which has been able to keep people connecting to their important jobs, their important education opportunities and the medical appointments that we know people who use our public transport network rely on. But in terms of some of our other initiatives, I am delighted for Jeroen to add to that.

Mr WEIMAR: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr Hibbins. At the moment we have over 250 kilometres of cycling and walking paths in delivery or indeed in final planning, and that work is going on across the state. Obviously we have got work happening in Ballarat on Sturt Street and we have got work happening in Bendigo, and then recently, on Monday, the Government announced an economic stimulus package which included additional investment in cycling infrastructure for places like Macedon and Timboon. We are also, as the Minister said, talking to at least four or five local governments, particularly in inner Melbourne, who are keen to work with us to explore temporary cycling and walking provisions. Those discussions are progressing well, as you would expect. We are going through the detail of how we make those things happen, and we will be keen to enable that where we can do so.

Mr HIBBINS: That is good to hear. Can I ask specifically now about the provision of automatic pedestrian signals. Again this is an initiative that has taken place in Sydney and other jurisdictions. I understand that whilst we already have it in the CBD the Victorian Government has not rolled this out in any other locations. Why is that?

The CHAIR: Mr Hibbins, can I ask you to bring it back to the relevance of the terms of the Inquiry.

Mr HIBBINS: Obviously many people now are avoiding putting their hands on the buttons to get the pedestrian lights to go. Automatic pedestrian signals have been used by other governments as a response to COVID. Why isn't this being rolled out by the Victorian Government or any further action being taken?

Ms ALLAN: Are you right for me to respond to that, Chair?

The CHAIR: Yes, thank you.

Ms ALLAN: I will again ask Jeroen to add to this. We have had automatic operation of pedestrian signals in the Hoddle grid for many, many years now, so there has not been the need to make changes to that, but I will ask Jeroen to add to this.

Mr WEIMAR: We have had that facility for a number of years. We have stepped it up, and actually we have drawn attention to the fact that we have had this capacity—we have had the automated crossings in our network in the CBD—for a long time. That is all part of the underpinning automated signalling system that we run across the Hoddle grid. It is quite different to the signalling systems we have in other parts of the state. We are talking to councils about other areas where we might be able to deploy this kind of technology, but automated pedestrian crossings also need to be seen in the context of other road users and other demands on the traffic network, including obviously freight, including trams, including buses and including cyclists. So we do not have the facility, I think, nor do most cities, to expand this across the entire metropolitan or state networks, but we are prioritising those locations.

Mr HIBBINS: Can I ask specifically about hospitals? Is it being considered? Are there any requests to have it outside hospitals?

Mr WEIMAR: Yes, so again we have key sites on the network that we focus on in particular where it is tracked to do so. What it does require us to do is to have an automated signalling system arrangement in that entire junction and to make sure that the modelling works well for the overall flow of services in and around that location, so it is not, unfortunately, as simple as taking out a button and putting an automated facility in place; it does require the underlying signals to be upgraded. We have prioritised those locations depending on where we see the greatest pedestrian flows and where we see the greatest need.

Mr HIBBINS: So it is under consideration? Is that the answer?

Mr WEIMAR: We continually review demand on our network. We will continue to review where we have those prioritisations. We have very constructive conversations particularly with local authorities and key

stakeholders in some of these areas as to how we can best design the local network to meet their needs as well as the needs of the arterial network.

Mr HIBBINS: Are you giving me, 'It's under review', a general answer, or is it specifically being considered in response to COVID-19?

Mr WEIMAR: Mr Hibbins, I do not have a particular set of locations in front of me at this point in time. What I can tell you is that in response to COVID-19 we were very quick to alert people to the fact that, where we already have the automated signalling systems, they could work in that way, and I think that has been received positively by most people. We are working on a council-by-council basis to say: are there specific changes that we could make and that they can make to improve the flow of pedestrian movements in their area, particularly in response COVID-19?

Mr HIBBINS: Can I ask now, just in terms of the modelling for public transport and the modelling for patronage, what is your anticipation now, moving on, in terms of just what will be the effective capacity of our public transport network to ensure safe social distancing?

Ms ALLAN: That is one of the challenges that we have before us at the moment. We have seen an unprecedented drop in passenger numbers over the past few weeks and couple of months, and predicting to what levels and when those levels will return is quite a challenge for us. As I said before, we have maintained 100 per cent of our services during this period of time in part because we wanted to make sure people could get to where they needed to—

The CHAIR: Sorry to interrupt you there, Minister, but the Member's time has expired.

Mr RICHARDSON: Thank you, Minister and department representatives, for joining us today. Can I take you to something that we have all been familiar with now across our community—that is, the impact on our transport system from students learning from home, from workers, where they can, working from home and from the massive effort that has been made by all Victorians during this coronavirus pandemic. Minister, given the significant drop in public transport patronage, despite these reductions, a lot of people in the community are asking why there have not been changes to timetables across all modes of public transport and why that has been maintained across the public. I am wondering if you could take the Committee through those reasons and figures?

Ms ALLAN: Thank you, Mr Richardson, and hopefully this will also assist Mr Hibbins in the question that I do not think he probably got as full an answer to in terms of the time available. So this might help provide some additional information for him as well in terms of the question that he just asked before his time expired.

I have mentioned it a number of times already this morning—I do not think I need to repeat it again other than just to say we have run 100 per cent of our public transport train, tram and bus services during this period of time. As I was part way through mentioning in response to Mr Hibbins's question, we have seen quite a wild fluctuation in passenger numbers during that period of time. In late March and early April, when we were in those very early uncertain times around the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, we did see our patronage numbers on our public transport network drop dramatically to around 10 per cent of its normal passenger numbers. So we saw it drop down to around an average of 200 000 public transport passengers, down from that normal average of 2.1 million trips a day. As I said, this fluctuated wildly. We saw at times that there were as few as 53 000 people travelling on one day—that was on Good Friday. Obviously normally Good Friday is a much quieter day on our transport network, but 53 000 people travelling is a very low number when you set it against 2.1 million trips in a normal time. I mentioned before that 66 per cent—two-thirds—of those people travelling on the network were those wanting to use public transport to get to work, and that was an important service.

So we monitor and we get a report every single day from our department in terms of the numbers of people using all of the modes of our network—road and rail—and we have seen that average of 200 000 that we saw late March and into April rise up to 300 000 for the last couple of weeks, Jeroen—

Mr WEIMAR: Yes.

Ms ALLAN: We have seen that sit at around 300 000 for the last couple of weeks, and that is not surprising, given that is in line with, as we have seen, some of the changes to the restriction settings. That is not surprising, and no doubt as restrictions change in the weeks ahead we will see the numbers change.

But what continues to be a really important message for people looking to use public transport—and it is consistent with the messages we are giving to the Victorian community—is that there are five reasons now to go out, and if you do not need to meet one of those five reasons, then we are still encouraging people to stay at home. We know that the movement of people around our community is the way that this virus is spreading, and we are trying to limit that as best we possibly can. Also, as we all think about how we get to and from work and get to and from school, but particularly the work piece, we are wanting to encourage people who can work from home to continue to work from home and if you are thinking about using public transport to please think carefully about when you need to use it—absolutely, if you are unwell, please do not use public transport—and also to practice good personal hygiene. All of us are practising good personal hygiene, I am sure, but that is going to be particularly important when you interact in public spaces, whether it is public transport or other. It goes to the question that Mr Hibbins asked before about pedestrian lights; you know, at all of our points at which we interact as a public with each other we need to practice good public hygiene. We will continue to monitor those patronage numbers very, very carefully.

Mr RICHARDSON: Thanks, Minister. Obviously people are turning their minds to restrictions easing, getting back to some sort of normality as we come back onto the network. Obviously along my line, on the Frankston train line, people are expecting a lot more activity with the buses replacing trains between Mentone and Cheltenham. But they are turning their minds, our communities, to people coming back onto the network. I am wondering what steps are being taken as we gradually see passengers return to our transport network?

Ms ALLAN: There is a lot of careful thought and planning going on with the Department of Transport, but we are also working very, very closely with the Department of Health and Human Services and very carefully observing the advice of the Chief Health Officer as well, because we do not want to see this virus spread any further. We need to look at every mechanism we can use to limit the spread, and that is why I spoke at length earlier of the additional and intensive cleaning regime that is going on on our public transport network on both the sanitisation of touch points but also the deep cleaning regime, the intensive cleaning regime, that is going on across the rolling stock of the network—and we will continue with that.

Also one of the initiatives we have undertaken as restrictions change and as people think about changing their movements is we are talking to our passengers. We talk to our passengers all the time, but we are undertaking some specific conversations with them around how they are feeling about using the public transport network during this time, wanting to get a sense from them about other initiatives they might want to see in terms of using the public transport network. That also helps shape the travel advice that we are going to give passengers—again, travel advice that is always and only consistent with the advice of the Chief Health Officer.

I might, Mr Richardson, if you are comfortable, ask Jeroen to talk a little bit more about those discussions we have been having with DHHS particularly.

Mr WEIMAR: Thank you, Minister. Yes, Mr Richardson, obviously we are working closely around how the Chief Health Officer sees the future easing of restrictions. I hasten to add that at this point in time we are still under a very strong direction that people should be working from home where that is possible and only making essential journeys, and the number of journeys we are seeing on the public transport network today reflect that—as the Minister said, just over 300 000.

The staging of our advice is around how do we ensure we can keep our public transport network as clean as possible. We have talked previously about the sanitation, the cleaning regime, that is in place across all of our bus, train and tram services. We will continue with a regime of minimising touch points for people—so the removal of cash handling. We will certainly for the foreseeable future keep those arrangements in place.

The next stage for us is obviously to support the return of children going back to school, starting next Tuesday and on 9 June, and we expect that we will see some increase again obviously of our school bus patronage. There are over 2000 school buses running today, and we expect to run all those buses with a few more children on them when they come on board. We will have good social distancing in place on those, particularly protecting the driver—keeping the driver segregated from the passengers by removing or cordoning off the

front few seats—and we have got specific arrangements for how people use buses going forward in terms of where they sit and maintaining as good a social distance as is possible in that environment.

When the restrictions start to ease more widely, we will continue to look for opportunities to make sure people are able to essentially adjust their travel patterns by having as much information as is possible. One of the key challenges in our public transport network is that traditionally, before COVID, we have a very sharp morning peak and a very sharp afternoon peak both on rail and on our road systems. One of the opportunities I think that comes out of COVID is enabling our passengers and employers to start to stagger their journeys more effectively. So a lot of conversations are happening behind the scenes around how do we work with major employers to look at more agile ways of working, how do we encourage people to travel before the traditional morning peak, how do we encourage them to travel after the morning peak and how do we flex our own service pattern in terms of timetabled services that we offer to better reflect that broader demand.

There is a huge amount of capacity on our network to absorb people and to enable people to travel with good social distancing in space going forward. We are looking at some opportunities at some of our stations around how we can keep people flowing through them without having to bump into each other all the time. We are doing some site by site specific arrangements to that point, and we are obviously looking at deploying additional sanitation points, hand sanitation points, at key entry and exit points to the network to enable people, as the Minister says, to maintain good personal hygiene.

Mr RICHARDSON: Thank you, Jeroen, for that answer. I want to take you, Minister, to road freight, and it only seems a little while ago that our communities were in the midst of panic buying and we were seeing people not able to access essential items. Could you take the Committee through the decision to lift heavy vehicle curfews, as announced by the Government in March, and how that is assisting freight companies to deliver vital services, including groceries and those vital pharmaceuticals, to communities in need?

Ms ALLAN: Thank you. If you cast your mind back to that period of time in mid-March where there was a lot of stress in our community about people being able to purchase essential items—we all remember the scenes of supermarkets and the activity going on then—as part of supporting the ongoing stocking of our supermarket shelves and the movement of goods around the state, truck curfews on our arterial and local roads—

The decision was taken from Sunday, 22 March, to not enforce those truck curfews for those who were delivering vital supplies to our retail sector. This was undertaken through an order put in place by the Minister for roads and road safety and published in the *Government Gazette* at that time. The curfews will remain in place for six months, until Monday, 21 September, and again, like all of the work we have been doing in the transport sector, we have been working closely in this instance with the transport association and with other freight organisations to continue to see how our transport network can facilitate the supply of goods in our community.

Also as part of this announcement, it removes time limits on delivery vehicles parked in loading zones while they are stopped to drop off or pick up goods, and there has also been some work undertaken, I should indicate, with local government around relaxing some of the local road curfews which they are responsible for, which has been done across the board as well. And so this is—

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Sorry to interrupt you. I will stop you there and I will pass to Mr Danny O'Brien, MP.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Good morning, Minister and officials. Minister, will any of the \$24.5 billion borrowed through the Parliament for the coronavirus response be used to fund any of the Big Build projects?

Ms ALLAN: Well, at risk of repeating the answer I gave to the questions earlier, the Premier and Treasurer have already indicated that the expenditure of those funds will be accounted for through the requirements under the *Financial Management Act*.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Minister, the Parliament was specifically told that this money was for the health response to the coronavirus pandemic and economic responses that the Government might take. Do you not think that both the Parliament and the Victorian people should know whether it is actually going to be spent on any existing projects?

Ms ALLAN: My apologies. I just missed the end of the second part of that question, Mr O'Brien.

Mr D O'BRIEN: That the Parliament and the people of Victoria should know if any of these borrowings, which the Parliament was told were for the coronavirus response, are going to actually be spent on existing projects.

Ms ALLAN: You are correct. The Parliament, and by extension the Victorian community, will be given a full breakdown of the expenditure as part of the requirements under the *Financial Management Act*.

Mr D O'BRIEN: These are existing projects that have been in the budget for several years now, Minister. I just want a clear answer that none of the new borrowings will be spent on these projects.

Ms ALLAN: Well, at risk of repeating myself, we will account for the expenditure of these funds in the requirements of the *Financial Management Act*, and we are focused on using the funding provision that has been made available to focus on saving lives and protecting our economy. Part of protecting our economy of course has been ensuring the ongoing maintenance and continuance of our construction program, which I have talked a lot about already this morning. The fact that we have been able—

Mr D O'BRIEN: So Minister, are you—

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien, can you let the Minister answer the question?

Mr D O'BRIEN: Can I ask the questions? You do not tell the ministers how to answer them.

The CHAIR: You can ask the questions, but you need to let the Minister answer the question.

Mr D O'BRIEN: The Minister is now waffling. I want to get an answer to the question.

The CHAIR: She is answering your question.

Mr D O'BRIEN: The people of Victoria deserve to know the answer to these questions, and the Minister is saying, 'We'll tell you in six or 12 months time'.

The CHAIR: The people of Victoria do deserve to know the answer to the questions. That is why you should let the Minister answer them.

Mr D O'BRIEN: And with respect, Chair, it is not your job to tell us how to ask our questions. The questions I am asking are entirely relevant to the terms of reference of this Committee, and it is incumbent upon the Minister to answer them. If she is going off on a tangent, I should be able to interrupt and say, 'Minister, can you come back to the question', which she still has not answered. Minister, I will give you another opportunity—

The CHAIR: You do not know if she has answered because you talk over the top of her. Let the Minister answer the question.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Minister, will you rule out any of the new borrowings for coronavirus being spent on existing, previously budgeted projects?

Ms ALLAN: Our focus during this period of time, whether it is through the funding that has been made available through the Parliament or other policy initiatives, is to save lives and protect jobs. As I was part way through answering before, part of protecting jobs and part of keeping our economy going has been the continuance of our construction program. Other jurisdictions—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

Ms ALLAN: We have talked a little bit this morning already about other jurisdictions, and about how other jurisdictions—

Members interjecting.

Ms ALLAN: shut down their construction sectors. They stopped their construction program, and that came at great cost to jobs in those economies and those communities.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Minister, that is entirely irrelevant to the question. Chair, I am now wanting to move on.

Ms Vallence interjected.

Ms ALLAN: They stopped their construction program, and that came at great cost to jobs in those economies and those communities.

Ms Vallence interjected.

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien, you cannot actually hear the Minister. Ms Vallence, you will get your turn.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Minister, has coronavirus caused any additional costs to your Big Build project?

Ms ALLAN: Look, it is a little too early to answer that question fully. I point out, as I indicated before, this coronavirus pandemic is far from over. Being able to put a rule under where we are in terms of giving an absolute answer [Zoom dropout] my previous answers of how we have made some adjustments and modifications to practices on worksites. We have had some feedback from the construction sector about how we have seen changes to productivity levels—some slight decreases, but decreases nonetheless. It is simply just too early, too soon to tell about what the final outcome of that will be. What would have cost more, can I say though, would have been to see these projects stop, to see people lose their jobs because these projects stopped. We were determined to avoid that circumstance.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Are you able to quantify at this point any additional costs to the Metro Tunnel, the level crossing removals or the West Gate Tunnel?

Ms ALLAN: Again, as I indicated in the answer I have just given, it is simply too early to tell. Firstly, can I point out that those projects are still continuing—those projects are continuing. What would have cost a lot more—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Well, we know that there have been blowouts in those projects; that has been previously reported both to the Parliament and in the media. Can you tell us what those projects each cost now?

Ms ALLAN: I will not quibble about how this may sit a little bit outside of your current terms of reference, but these figures are fully accounted for in our normal budget process.

Look, I know the opposition. I know you continue to oppose the removal of level crossings. There is no need to get too upset about it. We that you oppose the removal of level crossings. That is okay.

Members interjecting.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Please, Minister, can we ask questions about what this Inquiry is about. In light of the coronavirus crisis and your plans to stimulate the economy, which you have talked about, the importance of jobs, will any finance be sought for those projects through the Belt and Road Initiative agreement that you have with the Chinese Government?

Ms ALLAN: We have a range of live tender processes that are underway right now, and it would be highly inappropriate to speculate on those tender processes, because that would go against all the best probity advice. Can I say though in response—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Minister, I am not talking about—

Ms ALLAN: Mr O'Brien, if you would not mind, I would love to be able to finish an answer to your question before you move onto the next one. I know you like to get excited in these forums, but if I could just answer the question for a moment. I know for various reasons that you and others have got this focus on the Belt and Road Initiative, which at the heart of the Government's—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Minister, I just want an answer to the question.

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien, let the Minister answer your question.

Ms ALLAN: At the heart of the Belt and Road Initiative—where the Government and the Premier have answered questions in relation to this on so many different occasions—this has been an agreement that has been reached because it is about jobs for the Victorian community. It is about supporting jobs, and at a time like this there has never been a more important time to look at how we can continue to keep people in work and look at new job opportunities. If you want to run conspiracy theories about tender processes and relationships, you can do that—

Mr D O'BRIEN: I did not ask about a tender process, Minister.

Ms ALLAN: We will not engage, and we will not allow that to run. We will focus on the appropriate conduct of our tender processes that are underway right now.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Minister, I actually did not ask about a tender process; I asked about the finance of projects. Will any projects be financed through the Belt and Road Initiative agreement that you have?

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien, I will remind you of the terms of reference.

Members interjecting.

Ms ALLAN: Sorry, Chair, there were a lot of interjections there. I could not quite catch the substance of the question.

Mr D O'BRIEN: I will move on, because I am clearly not going to get an answer from you on it, Minister. I am not sure why you are so—

Ms ALLAN: Look, can I just—

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien, you have the opportunity to rephrase the question—the Minister did not hear it—or you have the opportunity to move on, but if you continue to talk over the Minister, you continue to waste your time.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Can I ask a question to Mr Hannett? Mr Hannett, I understand you went to China with the Premier, and I would like to ask: was finance of infrastructure projects discussed under the Belt and Road Initiative, and could it potentially be accessed to finance economic stimulus projects for Victoria?

Ms ALLAN: I fail to see how that is relevant to the terms of reference.

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien, can you bring it back to the terms of reference of the Inquiry?

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes, I am not just talking—the last words were about economic stimulus projects for Victoria, which, Minister, with the greatest respect, you have spent most of the morning talking about.

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien, can you rephrase your question in accordance with the terms of reference of the Inquiry?

Mr D O'BRIEN: Chair, this is the question: I understand you went to China with the Premier; was finance under Belt and Road discussed, and could it be accessed to pay for any stimulus projects under coronavirus? How is that not relevant to the terms of reference?

Mr MAAS: That was done as a part of the Government's response.

The CHAIR: That is right.

Mr MAAS: This was done well before—

Ms VALLENCE: So it was done? That was done in the past.

Members interjecting.

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien, you have asked a question.

Mr D O'BRIEN: I have asked a question. Are you going to rule the question out, Chair?

The CHAIR: I am going to rule the question out.

Mr D O'BRIEN: On what basis, Chair?

The CHAIR: On the basis that it is not relevant to the terms of reference of this Inquiry. I have given you an opportunity to make it relevant to the terms of reference of this Inquiry.

Mr D O'BRIEN: All right, I will do it as simply as I can, because I know the Government is obviously very sensitive and does not want to answer questions about this. The Government has a massive stimulus program for the economy. Minister, you have been talking about it all morning. In response to coronavirus pandemic, Mr Hannett, you went to China with the Premier, and I want to know: did you discuss the Belt and Road Initiative and finance, and could any of that finance be used to finance the projects in response to the coronavirus?

Mr RICHARDSON: He is not a time traveller. You cannot travel to China at the moment.

Mr RIORDAN: He has made the agreements—the discussions last year in China with the Chinese Government. Will they be using that finance?

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan, you have had your turn. The question is ruled out of order. Mr O'Brien, you have an opportunity to ask another question.

Mr RIORDAN: This is a protection racket.

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan, you have had your turn.

Mr RIORDAN: This is one of your most senior ministers and she will not answer the question.

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan, could you please not talk over the Chair and not talk over the Minister.

Mr O'Brien, you have the call. If you would like to ask a question relevant to the terms of reference of the Inquiry, you can.

Mr D O'BRIEN: This is the biggest borrowing project in the state's history and you will not allow questions about where that money is coming from. That is ridiculous. I will move on.

The CHAIR: That is exactly what we are here to ask questions about, with relevance to the terms of reference of this Inquiry.

Mr RIORDAN: So it is a secret.

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan, you have had your turn.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Minister, due to coronavirus, has any decision on the airport rail link and our high-speed rail to Geelong been deferred?

Ms ALLAN: We have been having active conversations and discussions with the Commonwealth, who of course are our partners in this project. I can advise I had a conversation with my federal ministerial counterpart just yesterday about this project. No final decision has been made on this project and obviously no announcement has been made, but we continue to have very constructive conversations with the Federal Government about the delivery of airport rail, which of course has at its heart making sure we provide better connections to regional communities as well.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Can I just put a couple of questions on notice, probably to the department. You mentioned in your presentation that there had been a 10 per cent downturn in throughput in the Melbourne port. Could I get a breakdown, please, for the ports of Melbourne, Geelong, Portland and Hastings? And are you able to provide the Committee with what processes are in place at Victorian ports to ensure that vessels arriving

from overseas do not pose a biological risk and what protections are put in place for pilots as well as anyone else interacting with ships? Happy for you to take that on notice, please.

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien, your time has expired.

Ms ALLAN: Sorry, just to crib a few seconds off the Government's time, we can provide that information, Mr O'Brien, and I also point out that some of the information will need to be sourced from our colleagues in the Commonwealth because obviously some of that intersects with the responsibilities of Australian Border Force.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thank you.

Ms STITT: Good morning, Minister, and good morning to your officials appearing with you today. I am actually going to continue on the theme of the Big Build and construction projects in our state and hopefully give you the opportunity to actually answer fully my questions. Minister, could you explain the ways in which the Government's Big Build projects have had to adapt during the coronavirus pandemic?

Ms ALLAN: Yes. Thank you, and I am pleased to talk about how we have been able to continue our Big Build program. As I have said on a number of occasions before, but it is worth saying each and every time, it is important to support each and every job in our construction sector. As I indicated before, I think to one of the previous answers, it is not just construction, it is the manufacturing sector, it is the goods and the supply service sector that also supplies important services to our construction program.

Can I say different projects have needed a different response depending on the work environment that we are in. So that is why through the Major Transport Infrastructure Authority I mentioned the site inspections that have gone on before. There has been a huge amount of work around looking at the different changes that have needed to be put in place and adapted at different workplaces. If I can just give you a couple of examples, I think operating a tunnel-boring machine 30 metres underground is obviously very different to building a road project in a suburban or regional community. By its very nature the work that goes on underground requires people to work in closer quarters, and there has been a lot of change practice being put in place around the number of people going up and down in lifts. I have mentioned before how the sharing of tools and equipment has gone on to keep those workplaces as safe as we possibly can. As I mentioned before, a lot of those road projects of course are outside; you can spread the workforce out. That is just a brief example of how we have needed to work to respond to the different challenges to manage the hygiene and safety standards on each of our workplaces.

As I said before, we have got the huge amount of work, the 70-strong staff that are travelling to those worksites. I mentioned before that they are doing on-site inspections. Their work too, I should have also mentioned, goes to education and providing support and advice and education to the workplaces and the workforces around how they can keep as safe as possible.

There is no doubt it has been a challenge for us. We have got, I think I mentioned before, 119 different projects going on. They are spread right across Victoria. We engage with a whole range of different contractors and thousands of workers. But we have been working very hard to support these important jobs during this difficult time.

Ms STITT: Thanks, Minister. In relation to the Metro Tunnel, which is obviously an incredibly important project for this state, can you outline the progress on the Metro Tunnel project during the pandemic?

Ms ALLAN: We have talked a little bit about the Metro Tunnel already. I am delighted to continue to talk in a little bit more detail, because we have got all four boring machines going in different forms of activity right now. We have got our third and fourth tunnel-boring machines, Millie and Alice, who will be tunnelling from Anzac station on St Kilda Road out towards South Yarra. Millie has started her work, and Alice is not too far behind. Of course the other two tunnel-boring machines, Joan and Meg, have already had their first breakthrough—

Mr RIORDAN: Point of order, Chair. We had quite some discussion during the opposition's questions about the relevance of talking about the Big Build projects. If the funding is not relevant, surely a storyboard walk-through of what boring machines are doing, apart from something that we hear about in Parliament

regularly, I do not think the boring machine adventures underground in Melbourne really are relevant to the COVID Inquiry.

Ms STITT: Further to the point of order, Chair, my question to the Minister was specifically in relation to progress on the Metro Tunnel project during the pandemic.

The CHAIR: Thank you. There is no point of order.

Mr D O'BRIEN: So we can talk about the project, just not how it is funded.

Mr RIORDAN: We can talk about boring machines, but—

Ms VALLENCE: Only the positives. We can only talk about the positives.

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan and Mr O'Brien, the clear terms of reference are in relation to the management of the health crisis and the economy during the health crisis. The Member's question went directly to that. If your questions go directly to that, they will not be ruled out of order. Minister, you can continue with your answer.

Ms ALLAN: Thank you kindly. Yes, I think it is important, despite the coronavirus pandemic and the changed work practices we have seen at all of our worksites, to give an update on the progress that has been made, because it is supporting jobs, it is supporting families.

Mr D O'BRIEN: You cannot tell us how much it costs?

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien, can you stop interrupting the Minister and the Chair. The Minister is answering the question.

Ms ALLAN: Thank you, Chair. I understand that there are some in that room who have never supported the Metro Tunnel or the level crossing removals that are going on around the state.

Mr D O'BRIEN: How is this relevant?

Ms ALLAN: They want to continue to bluff and bluster and interrupt at every opportunity.

Mr RIORDAN: Call the Minister, Chair.

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien, Mr Riordan, I would appreciate your patience, and I would appreciate you not interrupting the Chair and not interrupting the Minister. I will ask the Minister to continue.

Ms ALLAN: Thank you, Chair. The final point I will make about the Metro Tunnel project is some announcements that we made today advising of some changed traffic movements. For traffic travelling along St Kilda Road and turning left into Flinders Street, that will temporarily not be available to road users from 3 June for a period of some time as we continue to make great progress. This is a project that was talked about for a really long time. This is a project that is going to deliver more train services, bring more people in and out of the city and provide that turn-up-and-go service that our public transport network needs, and this is important progress. At a time when around the world we have seen construction sites grind to a halt because of the coronavirus pandemic, we have been able to keep these big projects going, particularly this Metro Tunnel project, where the work is occurring deep underground. It is a complex project. It involves tunnel boring machines, road headers and complex construction tasks that are happening underground. The fact we have been able to keep this work going safely and continue it going on track is a great credit to those workers and the people overseeing this project.

Ms STITT: Thank you, Minister, and I do appreciate that answer. It is a project that employs a lot of people in the region that I represent and in addition will have huge benefits for people who are commuting right across Melbourne's west into the city, so thank you for that response. Can I also ask you to outline the progress on level crossing removals during the pandemic period? I do know from firsthand experience that these are continuing at pace, so I would appreciate an update on those projects as well.

Ms ALLAN: Yes. Again, as I mentioned before, just as we have had to make some modifications to our Metro Tunnel sites, we have also been able to keep our level crossing removal program going. It is ahead of

schedule. We have seen, as I said before, the 35th level crossing go with the removal of Toorak Road at the really early stages of the coronavirus pandemic, around early April. When there was a huge amount of uncertainty we were able to hold to that project time, we were able to hold that spot in our program, and get rid of that Toorak Road level crossing—and it is gone for good. That also manages to see traffic flow more freely on the Monash Freeway, because those boom gates being down at Toorak Road had a really difficult knock-on effect on traffic moving along the Monash Freeway. So not only were we able to hold to that time during the coronavirus pandemic, but it was also removed six months ahead of schedule.

Because of the work that we have been doing pre coronavirus but also the careful planning and work we have been doing in terms of keeping our worksites safe during the coronavirus pandemic, we have been able to confirm today the next stage of workplace activity that is going to occur right across the suburbs over the coming months. I know the Member for Mordialloc knows very well the huge construction program that is about to ramp up around Mentone and Cheltenham over the coming weeks as we remove those level crossings at Mentone and Cheltenham and build two new train stations. There will be some disruption to the movement of people in that community around the kids getting to and from school when school fully resumes in the coming weeks, but what we will see at the end of that rather long construction period is that those level crossings will be gone and gone for good. I know the Member for Mordialloc would also perhaps want to reference that there is work going on in establishing site offices in the Edithvale, Chelsea and Bonbeach area as we move along the Frankston line and get rid of another five level crossings in that corridor.

Also on the Frankston line during this coronavirus period we will see the Kananook train stabling facility become operational, which is an important outcome in being able to run more trains on the Frankston line by adding extra capacity for our trains to be stabled on the corridor. I know that the Chair has a particular focus on what is going on on the Upfield line. Again, there is going to be a very long shut of the Upfield line that we indicated today will run from late July through to November. This is to remove four level crossings, and again we will be having those worksites operate under the safe work practice guidelines that we have got in place during this coronavirus period. We will be putting in place replacement buses, and there has been a huge amount of work go on with the local community as we remove the four level crossings and build two new train stations at Moreland and Coburg as part of that work.

There is the work on the Cranbourne line at Evans Road. I must say it is sounding like a call of the card for members of this Committee. Not to be left out, I know that the work that is going on on the Lilydale line at Manchester Road and the Maroondah Highway shows there are level crossings going on right across the state. It is just about—

Ms VALLENCE: How is the public consultation going, Minister?

Mr D O'BRIEN: Well, Minister—

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence, Mr O'Brien, the Minister is answering the question.

Ms ALLAN: Look, it is okay, Chair. The Member for Evelyn has been very busy letting her community know she opposes the removal of those level crossings. We have just been delighted to continue with—

Ms VALLENCE: That is absolutely incorrect. And for the record, that is absolutely incorrect.

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence, you will get your turn.

Mr D O'Brien interjected.

Ms VALLENCE: That is absolutely incorrect. That is absolutely incorrect.

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence, Mr O'Brien, you will get your turn.

Ms VALLENCE: That is a false statement made by the Minister.

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence!

Ms ALLAN: One of the things as part of our program delivery during this period that we are working through the challenges presented by the coronavirus pandemic is of course our community consultation, and we have seen a great and enthusiastic response—

The CHAIR: Sorry to interrupt you again, Minister. The Member's time has expired.

Mr LIMBRICK: I thank the Minister for her presentation and appearance today. As was mentioned during your presentation, there have been lots of businesses adapting to what has been going on. So we have seen supermarkets that have had increased demand, so they have increased deliveries and staffing and that sort of thing. And then in other sectors of the economy unfortunately they have had lower demand, so they have had to readjust everything, and yet the public transport system has had an 85 per cent drop in demand and still appears to be running at a normal timetable. I have seen trams going up and down throughout the city that are literally empty. How is this a good use of taxpayer money?

Ms ALLAN: Thank you for your question, Mr Limbrick. I have mentioned this a couple of times already this morning. We made the decision to continue to operate the public transport network at full service provision because we did not want to disadvantage people who continue to need to use our public transport network. So if you are, for example, a nurse who catches the train to work, reducing the frequency of those train services makes it more difficult for that nurse to get to work or the retail worker to get to their supermarket job. It was a carefully thought through decision. We thought carefully about those issues that you raised around the cost and the benefit, if you like, of providing the service versus reducing the service, and we came down on the side of continuing the service because there were people who relied on it. It was not easy to predict who may or may not want to use it at a particular point in time. Given that particularly during the late March–April period where pretty much the only people moving around our community were those going to perform those essential workplace functions—nurses, cleaners in hospitals, retail workers—that you identified, we felt it was important to enable them to have that opportunity to travel via public transport. Also, too, part of continuing the public transport network running was supporting the thousands of public transport staff. Keeping them engaged in their work was also a very important consideration at a time when so many Victorians were losing their jobs.

Mr LIMBRICK: What has this done to the average cost per trip for, say, trains and buses? In lots of cases surely this must be a very, very expensive cost per trip, especially when you can see trams that are literally empty.

Ms ALLAN: Yes. Well, look, it has not changed—I mean there has been no change to ticket prices, for example, so that has not changed during that period of time.

Mr LIMBRICK: I mean taxpayer cost per trip.

Ms ALLAN: Indeed, I think, Jeroen, we have been—sorry, I missed that interjection.

Mr LIMBRICK: I mean taxpayer cost per trip. There is a cost of running the network and then there is a cost per passenger. That must have increased dramatically, surely.

Ms ALLAN: Regardless of how many train or tram services you run on the network, there are fixed costs associated with running the public transport network. There are fixed costs with maintenance; there are fixed costs with the employment of staff. Those costs do not change, depending on the number of people.

Mr LIMBRICK: I am familiar with the concept of fixed and variable costs, but there are also a lot of variable costs, like the electricity used to run the trams et cetera.

Ms ALLAN: No, that would be included in our fixed costs for operating the network.

Mr LIMBRICK: Okay. So there are no variable costs. Even with an 85 per cent drop in demand, there is no way that the costs of the network can be reduced?

Ms ALLAN: Well, look, again, of course there could have potentially been a saving, if you like—and I say that in inverted commas—around reducing your timetabled services. But the cost that that would cause in other parts of our economy and our community just was not—I guess was weighed up in that balance. Every decision you have to make it during these periods of time has to be weighed up in terms of who it impacts and what the benefit is, and as I said before, making sure that people could continue to rely on their regular scheduled service

was very important during this period of time. I have just indicated we have a set of fixed costs. We have a fixed cost arrangement as well with the franchisees who run the metropolitan train and tram network. There has been no doubt that there has been an impact on the tickets, the number of tickets, that have been bought during this period of time. There is no doubt that there are less people travelling, there are less tickets being purchased on the train network, and that sees, if you like, a loss of revenue for the operators. But there are fixed contracts in place, there are fixed prices in place and we felt it was very, very important to keep the public transport network operating.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you, Minister. On the issue of tickets, the Government's response to the coronavirus has caused the situation where many people who had purchased, say, yearly Myki cards are unable to use them because they have been instructed to work from home. Has there been any consideration given to some sort of compensation to those ticketholders who cannot use their card by maybe extending the expiry date on their card or something like that?

Ms ALLAN: Mr Limbrick, I will ask Jeroen Weimer to add to that, because we have been able to put in place some refunds for Myki pass holders, but I will ask Jeroen to give you the detail.

Mr WEIMAR: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Mr Limbrick. By and large, our passengers hold two types of Myki products. Clearly people who are holding Myki money essentially are no further out of pocket. They only pay for each journey that they make, and if they are not travelling for a number of weeks that money just stays on their cards. But clearly some people have season-ticket products. I do myself. In the last seven or eight weeks we have had 42 000 refunds processed. So anybody who feels at any point in time that they want to, you know, suspend or give back or cash in their unused part of their season ticket is able to get that refund. We process those very quickly. We obviously had a big increase in requests seven or eight weeks ago at the start of this, and as I say, we have processed over 42 000 requests in total. Those numbers have really dropped, obviously, in the last few weeks, as I think the majority of people who wanted to take advantage of that have got in contact with us and had their refunds processed.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you for that clarification. Can I just ask, though—I was aware that you can cash out a remaining part of a ticket and that is a normal thing that you can do. But what about someone who holds a yearly pass? They are expecting to go back to work, hopefully in a few weeks, but they have not been able to use their pass for a couple of months. Can they get a refund on that portion that they have already paid for and have not been able to use? How does that work, and how was this communicated to travellers, because I was not aware of it and lots of people I have spoken to were not aware of it?

Mr WEIMAR: Thank you. So certainly people who have got an unused part of a yearly pass, they have got two options. They can either suspend their yearly pass for a number of weeks and then reactivate it—so, say, suspend it on 1 April and reactivate it—on some future date, 1 June. Then the unused portion essentially moves forward, or they can just cash it in and say, 'Well, I don't know when I'm going to go back to travelling normally. Actually I'll just cash in the entire unused portion and then I'll make another decision when I go back to work'. So we have dealt with both scenarios.

In terms of publication, certainly we did a bit of media on this back at the end of March. It is certainly on our website. There is a fairly clear set of processes around how people can process refunds. Given, as I said, we have had 40 000 of these dealt with, I think it is clearly a fairly well known arrangement.

Mr LIMBRICK: Moving to a different topic, around disease transmission on the trains, are we aware of any community transmissions that have happened on public transport?

Mr WEIMAR: No.

Ms ALLAN: No. I will hand it over to the officials if that is okay. I think they are all saying no in unison, so I think that is the answer.

Mr WEIMAR: I think we are all saying no. Obviously, as you will be aware, the Chief Health Officer's team undertakes very detailed contact tracing. We are in very regular dialogue with that team. There have been absolutely no identified community transmissions. You will appreciate community transmissions are very low in Victoria, full stop, and certainly none have been identified on the public transport network. Back at the very

beginning, in the middle of March, we did have a confirmed case who had travelled on a V/Line train. Full contact tracing was undertaken. There were no community transmissions associated with that individual.

What I can tell you is that we have about 174 staff across the public transport sector, so our operators, who have been tested for COVID. Out of those 174 staff there have only been four positive responders, and all of those four positive responders were coming in from overseas holidays and essentially picked it up while overseas. They were not at work when they were stood down and tested and found to be positive.

Mr LIMBRICK: Another question around disease transmission. I know in other cities—so in Sydney the doors open automatically, so you do not need to touch a button, and in other cities I have been to internationally doors open automatically. What is the reason that we cannot open the doors automatically in Victoria, in Melbourne, because no-one wants to touch the button? Everyone is sort of scared of the button. Is there a way we can get around that?

Mr WEIMAR: So we have looked at that very closely, and unfortunately it is a bit of a legacy issue for us in terms of some of the trains that we have on our network. Without boring you on the details of our train fleet, the older Comeng trains have manual door opening. We are physically unable to actually change those out for automated power systems within any kind of reasonable time environment, and even with the more modern X'trapolis trains, although it is in theory possible, it is a significant software update because we have to connect into the signalling system and the location on platforms, which is a complicated and 12-month piece of work to implement. Of course the new high-capacity Metro Train will have all these options and all these bells and whistles to deploy. But unfortunately we have looked at retrofitting it onto our existing fleet, and the fact that it would take more than 12 months to get to part of our fleet has made it an impractical course of action for us to adopt at this time.

Mr LIMBRICK: And what about trams? So I know on the older trams the doors are automatic and operated by the driver, but on the newer trams they have the button still; they have another button that people do not want to press. Can that be automated as well?

Mr WEIMAR: Yes, so on the E-class trams the driver can activate all the doors on either side of the tram. So they are now activating all their doors automatically as they come in to the stops.

Mr LIMBRICK: So no-one needs to push the button on the trams anymore?

Mr WEIMAR: Correct, not on the trams; that is right.

The CHAIR: Thank you. The Member's time has expired.

Ms VALLENCE: Thank you very much, Minister and departmental staff, for your appearance at this very important Inquiry. I would just like to pick up on the construction projects that you have kept going during this coronavirus period. As part of keeping construction projects going, has the Government provided any funding to any of the construction companies on projects as part of the Big Build program to allow workers to continue working during coronavirus?

Ms ALLAN: Can I ask by way of clarification are you wanting to seek if we have done any contract variants, because we have our fixed-price contracts for all the projects that are underway. Corey, it is correct to say they are all fixed-price contracts across all of those sites? And we can obviously have discussions with our contractors about any variances to those arrangements. I am just wanting to get some clarification on your question.

Ms VALLENCE: So on that as part of the works that you have kept going during coronavirus in terms of variations or any other funding provided to any of the construction companies to allow workers to continue working during this period.

Ms ALLAN: Not that I am aware of in terms of anything over and above. If you are talking about costs associated with some of the safe work practices that we have put in place, they have been put in place within the work practices that we—

Ms VALLENCE: Sorry, just to clarify, any additional funding related to coronavirus or works during the coronavirus period.

Ms ALLAN: I have not signed off on any additional funding for our projects that are currently underway.

Ms VALLENCE: So has there been any discussion with companies working on these projects about requiring additional funding to continue working through coronavirus?

Mr HANNETT: Yes.

Ms ALLAN: I will ask Corey to add to that, but I think it is important to note that across all of our projects we are constantly talking to our contractors around all the issues that go with delivering those projects, whether they are cost, whether they are meeting project delivery time lines, whether they are workforce issues. They all come with their complexities and challenges, and cost is one of those, but I will ask Corey. I am personally having weekly conversations with contractors and unions, and I know Corey does it every single day, so I might ask Corey to add to that.

Mr HANNETT: So across our program we are having daily discussions with our contract partners about the pandemic and the changed work practices to ensure that we keep the projects going, so it is a commercial discussion pretty well across all our contracts.

Ms VALLENCE: Sorry, the reception was a little hard there. Did you say you have not started any conversations?

Mr HANNETT: No, we have. Yes, definitely. We are having conversations across the whole program with all our contract partners about the interface with COVID across the program itself.

Ms VALLENCE: Minister, you have talked a lot so far during the proceedings this morning about the progress of the projects during the pandemic period. I would like to ask specifically about the job losses during the period, specifically the 200 workers who lost their jobs on the West Gate Tunnel Project earlier this month. What has the Government done for those 200 workers?

Ms ALLAN: Again I will ask Corey to supplement my answer. When we were advised by Transurban and its builders CPB and John Holland that they were making this decision, which the Government has expressed its deep disappointment in, we made it clear to those companies that we thought this action was unacceptable. I know Corey has had conversations, because both of those companies are engaged in other works across the government construction program but also have their own works going on. We sought them to look at redeployment opportunities. Corey, do you want to—

Ms VALLENCE: Specifically what has been done for those workers?

Ms ALLAN: Sorry, I could not hear the interjection.

Ms VALLENCE: It was to the question: what has been done for those workers?

Ms ALLAN: I was answering the question. Corey has been having conversations with those companies about the Government's expectation that they look at redeployment opportunities for those workers.

Mr HANNETT: There have been discussions with Transurban, CPB and John Holland. There is the management team and the workforce side of it as well. We have obviously got this massive program. We have got over 18 000 people working across the program, so as there are ebbs and flows in different projects, other opportunities come and go on the other jobs. So for example, the big shutdown we have got coming up on the Frankston line, with the three crossings being removed there next month, there are opportunities there. Some of the workforce are employed by CPB and John Holland but also by labour hire companies who supply work across the whole program. The specifics of exactly where everybody is going I do not have on me, but it is fair to say that there are a lot of opportunities across the program and everybody is doing their best to make sure that people who unfortunately will not be required on the West Gate Tunnel Project will be employed elsewhere.

Ms VALLENCE: Mr Hannett, have discussions with companies involved requiring additional funding to let workers keep working?

Mr HANNETT: With respect to all our contracts, our contract partners have said they have issued notices of intention to claim a variation for the works due to the COVID pandemic. Those commercial discussions have started and will continue for some time, and obviously these discussions will not be resolved until we get out the back end of this pandemic.

Ms VALLENCE: So, Minister, the *Age* reported on 11 May that a further 400 workers were at risk of losing their jobs; that would be a total of 600 during the coronavirus period. What is the Government doing then to protect these jobs?

Ms ALLAN: Well, that answer is consistent with the previous question you asked about the 200 jobs.

Ms VALLENCE: So you are looking to redeploy. You are looking to redeploy, but that is obviously taking time. I obviously care about the workers and what you are doing to protect those jobs, so a little bit more clarity than 'looking' to redeploy.

Ms ALLAN: Pardon my scepticism of your concern for workers on projects and across all of our program that you do not support—the 15 000 construction workers that are supported across our Big Build agenda.

Ms VALLENCE: Minister, you have talked about being verbally. I would appreciate you do not verbal me.

Ms ALLAN: So forgive my scepticism of your support for workers on our programs.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Who is doing the verbaling now, Minister?

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien, you have had your turn. Ms Vallence?

Mr D O'BRIEN: Well, when are you going to call the Minister to account for answering the question—

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien, please do not talk over the top of me. You have had your turn. The Minister answered the question. Ms Vallence, you have the call.

Ms VALLENCE: Okay, obviously not doing anything specific for these workers, just 'looking' at things to do to support these workers.

Look, I will move on in consideration of time. As you have said a lot so far about keeping construction work going during the coronavirus pandemic, will you guarantee that you will not take away the Shire of Moorabool's planning authority to approve rights for the Government to plan to dump 2.3 million tonnes of toxic soil at the Maddingley Brown Coal mine adjacent to Bacchus Marsh?

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence, could you phrase the question in terms of the reference for this bit?

Ms RICHARDS: Point of order, Chair.

Ms VALLENCE: I will repeat the question: so as—

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence, there is a point of order.

Ms RICHARDS: Can you ask the Member to bring it back to the terms of reference for the Inquiry?

Ms VALLENCE: Thanks, Ms Richards, I did not waste any of your time.

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence, can you rephrase the question. The point of order is upheld. Could you rephrase the question in terms of the reference of this Inquiry?

Ms VALLENCE: During you keeping construction jobs going during this period, and construction projects, part of the construction projects on these tunnelling works is to remove toxic soil. Will you be removing the planning authority from the Shire of Moorabool during this coronavirus period to dump the 2.3 million tonnes of toxic soil at Maddingley Brown Coal mine?

Ms ALLAN: In answer to your question, Ms Vallence, there are a couple of points I would like to make: no decision on the location of where soil from the West Gate Tunnel Project will be treated—no decision has been

made; secondly, your characterisation of the soil is incorrect. The EPA have provided advice to the Government on the levels of contamination in the soil coming from the West Gate Tunnel. It expects those levels of contamination to be quite low. However, any soil that needs to be taken out of the West Gate Tunnel site needs to be taken to a different location to be dewatered so you can accurately test the level of contaminant and then consider its next treatment. As a result of that, the EPA has also advised it expects that some of that soil may be able to be used as clean fill. So your characterisation of the level of contamination in the soil is incorrect, and no decision has been made on the location of where that soil will be located.

Ms VALLENCE: So will you then guarantee that no planning approvals will be granted until the coronavirus period or coronavirus restrictions have been lifted and consultations with the community have been fully concluded?

Ms ALLAN: I repeat: no decision has been made. I am not the planning Minister, so I am not able to answer that part of your question for you. And finally, I have personally met with the mayor and the CEO of Moorabool council about this issue and I am not at liberty to disclose what was a private conversation—as has Corey Hannett, who is in attendance with me. We have had a conversation with them about this matter.

Ms VALLENCE: Well, I notice that the mayor has not been very satisfied with the level of transparency from the Government during this coronavirus period. How have you conducted community consultation during the coronavirus period? Of course with restrictions, people in lockdown and minimum numbers of people at gatherings how have you conducted genuine community consultation on the removal and positioning of toxic soil during this coronavirus period?

Ms ALLAN: Well, I simply restate two things: no decision has been made, and that matter is more appropriately directed towards the planning Minister.

Ms VALLENCE: Well, when will the decision be made and what representations have you made to the planning Minister in relation to this? Have you made representation to the planning Minister that none of these decisions should be made until the coronavirus restrictions have been lifted?

Ms ALLAN: Look, I repeat. I cannot answer when the planning Minister will make the decision on that planning matter. I am sure he would appreciate me not making his decisions for him, and secondly, as I have indicated before, we have placed a premium on continuing the construction work going on for all of our major transport infrastructure projects because it simply supports jobs.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister, and sorry to interrupt you there, but the Member's time has expired. We thank you and the officials who have joined you today very much for your appearance at the hearing. You will be provided with a copy of the transcript to verify. Any questions which were taken on notice will be followed up and answers required within five days of the Committee's request. The Committee will now move to the consideration of the next witness. Thank you all for your time.

Ms ALLAN: Thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.